



Apostolic Assembly
of the Faith in Christ Jesus



Go and make

DISCIPLES

of all Nations

the **STRATEGY** of *Jesus*
FRIENDSHIP GROUPS
To day

52 LESSONS FOR **Friendship Groups**

GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES

of all nations

52 lessons for Friendship Groups / **Manual 2012**

© 2011 Apostolic Assembly of the Faith in Christ Jesus,
10807 Laurel Street, Rancho Cucamonga, California, 91730.

www.apostolicassembly.org

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Printed in the United States of America

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52 lessons for
Friendship Groups

MANUAL 2012



Apostolic Assembly
of the Faith in Christ Jesus

PRESENTATION

“I must be about my Father’s business”



The 2011 Ministerial Convention of the Apostolic Assembly in the United States of America will mark a historic moment in the implementation of the vision of cell ministry of the Church.

I appreciate the wholehearted and complete support from the General Board and our Bishop President Samuel Valverde, for the work of the Jesus Strategy Committee.

In this manual, we have 52 lessons to be taught during the meetings of the Friendship Groups or cells of our churches. We have prepared an entire year of lessons. God willing, at the General Convention of 2012, we will be ready with the next manual.

Our thanks also to the coordinator of our committee, Pastor Joe Aguilar, for his help in reviewing these lessons.

I thank Bishop Juan Fortino, Vice President, Bishops Elías Paez and Francisco Quezada and pastors Andy Provencio, Rogelio Razo, Arturo Ocegüera and Steve Moran for writing these lessons.

We ask our Lord Jesus who has called us to make disciples of all nations, to use this manual and all the Friendship Group leaders in the United States of America, Canada, Mexico, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Spain, Italy, Tanzania, Kenya and India.

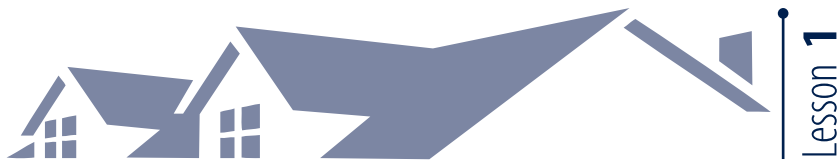
Bishop Ismael Martín del Campo,
President, Strategy of Jesus Committee

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The stewardship of the Kingdom **Time**

The Stewardship *of Our Time*



BY ANDY PROVENCIO

Key Verse: *Ephesians 5:16 y Colossians 4:5*

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

"Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time."

Introduction

We, the sons of God, are servants in the kingdom, there's nothing we have, that really belongs to us; but to God, so it can be used to accomplish His goals, whilst we enjoy it all here on earth.

There's a difference between the stewardship of talents and riches, and the stewardship of time. This means that we neither get the same amount of talents, nor of treasures; but we all receive the same amount of time. Today's topic deals with the importance of knowing how to redeem our time.

1. The Importance of Time

a) Imagine, that every day you get a deposit to your bank account, for \$86,400 USD to be used. The only condition would be this: You'll have to use all of that money, because the bank will withdraw it at the end of the day, and what wasn't used, will be lost. What would you do? I would try and program myself so that I could take all that money and employ it the best I could. That way, at the end of the day, I will not have any of it, because I know they'll take it away from me.

b) The truth is, we DO have such an account. This account receives a daily deposit of TIME. We all get 84,600 seconds (1,440 minutes or 24 hours), and what's unused, is withdrawn at the end of every day. The only condition we have to comply with is, that each day we'll be allowed to use only that very same day's deposit. We can use neither yesterday's deposit, nor tomorrow's.

c) When some think about stewardship, they think about "money". But the bible teaches that we are overseers of OUR life; that is, OUR time. So, How do we invest our time? Someone suggested the following:

- 70 Days reading the Bible
- 6 months stopped at a red light waiting for it to change
- 8 months opening unimportant mail
- 1 year looking for keys and things we've lost
- 2 years surfing the web
- 4 years doing the house cleaning
- 5 years waiting at bank and supermarket lines
- 5.5 years driving
- 7.5 years listening to the radio
- 10 years watching TV

2. Some Obstacles That We Have To Overcome In Our Stewardship Of Time

a) When we have to cross the barriers of the Stewardship of Time, there are several that need considering.

b) Charles Swindoll mentions five of them:

- Ambition
- Using our time to accumulate money
- Comparing ourselves to others
- Increasing our enemies' list
- Fear and pride

c) Harry Salem mentions in his book *Distractions from Destiny*, other things which prevent us from using time right:

- Interrupted focusing
- People
- An offended heart
- Double feelings
- Lack of direction

d) Sometimes, dealing with our time, we try to do everything so hastily that a lot of what we do bounces back. When we study the Lord's life, it amazes us that He never did anything in a hurry. Even though He was doing the most important job in the world, and knew that He had limited time to do so, He never rushed. He made the time to consider flowers and birds, made time to touch children and bless them. Time was His friend, not

his enemy. The Bible helps us to understand how time can work for us and not against us. The key factor is, that we most submit our lives entirely to Him. As the psalmist said: *“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” (Psalms 90:12).*

3. The Meaning of the Phrase: “Redeeming Time”

a) The word “redeem” in Greek, means to rescue or to free from slavery through a price. It was used as a reference, in the new testament, to describe the price the Lord paid in Calvary to buy our salvation!

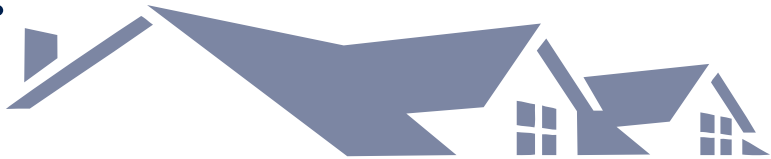
b) Redeeming time, doesn’t mainly refer to hours and minutes of our day; but to ***opportunities taken*** to serve the Lord.

c) Someone suggested that ***“Redeeming Time”*** can mean the power that we have (should we desire) to buy or restore our past. ***And also strength to focus in the future!***

Conclusion

Brothers, these days, the Lord is giving us the chance to come back to Him and redeem the time that’s been given to us. Undoubtedly, we have lived through very hard days, and many things have conspired to steal our time. We all have twenty four hours a day; but apparently, there’s so much to do, that we barely have time for the Lord.

May the Lord help us, may He speak to our hearts, so that we may redeem our time in these bad days, and run our race the way we like best and bring glory to Him. When we arrive in His presence, we shall hear that wonderful phrase: *“Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”* (**Mathew 25:23**)



The stewardship of the Kingdom

Talents

The Stewardship *of Our Talents*



BY ANDY PROVENCIO

Key Verse: *Mathew 25:14-30*

Introduction

When God transformed our heart, He gave us the opportunity to become servants in His Kingdom. We are overseers of our talents, time and treasures. All who have given him our hearts to the Lord, have discovered that God distributes talents in church so that it receives His blessing. Each one of us has been given at least one gift (talent).

Some brothers do not become involved because they have not understood what God has given them: "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 Peter 4:10). Besides, the Gospel teaches us that we receive the gift or talent at birth. However, it's not until someone surrenders his heart to God by being "born again," that he can really discover God's purpose for his life!

Someone said: *“Amongst the big things that we can’t do, and the insignificant and minuscule that we don’t want to do, there is the problem that, in the end, we don’t do anything for the Lord.”*

1. What do We Learn from this Parable?

a) God has given varied talents to different people. It’s not the talent that’s expensive; but how it’s used. God never demands more than what has been given to us. The wager for our work, is more work. It also teaches that, the one that is condemned is the one who chooses not to do anything.

b) Thus, we learn a very important lesson: He who produces the most, receives the most. He who does not produce, even the little that he has, will be taken away from him. It seems somewhat paradoxical, that we live in a time when many believe that rich people have too much and poor people have too little, and many governments embrace the socialist philosophy, and others, the communist.

c) However, the truth is, that in His eternal design, there is the law of productivity that says: He who produces, will be given the most. He who doesn’t, will lose what he has.

2. The Natural and Spiritual Law of Productivity

a) If a car is not used for a month, the battery loses strength. When a house is not repainted for 10 years, the wood begins to rot. If we do not take care of the lawn, in a short time will turn into a forest. When a person breaks an arm or a leg and wears a cast for four months, that part of the body loses strength.

b) Don't you think that we could learn a few spiritual principles in this parable? Let's consider the next examples:

- The Lord spoke unto Abraham: *"For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever."* (Genesis 14:15). His condition was: *"Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee."* (**Genesis 14:17**).

- The Lord spoke unto Moses: *"Every place where on the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours..."* (Deuteronomy 11:24). His condition was *"Every place where on the soles of your feet..."*

- In the New Testament, the Lord cursed the fig tree because it had no fruit: *"And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever. And presently the fig tree withered away."* (**Mathew 21:19**).

- The Lord said to the church of Philadelphia: *"I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name... Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."* (**Revelations 3:8-11**).

3. Decay comes when the Law of Productivity is not active.

a) Disuse immobilizes everything! If a church makes no use of its gifts, and talents will lose its force. If a believer underestimates the gift or talents that God has given him, his relationship with God will deteriorate.

b) God can move mountains, dethrone kings; but man's will blocks God from doing big things. The church or person who wishes to grow, must be willing to extend or broaden its capacity for being used.

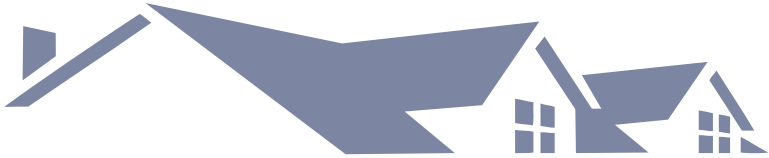
c) If the pastor has to use someone to perform a duty or to lead a ministry, it's best to look for someone who's busy, because when he's not busy, he cannot guarantee that the job will be done. The apostles chosen by Jesus had this in common: they were all busy men.

Conclusion

I was thinking about the Good Samaritan parable. The priest and the Levite passed where the wounded man was and did not lend a hand! They represent the law of no productivity. The good Samaritan went by and helped him anointed his wounds, picked him up, laid him on his own animal, took him to the inn and told the host that, should this man need anything else, to charge it to his account. This attitude represents the law of use!

There are many who possess great skills; but hide their talent. What will happen is that you will lose yours. When Israel's army was challenged by the Philistines and Goliath the giant, a young man had the courage to accept the challenge, because a few months earlier the Lord had given him victory upon the beasts which wanted to harm his sheep.

The reality of things is that the worst enemies of the pastor, are the inactive members of the church. A philosopher said once... *"All that's needed for evil to triumph is that good men don't do what they must."*



The stewardship of the Kingdom **Treasures**

The Stewardship *of Our Treasures*



BY ANDY PROVENCIO

Key verse: *Ecclesiastes 5:10 also 1 Timothy 6:6-10*

“He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.”

Introduction

God entrusts each family with certain resources and expects us to be good overseers of what we have received. The Bible emphasizes repeatedly that if we use well the limited resources, we'll receive more but if we misuse the little we got, even that will be taken away from us. It's such a key principle that Jesus used it in two of His parables: **Luke 19:11-26** (*parable of the 10 pounds*) and **Mathew 25:14-30** (*parable of the talents*).

It's interesting to know that problems caused by “money” are at the head of those that destroy family harmony and happiness. Should this be the case, it's worth paying close atten-

tion, for in doing so, we'll avoid many struggles, tears and unnecessary anger.

It's also important to understand that a Christian's spirituality becomes defined by the way he handles his finances. One could be centered in the areas of worship, ministry and service to God and church but if there is weakness in the area of stewardship and financial integrity this problem will finally affect everything else. Today, we'll analyze four important things related to our finances: (1) being satisfied with what we've got, (2) learning discipline, (3) learning to live with 75% of our entries and (4) learning to give to God, not to need.

1. Learning to be satisfied with what we've got.

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content."
(1 Timothy 6:6-8)

a) We have to learn to appreciate what we've got and not to desire what we don't have. When we live comparing ourselves to others, we'll always find someone who has more than we do. We must understand that it isn't necessary to try to impress them. If someone progresses economically at a normal rate, according to God's blessing, there will be no sadness brought upon him. However, when they acquire debts to compete with others, they'll fail to comply with their tithe, offerings and other compromises and the worst is that they live spiritually dissatisfied.

b) We must know that happiness does not reside in shopping. Occasionally, the husband wishes to please his wife and

agrees to pay for a dining set or bedroom furniture. Neither happiness nor peace can be bought.

c) It's important to understand that we all drive a used car. If someone wishes to have a new car, he must do so without sacrificing the Biblical priorities and the principles of giving and receiving. If any of you bought a new car this week or last week, you ought to know that it's become a used car.

2. Learning the Discipline

a) It's important to learn from our, as well as everybody else's, mistakes. The brothers who have had a bad financial experience must help the others (especially young couples). We must warn others about con men, phony ads and tricky deals. We must not be embarrassed for asking for advice, particularly before buying goods and state.

b) Discipline means to have a ***“personal domain.”*** The Christian who has a discipline, doesn't shop just because he carries a checkbook. That would lead him to compulsive shopping. If one buys specifically what he needs, instead of “going shopping,” shopping”, superfluous spending can be eliminated. Someone suggested that *“if we wish to take a substantial bite off our family budget, it can be easily done by eating out regularly”*

c) If you can't pay “cash” for a necessary house item, at least should try to buy that article where they offer the opportunity to pay in six months (even 12) with zero interests. What can be done to clear one's debts? Make the effort to pay them. Organize your expenses and make a debt list such as this one:

Debt	Amount Owed	Monthly Payment
Mortgage	\$80,000.00	\$500.00
Vehicle	15,000.00	350.00
Bank loan	10,000.00	300.00
Credit Card	3,000.00	100.00
Other debts	1,000.00	50.00

Make an effort to pay the smallest debt first. This can be done by spending less in other areas (restaurants, superfluous goods, etc.) Once you have paid the \$1,000.00 on several accounts, add those \$50.00 to the credit card payment until it's paid in full. Once you've done that, add \$150.00 to the main amount of the Bank loan, and so on.

3. Learn how to live with 75% of your income

a) We're wise when we make an effort to save a little amount of our income. Jesus spoke about the servant in the parable of the talents saying that he should, at least, have put the money in the bank so it could yield interest, and he didn't.

b) We suggest to distribute our monthly family budget in this way: (1) 10% for our tithe, (2) 10% for personal savings, (3) 5% for offerings –cults, missionaries, special offerings, (4) 75% for monthly expenses.

c) This may be difficult for some. However, you could start by planning wisely and little by little, handle your finances in a way which honor God, the church, family and oneself.

4. Learning to give to God, not to the necessity

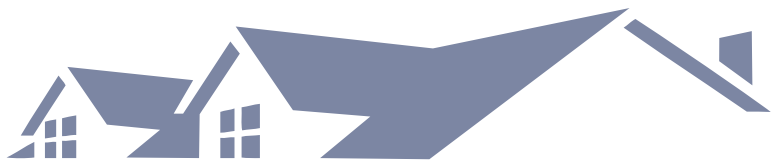
a) When we first fall in love with Jesus, our donation will mature to a point where we give to Him and not to church, project or apartment. Even though we know that the money will be used for specific needs, our giving is to the Lord. By knowing that we are giving to God and not to a need, this act becomes more valuable to us and has more merits before Him.

b) We must learn to give God the best. Occasionally, the brothers bring to church articles that they no longer want or need. Some clean their garages or warehouses and donate what they “no longer need”. We must be careful to give God only the best. If it’s no longer usable, why bring it to church? Some things can be useful; but try to bring the best that you have to offer Him.

c) We must learn to give God every time we receive our weekly, biweekly or monthly check, as a reminder that all belongs to Him. Tithe is for the storehouse (general treasury) and not to be used in other needs. To levy a tithe on the brut amount, instead of the net, ensures that God, and not the government Will get the first fruit. Try it, prepare your tithe at home, don’t go looking for envelopes and signing checks to the last minute. Remember, it’s for the Lord, not for an ordinary people.

Conclusion

Our joy will increase when God is glorified through our finances. Besides, in our services, worship and praise have more bases when the financial life of the congregation praises and honors the Lord.



The stewardship of the Kingdom

Attitude

The Stewardship *of Our Attitude*



BY ANDY PROVENCIO

Key Verse: *Numbers 13:31-33*

"But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight."

Introduction

It'd be interesting to make a list of the twenty five closest persons to us, whether they may be friends or relatives and write the most admirable characteristic in them. We could write an A for every characteristic which represents an attitude, an S for skills and an N for nice (or nice looking).

We would realize that the majority of the answers are related, more to their **"attitude,"** than anything else. There's

truth in saying that **“God does not seek for skill, but for sincere availability.”**

1. Our Attitude Determines

Our Success / Failure

a) Moses sent 12 spies to be informed about certain characteristics of the country (the size of it, the type of harvest, the defensive strength of its inhabitants). The spies stayed in the land of Canaan for 40 days and came back with a brilliant report (**Numbers 13:27**). However, despite this great report, they took too long thinking and informing about the military strength of the inhabitants.

b) The more they focused in the negative, the more pessimistic they became: *“But the men who went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their site”* (**Numbers 13:31-33**).

c) **“We are but locusts”** (we are nothing). That was the attitude that they took. Because of this attitude, an entire generation wandered for 40 years until they died in the desert! Negative attitudes are very contagious. When we focus in “the problems” before reaching our decision, we’ll never make the right choices.

d) After a generation, Joshua sent spies again to the land of Canaan. When the spies spent the night at Rahab's house, she told them: *"I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you... And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath."* The spies carried a good report to Joshua. Everybody's attitude was: *"Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land..."* (**Joshua 2:24**).

What was the difference between these two generations? The only difference was the "attitude" the second generation had taken. 40 years earlier, God had given them the Promised Land, but a negative attitude stole their blessing.

2. Our attitude towards God

Makes the Whole Difference

a) Our attitude towards God is what draws us near to Him. The Lord doesn't want our treasure, our time and our talents, unless He can have our worship (worship and service are synonyms) We can't worship Him, unless we're willing to serve Him.

b) God wants our worship, and hell opposes to this! It's important to understand what the source of **"bad attitudes and rebellions"** is: *"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:*

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit” (Isaiah 14:12-15).

c) In the book of Hebrews, Satan was called “*the morning star.*” He shone because God had invested him with a robe of precious stones. “When he worshipped God, The light of God was magnified, and His strength and power gleamed against the diamonds, making the entire universe to glow.

We must understand that Lucifer was not the light. He merely reflected it. However, he was dethroned and has been replaced by the church. When he was deposed, he lost his place and clothing. All those jewels are found in Revelations. ***We don’t need them to shine, because we have the Holy Ghost!***

3. We Reflect His Light with the Right Attitude

a) We are the ones who reflect the Glory of God in our lives now. We must understand why Satan is so mad. He was an employee who lost his place and got fired for being a bad servant. Knowing that inferior beings took his place makes him angrier.

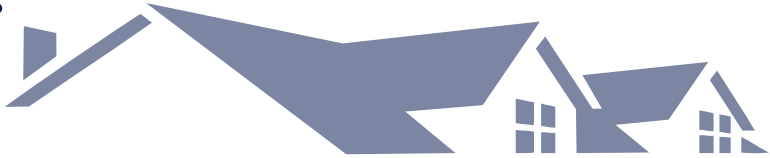
b) Our attitude towards God determines our attitude towards others. There are four things, which are necessary to eliminate negative attitudes:

- 1) Let’s start speaking only of positive things,
- 2) Let’s look for the positive in each situation and person,
- 3) Let’s assume the control of our thoughts, and
- 4) Let’s NEVER surrender to negative emotions.

Conclusion

Your attitude and mine are far more important than facts, the past, our education, failures, successes, what others might think of us, money, appearance, skills and gifts, etc.

When we have the right attitude, there is no wall high enough, valley too deep, dream too elevated or challenge too big to us. Attitude is what brings success or failure to a business, church, family or individual! Life is 10% what happens to us, and 90% is the way we react to what happens to us!



Change your situation by changing your words



BY JUAN FORTINO

Welcome

Icebreaker: If I could change a situation now, what could it be?

Key Verse: *Hebrews 11:3*

Objective: To establish the power of the words we speak to make them more biblical.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. By **“situation,”** we mean our environment, your body, your mind, your spirit and soul. We’re also talking about your home, your sphere of influence.

2. They say that *“your body listens to what you say.”* You influence yourself as well as your body, with the words you use. It’s important that you understand that you could change the situation in which you are at, by changing what you say.

3. Your situation will never change until you change your words. *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof” (Proverbs 18:21).*

Pay attention to the power of your tongue. You could obtain blessings or curses through the use of your tongue.

4. Jesus said: *“For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” (Mathew 12:37).*

5. Words create pictures in our imagination and thoughts.

The first great picture that you have to paint is that of yourself. I always paint a good picture of myself. I say: *“Juan, you’re a very handsome man, tall, strong, nice, blessed... the devil (ESR) can’t defeat you, since you’re in the centre of God’s will and you’ll achieve everything you set out to do!!!”*

And, how do you picture yourself?

6. If you want to change your situation, you MUST change your words!

II. WHICH WORDS WILL CHANGE OUR WORLD?

1. Let’s read carefully **Luke 4:16-21**

a. And, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue: He visited the temple regularly.

b. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And... he found the place where it was written: This means that He was looking for something...

c. What was He looking for? He found the place where the scriptures mentioned Him and started to read. Praise the Lord!

d. I am the one the scripture talks about. I declare this scripture. This scripture is for me, and it speaks of me.

2. God wants us to find the scriptures which may apply to our lives in this particular moment, and to declare them with passion as ours. May we boldly command the devil: "Out of my life, these promises belong to me"

3. During His earthly ministry, Christ used the scriptures.

From the beginning of his ministry, when the devil tried to tempt him (**Mathew 4**), until after his resurrection, when He appeared to those who walked to Emmaus. *"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself"* (**Luke 24:27**)

4. John the Baptist also identified himself with the Scriptures that spoke about him. See **John 1:21-23**.

John replied with a passage from the Bible. He found the place where it was written about him, never said a word about his feelings. He didn't mention how things would look. John simply said: this is what I am. I'm what the Scriptures say I am. I'm the voice of one who claims in the desert. This is what the prophet Isaiah said.

5. Might there be verses in the Bible that speak about you?

6. We confess poverty and complain about not having riches. We confess disease and wonder why we have no health. We confess defeat and wonder why we don't have victory.

We confess weakness and whine because we don't have the strength. We confess curses and wish for blessings.

7. We must speak strength, and strength will come. We must speak victory, and victory will come. We must speak health, and health will come. We must speak prosperity, and prosperity will come. We must declare it aloud.

8. Read carefully **Hebrews 11:3**

- a. The universe is not everlasting, God is everlasting!
- b. Everything existed, although it could not be seen but, where was it? It was in the Word of the Creator.
- c. Until He spoke, everything started taking form.

9. This is what I wish to emphasize. Find what God says about you and say what He says.

III. THE POWER OF CONFESSION

1. To confess means to say what really is. Another possible meaning would be: to agree on something. If you confess the Lord's word, say what's written and agree on what He says.

2. Read **Isaiah 55:10-11**

3. Put God's Word in your heart, but place it also in your mouth.

4. *"For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"* (**Romans 10:10**)

5. To change your situation, change your words!

6. *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).*

You’re part of a new species. You can’t have the same defects as before. Some try to justify their wrongful deeds of the past. Well, the Bible says NO. Your problem is that you’re not in Christ, but in the flesh.

7. *“Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Colossians 1:12).*

You’ve been made “apt.” You weren’t, but you were made “apt.”

God has released us from the power of darkness...

8. *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law...” (Galatians 3:13)*

Because of the sin the law was written, and hence death, diseases, curses, pain, problems and satanic oppression. However, I declare today: I am redeemed (bought to a price) from these curses. They will never touch me.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

1. Jesus said: *“...Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but*

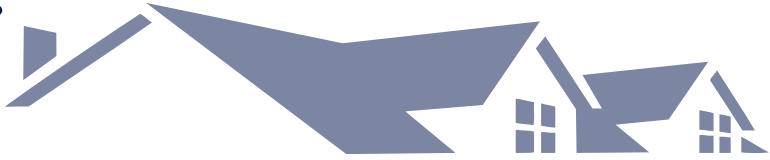
shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith" (Mark 11:22-23)

2. When we declare His word, we change the situation in which we are. To do that, one needs faith. There are three levels in faith that must be considered:

a. First level: We receive the measure of faith in us. Second level: we make it grow to hear His word. Third level: we declare it making it part of our lives.

b. The first level separates us from irrational, incredulous beings. The second level separates us from those in the flesh. The third level separates us from the frustrated and unsuccessful.

3. When we confess His word and declare it any time, we'll live as more than victors.



Where there was fire, Ashes remain



BY JUAN FORTINO

Welcome

Icebreaker:

Mention two things that you want to achieve next year

Key Verse: *Zechariah 4, Ezekiel 37*

Objective: In this lesson, we will see that God hasn't finished with you. That is because you're very special before His eyes. Serve Him with all your heart.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. On a winter night, in one of Canada's provinces over a mountainside, there was a Christian family in a very precarious situation, due to the frosts they were experiencing during those days. The snow had frozen the trees making the act of cutting the wood nearly impossible. Besides the cold, the wind was strong and thriving. That cold night brought bad news. The fire

of the chimney was extinguished, and cold had crept into the pine wood house. To capture heat, the family members huddled together and hugged each other for warmth, while singing hymns to the Lord. In an almost heroic act, his father decided to go out to cut more wood, because his family life depended on it. With no more than ashes in the fireplace, he placed the cold hard wood that he had just cut into the almost dead fire, praying and waiting on the Lord to light the new wood. A son asked his father: ***“will the fire reignite?”*** to which the father replied: ***“Sure, because where there was fire, ashes remain”***.

2. This is a message for those who think they won't be able to get up again or whom the devil has led them to believe there's nothing more to do.

3. I've got good news for you and bad news for the devil. You've got to this moment with mere ashes, but the fire can be lit again!

1. EZEKIEL 37

1.1 in Ezekiel we find the famous history of the field of dry bones.

1.2 The Lord took the prophet to a bone yard. There were so many that laid scattered all over the field. They were not buried, They were not underground.

1.3 Read Ezekiel 37:3-10

1.4 Those bones were people before. There was life in them. Somehow, life escaped from them and now they're dry. They were wood, but turned to ashes.

2. ZECHARIAH 4

A. GOD REBUILDS OUR LIFE BY WAKING US UP (V.1)

2.1 *"...And waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep..."*

2.2 Allow me to give you a little historical background:

- Zechariah distinguishes for describing prophetic aspects through symbolisms, alike the book of Revelations.

- This is the fifth vision of the prophet Zechariah. It refers to Israel's situation after the exile to Babylon.

- Around the year 520 b.C. after nearly 70 years of captivity, they came back to find Israel in ruins and rubble.

2.3 Zechariah is a victim of what he sees. He becomes tormented, does not recover from the crude reality of seeing his beloved homeland, chosen by God, now in ruins.

2.4 Three leaders were necessary to restore Israel.

- Zerubbabel, Jerusalem's Temple. Ezra, the worship in Jerusalem, Nehemiah, the walls.

NOTE:

When crisis arise, they prevent us from seeing the solutions. And we fall asleep and it becomes necessary that God wakes us from the dream.

B. GOD REBUILDS OUR LIVES BECAUSE HE VALUES IT (V.2)

1. *"i see a lampstand of pure gold ..."*

2. We continue with the vision of Zechariah that after being alerted to see the way God was going to rebuild the nation, was shown with a chandelier.

3. It wasn't an ordinary chandelier, Zechariah describes it as one of solid gold. This candlestick represented the temple that would be built under the leadership of Zerubbabel.

4. How is your candlestick? Is it lit and illuminating?

5. He wants to make you a beautiful place where He lives forever. If you believe in Christ, you're like a golden candlestick where the presence of God will always be. Regardless of your problem or your situation, God will rebuild you for your own good and His glory.

C. GOD PROVIDES CONSTANTLY TO REBUILD OUR LIFE (V.2B)

1. *"... With a bowl upon the top of it ... And two olive trees by it..."*

2. In addition to the vision of the candlestick, we are told that at the top of this chandelier was an oil reservoir that fed the fire through the olive branches of the candlestick (BLA).

3. The providence does not come from the strong arm of man but from God, for that reason it is said that the oil bowl is up, for God will always provide the means to overcome.

4. Almost always, the oil symbolizes the Spirit of God, which is constantly given to anyone who holds a close communion with Him.

5. The answer is that we are using the wrong tool. It is the spirit of God who will provide us inexhaustibly with the power and strength to rebuild our lives.

D. GOD REBUILDS OUR LIFE, HELPING US TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES (V.7)

1. “Who are you, great mountain?”

2. After this, God asks a question, apparently these hills were result of the accumulated debris around the temple after its destruction, although it is believed that this term refers to the opposition Zerubbabel would face; furthermore, it is believed that that mountain is the indifference with which Zerubbabel would also meet to rebuild the temple.

3. Amidst the ruins of your life, you will see huge mountains of obstacles that will prevent you from getting ahead. However, God promises you that, as long as you keep burning before you the flame of faith, you can cope with them and succeed.

E. IF GOD REBUILDS OUR LIVES, HE WILL COMPLETE HIS WORK (V.8)

1. “...Cast the foundation ... And His hands shall also finish it”

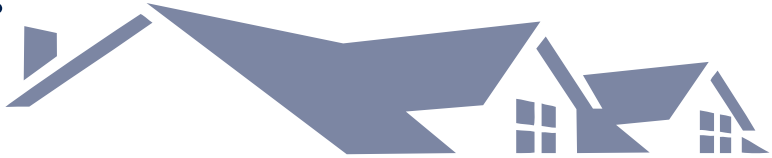
2. Zechariah is God’s messenger to Zerubbabel and gives him one last message which says that it is precisely Zerubbabel who would initiate the reconstruction and will be the one to see it finished. It is a vision as well as a promise.

3. A generation would not pass before the city and the temple would be completely built and in all their glory. All that God begins in our lives, He ends. Paul says in another portion of the bible: *“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1: 6 NIV).*

4. No matter how destroyed your life may be, if God has begun its reconstruction, He will take the time needed to rebuild it and show it in all its glory.

A) God is not like us, that we can start something and never finish it. Many times when we stumble upon something or someone, the easiest thing is to give up and try something different or return to the same, believing that there is no point trying.

B) However, the Lord says that if you place your life in his hands, He will begin his work of reconstruction and, no matter how long it will take Him to rebuild you, He promises to finish it.



The Bethesda *Paralytic*



BY JUAN FORTINO

Welcome

Icebreaker: Talk about a miracle of Divine healing in your life.

Key Verse: *Zechariah 4, Ezekiel 37*

Objective: To Show that God is willing to do miracles of healing and the only thing “He wants” is, that “we want.”

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Every day we go out, we submerge into a crowd.

- It is in this kind of “jungle” where we must fight to survive. Where self-interest dominates, where no one cares about anyone. Where each one strives to be the first, not to lose his turn, or to take away someone else’s. Whether it be in a hospital, school, bank, or a company, there reigns the law of the jungle. And the weak lose.

1.2 In verse 4 we see the story of the man who could not run. He could not get there first. Verse 5 tells us that: he had been sick for 38 years.

- Maybe it's a case similar to yours. Because you've been suffering for too long, you have searched too much and waited too much. Because you are alone, because you have no one to help you. Because you haven't the strength to walk.

1.3 Verse 6 tells us that. ***"Jesus saw him."*** The Lord always sees us.

- He saw Nathanael under the fig tree and knew that there was a true Israelite.

- He saw Zacchaeus hidden among the branches of the tree.

- The Lord saw the anguish of this man, paralytic for 38 years, saw that he was ill, and the sin in his life.

- The sin is worse than the paralysis of the body.

- So many today refuse to acknowledge that there is sin in their lives! It is the sin that ruins the lives of humans. This is what steals the happiness, which crushes the soul by making it moan in pain.

II. CHRIST MAKES MIRACLES.

2.1 After Jesus saw and knew what was in that man, he asked him that crucial and tremendous question: Do you want to be healthy?

2.2 The man hesitated. He began to see the obstacles that prevented him from being healthy.

2.3 He began to argue the reasons why that could not be, instead of seeing that, before him, was the Lord of Glory asking: Do you want to be healthy? All the power that was able to create the universe was there in front of him, to make that simple miracle.

2.4 Maybe you're also doing the same thing about the health of your soul and eternal life. You may be trying to save yourself through human means.

2.5 You may be trying to get to heaven through your own efforts, through your own "good deeds" and you may not see Jesus Christ, who, in front of you, asks you: Do you want?

- Do you want to be free of your sins, your pride, your envy, your disbelief? If you want, there is nothing that can prevent it from happening, because God has all power to do so.

III. DO YOU WANT IT OR NOT?

3.1 The real battle is there: in the wanting. Do you really want?, Do you want eternal life? Would you like Christ to wash away all sin?,

3.2 Verse 8 says that the Lord told that man: **Arise!** It would seem impossible to the paralytic, something bizarre, illogical. He was a crippled ... But it was the voice of Christ.

- The same voice that said in the midst of darkness: **"Let there be light!" And there was light!** The same voice that commanded to Lazarus after being dead for four days: **Lazarus, come forth! The man who had been dead resurrected!**

3.3 He calls on you today, He says: get up and walk. Live. Do you want to? Will you obey? Or will you be more stubborn than a crippled, or more deaf than a dead man? God himself is calling you.

3.4 Do the circumstances of your life, do not tell you of this also? Does your soul within you, that immortal soul, does not cry out too? Does it not say: peace? Does it not say: I truly want to live?

4. CONCLUSION

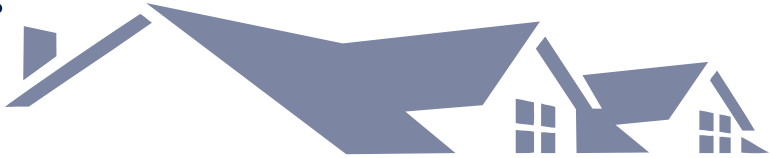
4.1 The crowd watched the pond to see whether it could reach the crumbs of grace offered there, and didn't see that God was very close to them with a torrent of grace and love. What are you staring at?

4.2 *"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22).*

4.3 Confess your sins to God, and in your heart, let him know: *"I believe you Lord, and I accept your voice in my life."*

4.4 He wants to heal you, do you?

- *"And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (Mathew 8:2-3).*



The power of the word



BY JUAN FORTINO

Welcome

Icebreaker: Name a phrase or a biblical passage, which helps you to keep going.

Key Verse: *Luke 7:1-10*

Objective: To demonstrate the power behind the words we speak or listen.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In our message, we find a man who understands the power behind the words.

1.2 To speak of the power of words is to talk about the domain of words about the situation or problem.

1.3 For example.

a) Friday afternoon, after a long day of work and tired of the sun, your boss shows up and says, I'll pay you \$ 2.00 more per hour!

b) They call you at 3:00 am and say, we call from Rome, Italy. We have searched everywhere until we found you. We want to inform that you are the sole heir of the property of his uncle, who died 2 weeks ago. His fortune amounts to 8,000,000 dollars. We need you to come and sign the documents!

1.4 It would seem that words do not only affect the ears, but also our whole being.

- a)** Our attitude changes through the word.
- b)** Our situation changes through the word.
- c)** Our mentality is changed by the power of the word.
- d)** Our direction is changed by the power of the word.
- e)** Our hearts are changed by the power of the word.

1.5 I am not speaking of any word, I am speaking of the Word of God.

- *"Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away" (Luke 21:33).*

2. IT ALL STARTED WITH THE WORD!

2.1 It all started with the word!

2.2 The creation is the product of the word, Genesis 1.

- **V.3** And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
- **V.5** Then God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters
- **V.11** Then God said, Let the earth bring forth grass,
- **V.14** And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to separate day from night;
- **V.19** And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be in place, and let it dry. And it was so.
- **V.24** And God said, Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind

2.3 Joshua commanded the sun and moon to stop (Joshua 10:12)

- Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, And thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon.

2.4 Many of us quote Peter saying: to whom shall we go? If only You have words of eternal life. We need to understand that Peter already knew that word!

- In Luke 5, we learn about the miraculous catch.

3. DABAR, RHEGMA and LOGOS

3.1 There are 3 words in the scriptures that are translated “**word**” Dabar, Logos and Rhegma.

- Dabar (Hebrew) tells us the word that holds a purpose, “what is behind”
- Logos (Greek) refer to the incarnate Word, to the written Word, to the static Word, but full of life.
- Rhegma (Greek) refers to the word that is put into motion, ie, the spoken word.

3.2 If we put these 3 words together we have the following:

- The Word of God is the essence of things that have a purpose or a plan which moves them, this word is written as a testimony to posterity and bears witness to a power manifested to anyone who wants to put it into action.
- Using biblical language we would say: “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

3.3 In Christ we see these 3 words United: Christ is the consummation of God’s plan, the essence of his word, the incarnate Word and the driving force that sustains the church.

3.4 For this reason Christ is the only one who can say: “The words I speak are spirit and life”

3.5 If we could be filled with that word, we would be powerful preachers!

- Not in bread alone doth man live but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God!

4. THE WORD IN ACTION!

4.1 Stop! Said the Lord to the storm, and it stopped!

4.2 Harden! He said to the sea and walked over it!

4.3 Multiply! He told the loaves, and fishes and nearly 20,000 people ate!

4.4 Heal! He told the paralytic, and he walked!

4.5 Come out! He told the demons, and they fled!

4.6 It is finished! He said on the cross and brought redemption to lost mankind!

4.7 Come up here! He told John and took him to the third heaven!

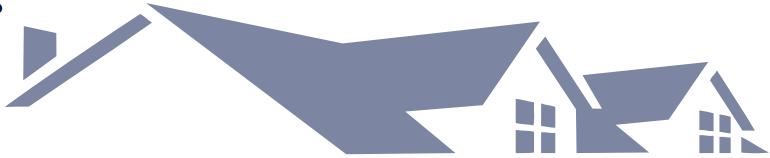
4.8 Sound the trumpet! It will tell the angel to gather his people from the ends of the earth!

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The spiritual blessings, are not achieved through rites or ceremonies, we must use the word.

5.2 Let's use the word in any situation.

- **Before the lure:** *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6:12-14)*
- **Before the problem** ... I can do everything through Christ, who strengthens me...
- **Before the depression** ... The Lord is the one that sustains my life...
- **In fear** ...Strengthen the weak hands and feeble knees!
- **Before Satan** ...Depart from me, for this has been written!



Dwelling in the secret place ***of the Most High***



BY JUAN FORTINO

Welcome

Icebreaker: When was the last time you bought a coat, and why?

Key Verse: *Psalm 91:1*

Objective: To emphasize the necessity of living under the care of God in a cold world.

1. GOD REVEALS TO HIS PEOPLE

IN DIFFERENT WAYS

1.1 As the God of battles. Exodus 14:14

1.2 As a defense. Psalm 5:11

1.3 As a Fortress. 2 Samuel 22:2

1.4 As a hiding place. Psalm 17:8

1.5 As a shelter. Exodus 33:22

1.6 As a shield. Deuteronomy 33:29

2. TODAY HE PRESENTS TO US AS A SHELTER

2.1 A condition: The one who dwells (speaking of time and place 1 Kings 17:1) "As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand"

2.2 It is a soul that lives in communion with God. Wears no flesh but the righteousness of God.

3. SHELTERED BY THE HIGHEST

3.1 It makes me think of the tastes of God. Genesis 1:11 "Let the earth bring forth grass. God's colors, the rainbow..." And so on. God has His own tastes.

3.2 What material will be the shelter of God made of? There are coats which are 25% nylon, 25% acrylic, 50% cotton. But His coat is 100% God's Love!

4. THIS WORLD OFFERS MANY COATS

4.1 Some are luxurious and very high priced. But they are only a burden, since they do not remove the cold and loneliness in this world...

5. THERE IS A COLD THAT PRODUCES DISEASE

5.1 But God is more present than a nurse... more than a pain-killer. He is your loyal family doctor... "...I will be with him in trouble" (Psalms 91:15).

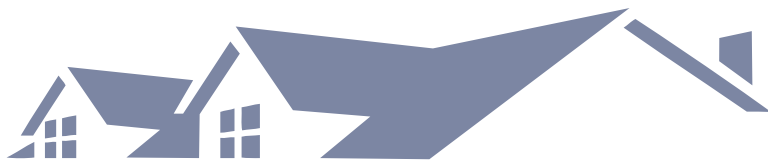
5.2 There is a cold which produces loneliness. When there isn't a kiss and a caress. Appears when the husband leaves. But God says "I will not leave nor forsake you."

5.3 There is a cold that causes ageing. When we've reached the winter of our lives. "Now king David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he got no heat... So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunammite, and brought her to the king" (1 Kings 1:1-3) ...but he didn't need a shelter of flesh... He dwelled in the shelter of the Most High. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15)

6. HE SHALL ABIDE UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE ALMIGHTY

6.1 God takes care of their children.

6.2 What kind of shelter do you have? Remember that out there, there is a cold world waiting for you. Do not leave home without Him tonight.



Deep sea fishing



BY JUAN FORTINO

Welcome

Icebreaker: When was the last time you went fishing?

Key Verse: *Psalms 107:23-32*

Objective: Would you like to do something great and good in this life! If you are tired of small things, would you like to connect to something bigger, something which pleases God? Leave the shore and go deep sea fishing.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 God asked me to take the church to deep waters.
- 1.2 It's time to leave the water's edge.
- 1.3 Allow me to explain some terms:

a) The sea is humanity. Those of us who go down to the sea in ships and do business in great waters are the GAAP's.

B) When the Lord comes I will not be found fishing in a pond or small river, but I want to be found at sea, the sea that represents humanity. A humanity which suffers, cries and dies to come to light.

C) This is what the Church does every time it leaves its four walls and goes out to win souls.

D) We must be more than just "another" Church of the corner. Our mission is to rescue souls. Share the bread of heaven.

E) Our anniversary will be coming soon. And our way of thanking God for so many years of love and compassion, is by going into deep waters to rescue the lost ones.

F) When the Lord finished his speech he told his disciples, Go into deep waters...!

G) I do not want to be tied to a safety rope on the beach, where everything is safe. I'd like to cut the rope and go offshore TODAY! How many would want to come with me?

2. STORMS

2.1 Look what's in the book of ***Psalms. 107:27*** "*They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end*".

2.2 When you are at sea, the fury of the waves is worse. The psalm says that they reached the sky and fell into the abyss. The funny thing is that God allowed it.

2.3 The reason is simple. When you are at sea, and in the midst of such waves, dizzy from the motion, and without wisdom, all that is left is to cry.

2.4 It is precisely there, where we will look at the power of God.

2.5 It says that when the storms came, they staggered, their souls melted, their wisdom exhausted. But it says that when they cried to the Lord in their distress, He delivered them from their afflictions.

2.6 However, to reach the depths of the sea, you could not walk, you need ships. There are 2 ships that we need to know:

3. SHIPS WHICH MAY CARRY US

TO THE DEEP WATERS

3.1 Prayer:

- a) The prayer will carry us out of the water edge and take us to the deep waters.
- b) When you work, you do work, but when you pray, God works.
- c) I refuse to believe that cell groups cannot multiply.
- d) What happens is that we are too comfortable.
- e) The Lord didn't call us to be comfortable, but to "negotiate" in deep water.
- f) We need to ask God to help us get where the souls are and rescue them.
- g) Since we already know each other very well. What we need is to multiply and carry the gospel to the souls.

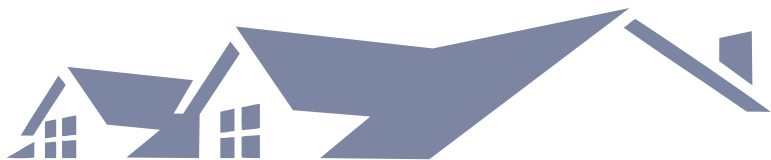
- h)** Our cell groups were not designed for us to look at our faces all the time. NO! They are designed for souls to come to the feet of Jesus. Do not be afraid. Row offshore and you will fish!

4. THE COMMUNION

- a)** We can't go offshore, if we are not in agreement.
- b)** Imagine a rowboat with four brothers to the right and 4 to the left, and that those at the right paddle to the front, and those to the left paddle to the back ... The boat will not get anywhere.
- c)** We must agree on the cell groups.
- d)** My assistants must know "where" we're going to.
- e)** Remember the law of navigation: "Anybody can drive a boat, but it takes a leader to know where to go"

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 1.** Only those who throw themselves out to sea, come out of the routine.
- 2.** Only those who, by faith move away from the shore, experience the power of God.
- 3.** Do not let yourselves be fooled by Satan who leads you to believe than you are safe at the very edge. Comfort is good, but it is dangerous to the spirit.
- 4.** Multiply! Row offshore! Do business in deep waters!
- 5.** The vision has not weakened. It's stronger than ever!



why do you keep rowing?



BY JUAN FORTINO

Welcome

Icebreaker: What project are you in now?

Key Verse: *2 Peter 1: 5-15*

Objective: To enhance the importance of doing things with the heart for God.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This is a question we all must answer.
2. Let's change the word paddling for the word singing, come to worship, pay tithes, serve, preach, love, forgive, serve, pray.
3. Why do we do it? Why, when many do not? I've heard phrases like: Why do you work so hard, if anyway, you will not get recognition?

4. Might the true Church, have gone insane? May it be that we like suffering and mistreatment? Are we masochists? Has the Church of Christ gone crazy?

5. Or may it be that perhaps, within our hearts, we know that the answer is different?

a) That maybe the last word is not given.

b) That maybe our spirit impels us to follow because there is something beautiful beyond.

c) *“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Cor. 2:9)*

II. THE CARPENTER’S HISTORY

There was once an old carpenter who, tired of working so hard, he was ready to qualify for the retirement and spend time with his family. Thus informed his boss, and although he would miss his salary, he needed to retire and be with his family, somehow they’d survive. The contractor was saddened by the news that his best carpenter was leaving and asked him to build one more house before retiring.

The carpenter accepted the proposal of his boss and began building his last house, but as time went by, he realized that his heart was not fully at work. Regretting having said yes to his boss, the carpenter did not put the same effort and dedication as always when building a house, and built it with inferior materials. That was, he said, a very unfortunate way to end a great career to which he had devoted most of his life.

When the carpenter finished his work the contractor came to inspect the house. After the inspection, he gave the house key to the carpenter and said, "This is your house, my gift to you and your family for so many years of good service." The carpenter felt the world was slipping... Great was the embarrassment he felt upon receiving the key to the house, his home. If only he had known that he was building his own house, he would have done everything differently.

III. APPLICATION

1. How are you going to meetings of cells? How do you come to worship? How do you serve God in this time? What are you doing for the souls that are lost? What is your goal?

2. Are you are giving 100% to the Lord, or only when you have nothing to do?

3. What if God surprises you by giving you the blessing or the payment of the last thing you're doing?

4. In **Acts 12** we have the story of Herod, who declined to give glory to God after his speech.

- *"And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost" (Acts 12:22-23).*

5. How terrible! If anyone had told him that was the last thing he would do, perhaps he would have acted differently.

6. How do we know that this is, or not, the last thing we do?

7. Funeral of Brother Almaraz.

IV. WHAT ARE YOU BUILDING?

1. We asked to 3 bricklayers who were laying bricks. One answer, I do not know and I do not care, I just want my week-end paycheck. The other said: I am laying bricks over bricks and the third said: I'm building the house of God and a door to heaven!

2. The three were building the same, but only one looked beyond a weekly paycheck or a simple building. He could see God healing, saving and touching the lives of people.

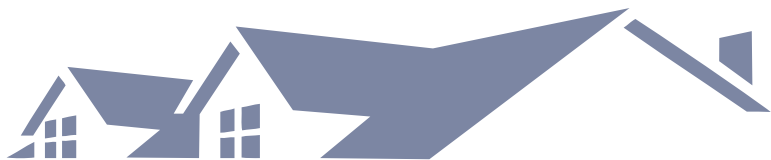
V. CONCLUSIONS

1. Someone once said: *"Life is a project that you do yourself. Your attitudes and the choices you make today, build the house in which you will live tomorrow."*

2. Build wisely!

3. Remember ... work as if you didn't need the money, love as if you've never been wounded and worship God as if nobody was watching...

4. For the whole world, maybe you're just one person, but to one person maybe you're the whole world.



Our eyes on Jesus



BY JUAN FORTINO

Welcome

Icebreaker: In times of need, whom do you go to?

Key Verse: *Hebrews 12:1-2*

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"

Objective: To understand the need to put our eyes on Christ at all times, in times of danger and in times of plenty. It seems that the abundance and prosperity of God send some people away faster than needs.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This letter was addressed to Christians who were Jews. They were in constant danger of returning to Judaism, fall into the rites and customs of their ancestors.

2. The writer, Paul or whoever wrote it, tried to prove the superiority, as it concerned men, of the Christian era compared to that of the Old Testament.

3. In the previous chapter we saw a parade of heroes of faith, who now become mute witnesses to the kind of life a son/daughter of God must live.

II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN, SETTING EYES ON JESUS?

1. Literally “watching from afar or fixedly.” In other words, a goal, purpose, target, destination where we want to arrive.

2. It refers not to the physical eye, but to the inner eye of the heart. . . The focus of our thoughts.

3. It also refers to priorities: Generally, you see what grabs your attention.

4. It refers to the motivation: When you look at Jesus, things become less difficult.

III. WHY PUT OUR EYES ON JESUS?

4 REASONS

1. We need a guide who is faithful and true.
2. Those who have succeeded in the past, have done so looking at Jesus.
3. When we stop looking at Jesus, we begin to destroy each other.
4. Those who look at Jesus reach their goal.

IV. JESUS IS THE ONLY TRUE GUIDE.

1. Life is full of guides, people trying to catch our attention, taking our eyes off the Lord.

a) Human power. *“Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!” (Isa 31:1).*

b) The rewards of this world. *“Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way” (Psalm 119:37).* The word “vanity” means deceiver, false, empty... encloses all the rewards offered by a world without God, the riches, self-honor, pleasure.

c) The Vices. *“And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).*

d) A lack of control in priorities can be a deviation.

“And as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Luke 21 :5-6).

e) The Man. *“You see things after the outward appearance” (II Cor. 10:7 a).*

V. THOSE WHO HAVE TRIUMPHED IN THE PAST HAVE DONE IT WITH THEIR EYES ON JESUS.

1. Abraham.

a) Abraham *“looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God, considering the reproach greater riches than the treasures of Christ in Egypt: for he looked to the reward” (Hebrews 11:10; 11:26).*

2. Peter

a) *“And the disciples saw him walking on the sea, were troubled, saying, A ghost! And they cried out in fear. But straightway Jesus spoke unto them, saying, Be of good cheer, I am not afraid! Peter answered him and said, Lord, if thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And Peter got out of the boat, walked on the water to go to Jesus. But seeing the wind boisterous, he was afraid and beginning to sink, he cried, saying: Lord, save me! And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, caught him, and said, ye of little faith! Why did you doubt? And when they climbed into the boat, the wind ceased” (Matthew 14:26-32)*

VI. WHEN WE FAIL TO LOOK TO JESUS, WE BEGIN TO DESTROY EACH OTHER.

1. Many do not have the time to lay their eyes on Jesus, because they are too busy looking, analyzing, evaluating, comparing, investigating, and scrutinizing his brother.

2. When we divert our eyes of Jesus, we begin to criticize, judge and attack each other.

a) *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word in the commandment: "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. But if ye bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another" (Gal 5:14-15).*

3. Why is this?

a) Because when we take our eyes off Jesus, we begin to believe we are well on our own.

b) Because we are complying with God, because we gather, because we tithe.

c) We forget that our best works are filthy rags, **Isaiah 64:6**.

d) When a Christian looks to Jesus, understands and practices the love and mercy.

VII. THOSE LOOKING FOR JESUS, WILL GET THERE

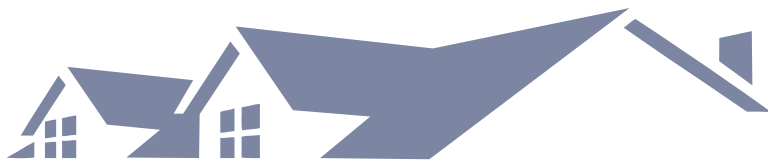
1. They will be resuscitated

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:1-3)

2. Have the strength to persevere.

a) The cheetah lives in the plains of central Africa. This animal survives by chasing his victims with a big boost of energy running up to 70 MPH. But this beautiful animal has a problem, it gets tired quickly. Inside its long and agile body, has a disproportionately small heart, which prevents it from maintaining that speed for long. Unless the leopard catches its victim in the first burst of energy, its forced to abandon the chase.

b) Some Christians are like the cheetah. They answer to God’s call with an explosive energy at first, but cannot sustain it for long and soon fail and go out. They make promises to work harder and run faster, when all that they need is not speed but endurance. We all need a bigger heart. Lots of movement, noise and emotion are useless if our heart is not large. ***And a heart is enlarged looking to Christ every day.***



Who is the greatest?



BY JUAN FORTINO

Welcome

Icebreaker:

When you look at a group photograph where you and your loved ones appear, who is the first person you look for?

Key Verse: *Matthew 18:1-5, Prov 16:18*

I. INTRODUCTION

1. We live in a society where everyone wants to be great, where a lower position means not having achieved the goal, today we speak of great doctors, great politicians, great artists, great writers, and so on. The story does not begin today...

a) *"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying: who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?"*

b) “At that time” means after being called to follow Jesus, to see His miracles, to listen many sermons so, after a while, began to look over each other.

2. There is always a time when man’s heart swells proudly, and we must discern the moment when pride knocks at the door of our heart.

II. “WHO IS THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?”

1. The example of the conversation:

a) Andrew: The greatest among us is me because I was the first disciple Jesus called.

b) Peter: Andrew, I was with you when this happened, so I think the two of us should take care of these guys; moreover, “I” was the only one who walked on water.

c) Matthew: - I’ll be the greatest. My testimony is nicer than yours. I was the greatest sinner of all. The world will be moved by my story.

d) Judas Iscariot: I have the silver. I have the money. I’ll be the greatest among you. I can bribe you, I will buy your votes if necessary.

e) Nathanael - Jesus said I am a true Israelite, in whom is no guile.

f) John: I am the man whom Jesus trusts. I am his beloved disciple. He loves me more than he loves you.

g) Lucas: I am a doctor. I am the most learned. I am a professional. I am more qualified than all of you together. I am the cult one.

h) Disciples of John the Baptist: We are the biggest because we fast very often, unlike you who only think about eating.

III. EXAMPLES

1. *The Pharisee prayed but exalted himself, in other words, he said he was the greatest between him and the publican who did nothing but humiliate his spirit and mourn for his sins before God. (Luke 18:9-14)*

a) Be careful not to seek a place of privilege that the Lord has not given you.

2. The mother of John and James sought to accommodate their children in a wrong position (**Matt. 20:20**).

a) Be careful no to surround yourself with a pleasant atmosphere only, learn to walk in places where you are not recognized.

3. Jesus accused the Pharisees and scribes, for publicly displaying of all their good works. (**Matthew 23:5-7**). We can make the holiest acts but with the most devilish attitude: Giving, praying, preaching, helping the poor, with the sole intention of being seen, climbing ranks and pleasing men.

a) Be careful not to seek for a privilege place just to impose your ideas and criteria.

IV. A CHILD IN THE MIDST OF THEM

1. While the disciples were waiting for a definition by the Lord, about who was the greatest, Jesus surprised and met them with a child and from that “little one” extracts the answer to the twelve “major” Why a child? What’s in a child?

a) They are dependent. They do not want to be the highest, but look for someone older to guide them.

b) They are docile, and suitable for forming an appropriate character.

c) They are always learning and willing to absorb new knowledge.

d) They are true believers, they do not need to see to believe. For years they may believe in the wise men without ever seeing them.

e) *“Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” (Luke 18:17).*

f) *“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1Peter 2.2)*

TEACHING:

“The Lord raises children when those he has raised consider themselves to be the greatest”

2. The Apostle Paul tells us: *“...Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.” (1 Corinthians 8:1-2)*

a) If you think that you love, forgive and serve, there may still be a better way to do it.

b) If you think you have reached your goal, you may still be in the middle of the race.

c) If you think you're entirely sanctified, there may still be something new to fix and clean.

3. And again: *"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith"* **(Romans 12:3)**

TEACHING:

We must put a child in our hearts, so that when the older man wants to appear, the child may remind him that he is but a little one. So that when I say, "I know everything" this child may remind me how little I know, and that I still need to learn from others.

V. INVERTED VALUES

1. *"But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"* **(Mathew 20:25-28)**

VI. WRONG TARGET

1. The question for the disciples was, who would be the biggest among them; but to Jesus, it was who would enter or not to the Kingdom of Heaven.

2. *“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Romans 12:4-5)*

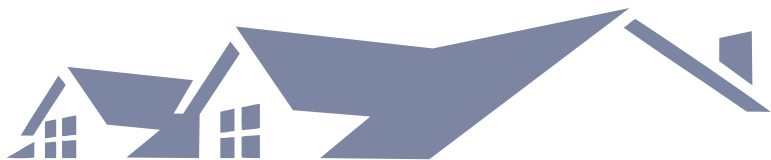
TEACHING:

We aren't parts of a body that predominate over the other limbs. Each must take the position that has been assigned to it to work correctly.

VII. CONCLUSION

1. Each disciple wanted to be the greatest among them, but Jesus would not make Pharisees out of them. Instead, He fought every spirit that rose against love, service and humility.

2. We are servants not masters, and in the best of cases, those who want to be the greatest in the Kingdom of God will only be able to achieve this through service and humility.



Tiger or hare?



BY JUAN FORTINO

Welcome

Icebreaker: What is the animal that you like best?

Objective: To understand that it is more valuable to serve than to be served.

Key Verse: *“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 7:12) (VRV60)*

I. INTRODUCTION

1. You wonder what’s this story got to do with a tiger or a hare?
2. Let me tell you a story.

A young Christian had a great disappointment. His absolute bitterness was caused by the inhuman way in which everyone behaved, apparently because no one cared about anyone.

Determined to get an answer from God, he went “deep” into a forest. There he observed, a little surprised, that a hare brought food to a huge wounded tiger, which could not help itself.

He was so impressed to see this that he returned the next day to see whether the behavior of the hare was casual or habitual. To his huge surprise, he found that the scene repeated: The hare left a chunk of flesh near the tiger. The days passed, and the scene repeated in an identical way until the tiger could regain strength and could get the food on its own.

Admired by the solidarity and cooperation among the animals, he said: “All is not lost. Surely, God is talking to me. If the animals, which are inferior to us, are able to help each other in this way, even more so people”

He decided to make the experiment: He fell to the ground, pretending to be wounded, and began waiting for someone to come and help him.

Hours passed. Night came, and no one came to his aid. He did the same thing throughout the next day, and was about rise, much more disappointed. He told the Lord: “There is no remedy for mankind! He left, more hurt and disappointed. God stopped him on his way and asked, “What is it my son?” He told his story and frustration, to which God answered him, what happens is that I gave you the lesson, so you could learn to be hare, and NOT tiger.

3. He heard the message, but got it wrong. How do you understand the verse we read?

a) *“Treat others as you would like to be treated, because that teaches the Bible.” (BLS)*

b) *“To treat others how you would like others to treat each of you.” (BLS)*

4. Many read: *“For me to treat people well, they should first treat me well.”*

5. Is this what the Lord is telling us? Because if so, nobody would do anything for anyone EVER!

6. If you still want to believe in humanity and find your fellow men as brothers, stop being a tiger and just be the hare.

II. THE BIBLE SAYS.

1. “Give him who has none”

- Do not think that you should receive from all, think about what is written, *“that you should give to others, who do not have.”*

2. “Love thy neighbor”

a) Do not pretend to receive the love of all, **love everyone yourself!**

b) In exchange, take the place of the one giving first.

3. “Be merciful”

- Begin by showing mercy and do not predispose yourself to receive mercy from others.

4. Some will say: It is impossible for a rabbit to feed a tiger. Well, in **1 Kings 17:6**, the Bible says that *“Elijah was in the brook*

Cherith. God commanded the ravens to bring him bread and meat to eat, morning and afternoon."

5. What the Bible commands you to give, begin by giving it, and your turn to receive will come on time. God will reward you splendidly.

6. We must live by helping others instead of benefiting from others. In life, do not be a tiger, be a hare. "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

III. CONCLUSIONS

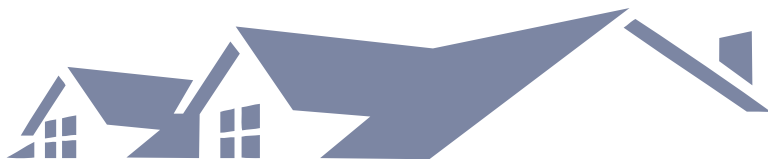
1. The Lord wants us to be servants. To develop that wonderful spirit.

- *"For the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).*

2. In John 13, Peter wanted Jesus to wash his feet. Peter was very rough. He had to understand that his most important role would be that of a servant.

3. Learn to give and serve.

"In all things I have learned that working well, it should help those in need, and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, who said: It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35)



A divine barter



BY JUAN FORTINO

Welcome

Icebreaker: Name one problem that oppresses you, so we can pray for you.

Key Verse: *Matthew 11: 28-30*

"Come unto me all ye that labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest for your souls: for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Objective: To learn to rest in God and live under His will.

I. THE LOADS THAT BURDEN US

1. *"Take your burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous". (Psalm 55:22)*

2. The Lord is willing to carry our burdens.

3. He asks us to lay them on Him, so that He may sustain us. Here He talks about us, NOT about our loads.

II. WORKED AND BURDENED

1. In Matthew 11, we read of two types of people that must come to Christ:

a) The workers: are those who get hurt by their actions.

B) The burdened: Those hurt by the actions of others.

2. The worked: We sometimes hurt ourselves.

a) When we go shopping (for shoes) and invest time without really needing what we're looking for.

B) By watching too much TV. He rises at 6:00 AM, but watches TV until 1:00 AM.

C) By eating uncontrollably. He knows that there are foods which harm him and still keeps eating them.

3. The burdened:

a) For the betrayals. They are the hardest pains to bear.

B) For the people that underestimate us. The loved ones who tell you that you're no good for anything.

C) For the past. The stories that have left us scarred forever.

III. THE YOKE AND ITS BURDEN

1. When we bring our burdens to Him, let us take on His yoke and His burden.

2. The yoke is His will. When you put the yoke to the ox, it will go where you take it.

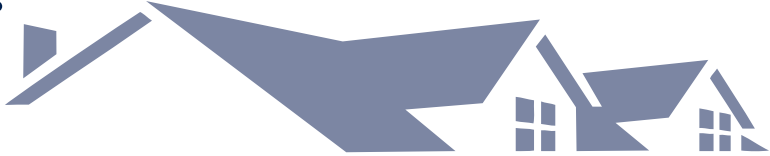
3. His burden represents His passion, His concern. This represents the communication of the gospel.

4. Why does He ask of us to carry his yoke and burden?

5. Because of our will, we got into the mess that caused the load we carry. His will deliver us from getting into trouble, and therefore His yoke is better than our load, and the passion for Him (evangelism) is what will bring joy to our hearts.

IV. THE DIVINE BARTER

1. You see, this divine exchange, is good for us. Let's change our burden that kills us, for His yoke that gives us life. Barter your load that overwhelms you, for His load, which produces joy. Only God, who loves us so much, could offer this kind of Divine barter. Accept it!



Carrots, eggs or coffee beans?



BY JUAN FORTINO

Welcome

Icebreaker: Take a carrot, an egg and coffee beans.

Key Verse: *2 Pedro 1: 5-15*

Objective: To teach that the trials and circumstances we face must not change us, but that we must change the circumstances.

One child complained to her father about his life and how things were so hard. He did not know how to move forward and wanted to give up. He was tired of fighting. It seemed that, as one problem was solved, another appeared. His father, a chef, took him to his workplace. He filled three pots with water and placed them on high heat. Soon water in the three pots was boiling. In one, he placed carrots, in the second he placed eggs, and the last he placed coffee beans. Then, he let them boil without saying a word.

The son waited patiently, wondering what he was doing. After twenty minutes, his father turned the fire off. He took the carrots

and placed them in a bowl. He took the eggs out and placed them on a plate. Then he ladled the coffee out and placed it in a cup. Watching his son said: "Dear, what do you see?" "Carrots, eggs and coffee," was the reply. He brought him closer and asked him to feel the carrots. So he did and noted that they were soft. Then he asked him to take an egg and break it. By pulling the shell off, he observed the hardboiled egg. Then he asked her to sip the coffee. He smiled as he tasted its rich aroma.

The son asked humbly: "What is the meaning of this, Father?" He explained to him that these objects had faced the same adversity: boiling water, but they had reacted differently: The carrot went in strong, hard, but after going through boiling water it became weak, easy to break. The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior. However, after being in boiling water, its inside became hardened. Coffee beans, however, were unique. After being in boiling water, they had changed the water.

When adversity comes to your door, how do you respond? How are you? Are you the carrot that seems strong, but when pain and adversity strike, do you weaken and become soft and lose your strength? Are you like the egg that starts with a malleable heart? ¿Did you have a fluid spirit, but after a death, separation, divorce, or a layoff it has become hardened and stiff? Your shell may look the same, but inside, you've become bitter and tough with a stiff spirit and hardened heart? Or are you like coffee beans? The bean actually changes the hot water, the element that causes it pain. When water reaches its boiling point, the coffee reaches its best flavor.

With all my heart, I wish you to try to be like the coffee bean; that when things don't go well, you will make your surroundings better. Remember, everything that happens in life, happens for a reason, you just need to discover its cause and learn from it. And if you have faith in God, you'll find the silver lining in every cloud.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The two houses of the Sermon on the Mount, **Matthew 7:24-29**

a) *“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” (Mathew 7:24-29)*

b) *“He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock...” (Luke 6:48)*

II. THE STORY OF PAUL AND SILAS

(Acts 16:12-40)

1. It all started in Philippi, a city of Macedonia.

a) *“And from there to Philippi, which is the first city in the province of Macedonia and a colony: and we were in that city a few days” V12*

2. As they went to prayer, they found Lydia, who was a merchant and God reached her with the saving message of Paul.

a) *“And on the sabbath we went out the door, along the river, where they used to be prayer, and sat down, talked to women who had gathered. 14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God, heard us and the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. 15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there. And she constrained us” V13-15*

3. But while they went to pray also came out a girl possessed, that bothered Paul for many days.

a) *“And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: This girl followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim the way of salvation. And she would do this for many days” V16-18a*

b) In the same place of prayer came Satan. Do not be surprised that in the same place where you pray the enemy is revealed. Prayer is not to scare away the demons, is to fight and win.

c) Mention the experience of Christ and his fast.

4. Until Paul took control of the situation and rebuked the devil, he cast him out, but that unleashed rampage (mess), Lords of the girl who supposedly brought them profits, were deprived of their business.

a) *“But Paul, he turned and said to the spirit, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of it. And it came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that he had left the hope of*

profit, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities, and submit to the judges, said: These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.” (V18b-21)

b) The text teaches us that there are businesses being fed by demons. Sometimes we do not realize these things, but they are right there before our eyes. Let’s use the name, when someone wants to harm us in our business or employment.

5. Here are Paul and Silas...

a) *“And the people ran together against them: and the magistrates, tearing the clothes, ordered them to be beaten with rods. After having beaten a lot, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. Who, received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened”. (V22-26)*

6. Our Christian character is what brought salvation to the lost.

a) *“Awakening the jailer, and seeing open the prison doors, drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm, for we are all here. Then he called for light, and sprang in, and trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and all who*

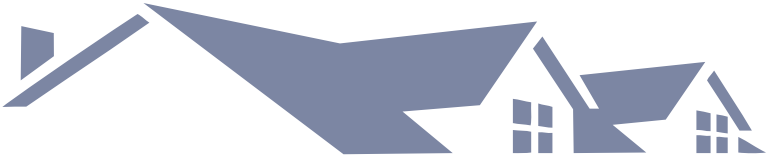
were at home. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds, and was baptized, he and all his family. The jailer brought them home, they set the table, and rejoiced with all his house, believing in God". (V27-34)

7. When you keep your Christian character, even the authorities will respect you.

a) "When it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men. And the jailer told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent word to let you go: now therefore depart, and go away in peace. But Paul said unto them have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison, and now cast us out privily? No, of course, but let them come themselves and fetch us. And the serjeants told these words to the magistrates, who were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. They are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim the way of salvation. And coming, he prayed, and brought them out, asked to leave the city." (V35-39)

8. They were really like the coffee bean, because after spending a day in jail and being beaten, they went to Lydia's house to console the brothers.

a) "Then, leaving the prison, and entered the house of Lydia, and having seen the brethren, they comforted them, and left". (V40)



In my Father's **Business**



BY ELIAS PAEZ

WELCOME

Icebreaker:

Have you ever been trying to make a business grow?

Key Verse: *Luke 2: 48-49*

“And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, how is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?”

1.A BUSINESS CALLED THE CHURCH

When we accept faith in Jesus Christ, we repent and receive His Holy Ghost. Unquestionably we are joining the business of

our Father. Thinking that serving the Lord means only to attend meetings, worship, conferences, seminars, concerts, is like thinking that I can be part of a company and all I have to do is to attend meetings, trainings, company get-togethers, and social activities but never thinking of working. Although I might wear the uniform of the company, I'm not considered a member of the company until I start performing the duties that I have been assigned as part of the team.

God has a business called the Church to which we have been integrated to make it grow.

2. WHAT BUSINESS DID CHRIST SPEAK OF?

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief". (1 Timothy 1:15)

Jesus Christ's business is to save sinners through His church. There's no other work that the church does which can replace the true significance Christ gave to his people to continue His business here on earth. Just as a company needs a business site, equipment, desks, tools, etc., to sell its product (whereas business is neither the tools nor the desktop or the premises where a certain service is sold or offered), also the church occupies temples, offices, classrooms and so on (but these are not the business of the church; but merely the necessary tools to make the business work better). To think that merely by building rooms or temples we are complying with the business of God's Kingdom, we would be seriously mistaken about what the business of the Lord is, which is about the souls; because even without the tools we would be able to work in His business.

3. JESUS EXPECTS US TO BEAR FRUIT FOR HIS BUSINESS

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:4-6).

Some confuse the fruit with the fruits of the Spirit, by saying that they are already bearing fruit.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law”. (Galatians 5:22).

Here, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that these are the fruits of the Spirit in the believer and not the fruits the believer should bear.

“Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well-beloved Epaenetus, who is the first fruit of Achaia unto Christ”. (Romans 16:5)

In the book of Romans, Paul calls Epaenetus “its first fruit”, thus qualifying souls won for God’s Kingdom, as fruits or profits of Christ’s business. As a mango tree naturally bears mangoes, apple trees bear apples, pear trees bear pears, avocado trees bear avocados, so one believer bears believers; that are what is natural in God’s Kingdom. And even though

the mango tree bears leaves, shells, branches, etc., all that is not the fruit; but the fruit is called mango. The believer, builds, gives offerings, goes to meetings and so on; however, his fruit is another believer.

4. GOD CALLS YOU TO INTEGRATE YOUR BUSINESS

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.” (John 15:16)

God is calling those who are lost to His Kingdom, so that they integrate to work in His business. He is not mistaken in choosing. If He chose you is because you can bear fruit to His Kingdom. God has a special place in His business for you. Join His vision and expand His business, it will bring great rewards to your life. He called you to do great things in His company.

“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” (John 15:8)

“And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.” (Mark 4:20)

It is no coincidence you're here. God calls you to work in His company. You are privileged. You'll work for the best Boss in the world, the King of kings and Lord of lords. You have all the potential that He gave you and wants you to use. Do not go down into the dust of the earth without having served him in His business and making large profits (souls) to His Kingdom.

“But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” (Luke 8:15)

5. WHO CAN'T MAKE PROFITS FOR CHRIST'S BUSINESS?

The word has already pointed out those who will not engage in this business:

A. Those who are struggling:

“And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares...” (Luke 8:14)

B. Those who are devoted to their wealth:

“And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches...” (Luke 8:14)

C. Those who are devoted to the pleasures.

“And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.” (Luke 8:14)

6. A WELL PAID JOB

A. There is a reward for working in the business of the Lord.

“Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded.” (2 Chronicles 15:7)

B. God pays you 100 times more.

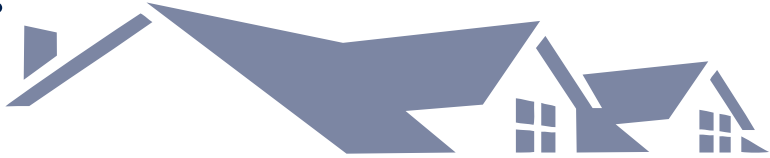
“And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.” (Mathew 19:29)

C. There are rewards in Christ’s Court.

“Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.” (2 John 1:8)

7. DO IT FOR THE LORD

“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.” (Colossians 3:23-24)



IN MY FATHER'S BUSINESS

“However, they didn't understand Him”



BY ELIAS PAEZ

WELCOMING

Icebreaker:

Have you ever tried to explain something that you find difficult to understand? How did you manage to understand it?

Key Verse: *Luke 2: 49-50*

“And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.”

1. UNDERSTANDING THE WORD “BUSINESS”

“Business” comes from the Latin negotium. That which is not idleness or opposes idleness.

When it comes to business has to do with being an entrepreneur; aside laziness and pursue profit through services or products.

When you talk about business, you talk about being an entrepreneur; about leaving aside laziness and pursue profit through services or products.

In Christ's Kingdom, not only it has to do with believing in Him, but also with integrating to His work. In other words, God didn't call us to be spiritually idle in His business, but to perform the task commended by Him to "go and make disciples of all nations..."
(Mathew 28:19)

Many believers come to the Lord only because of the benefits of being in His Kingdom, without any real intentions to serve, but to claim to God for the benefits that He offers in His Word. Thus, they keep reminding the Lord, His promises to those who are in His business; however, they'll never generate any profit (soul) for His business.

2. MARY DID NOT UNDERSTAND CHRIST'S BUSINESS *"And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them".* **(Luke 2:50)**

Joseph and Mary went from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. Back on the road they realized that Jesus had been left behind, so they returned to look for him and on the third day they find him in the temple of Jerusalem teaching the Word and saw that the doctors of the law were amazed by Him. But Mary, just as any other mother, distraught because she couldn't find Him, tells him off; and He replies by saying: "did you not know that in my Father's business I must be?" And they didn't understand the words He spoke.

It is not until the first chapter of the book of Acts, that we get to see her converted to Jesus and understanding the Lord's business through the Holy Spirit.

"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty)..." (Acts 1: 14-15)

3. THE DISCIPLES DID NOT UNDERSTAND CHRIST'S BUSINESS

A. IN THEIR APPREHENSION THEY FLED AND LEFT THE BUSINESS ALONE

"Then all the disciples forsook him and fled" (Mark 14:50)

B. PETER DENIED BEING A DISCIPLE OF THIS BUSINESS

"And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew." (John 18:25-27)

4. CHRIST CHALLENGED PETER TO WORK IN HIS BUSINESS

"So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea,

Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15-17)

The Lord challenges us to show our love for Him as He challenged Peter, loving the lost ones, that he bought with His blood. If we love Him, then we will love His sheep. Shepherding the lost sheep is thus the largest display of love we can give. We can say that we love Jesus by loving what he loves: Do you love me? Jesus said: Feed my sheep!

5. THOSE WHO UNDERSTAND *CHRIST’S BUSINESS*

“And these are the ones sown on good soil, hear the word and receive it, and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, a hundredfold” (Mark 4:20)

To dedicate ourselves to bear fruit for God’s Kingdom is an imperative, not an option. If we become good soil, we will bear good fruit. Failing to understand His businesses will cause us to seek for the Lord only to get His blessings, being ungrateful and uncompromising to this beautiful work.

Understanding that this it is not about us, but about Him, will be a greater blessing for our lives. Whether a friend or a brother, we must not forget to seek first for the Kingdom (His business) and He will add what we’re missing.

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be added.” (Mathew 6:33)

6. PAUL UNDERSTOOD THE PURPOSE OF CHRIST'S BUSINESS

"For though I be free of all, I have become a servant of all to win the more. I've done to the Jews as a Jew, to win the Jews, those who are subject to the law (although I am not subject to the law) and subject to the law to win those who are subject to the law; those who are without law, as if I were without law (not being without law toward God but under law toward Christ), to gain them that are without law. Weak I became weak, to win the weak, all I've done everything, so that by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel, that I may share it." (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

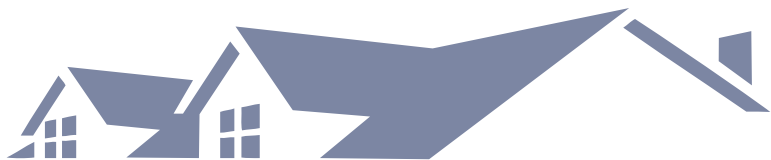
One of the apostles who brought more souls to Christ's feet was undoubtedly the Apostle Paul, and he learned very well to explain the plan of salvation in a language understandable to the listener, so that he could, as he said: "I am made all things to all men".

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise." (Proverbs 11:30)

7. WINNING SOULS REQUIRES *THE BEST STRATEGY*

"And how nothing that was helpful I did not shrink from declaring and teaching you publicly and from house to house..." (Acts 20:20)

Though he did not receive instructions on how to win souls like the rest of the apostles, the apostle Paul understood very well Jesus' strategy. The same strategy employed by the other apostles of the church in the book of Acts (5:42): "And daily in the temple and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ".



IN MY FATHER'S BUSINESS

Investing



BY ELIAS PAEZ

WELCOME

Icebreaker: Have you ever invested in something that has given you great satisfaction? How did you feel after having invested in it?

Key Verse: *Romans 9:6-8*

“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (2 Corinthians 9-6)

1. INVESTING IN MY FATHER'S BUSINESS

In today's world, we need to invest to make things work: time, strength, material goods, talents and gifts, knowledge,

money, disposition, etc. Goals are not achieved without dedication and commitment. God's Kingdom is in need of these human things. If we think that the Lord's church requires no investment, we will fail when we try to magnify our Father's business.

There are three factors that can't miss being present in God's business to enlarge His Kingdom: 1) God's power, 2) human capital, 3) economic capital. If one of these three fails, the growth of God's Kingdom will be limited. However, the one that we are sometimes less aware of, is the need for economic capital, by thinking that the Lord does not need material goods to drive His Kingdom. So we fail miserably and we stick to the other two, forgetting that the church is still on earth and is not in heaven yet, and that it humanly needs the economics to move our Father's Business.

2. INVESTING MY TIME

"That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revelings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" (1 Peter 4:2-4)

These days, the Lord Jesus Christ is calling on a generation that's willing to leave the way they live wasting time in feeding lustful desires, and begin investing our time in the Lord's Business, which has eternal repercussions. According to a study by Nielsen, these days the average citizen spends his time like this:

- 60 hours a month connected to Internet (30 full days per year).
- 22% of time on social networks,
- 42% reading multiple content types,
- 36% for email, shopping, etc.

Others spend their time watching television or playing with friends, etc.

"Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints" (Philemon 1:5)

In this book, Paul speaks well of Philemon by saying that he heard about his love and faith in Jesus; for that we dedicate time to, is what we value and want. If we really love God, we'll be willing to invest our time in what he loved (the lost ones).

3. INVESTING MY STRENGTH

If we're going to invest our strength on something, it better be in His Business.

"Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God". (Isaiah 49:4)

Wasting this God-given beautiful life in trivialities and worthless things means throwing away a jewel of great price. People who spend their energies in strife, bitterness, wrath, strife, gossip, temporary pleasures, are dead in life because those things do not bring satisfaction or contentment to the human being. Hence, my friend in this friendship group, decide how to spend the lifetime you have left, will you spend it in vanities, in lustfulness or in God's Kingdom?

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” **(Galatians 2:20)**

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gained” **(Philippians 1:21)**.

4. INVESTING MY GIFTS AND TALENTS

My spiritual and natural abilities must serve God’s Kingdom.

“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey” **(Matthew 25:14-15)**

God has equipped us with skills, both supernatural (gifts) and natural, to place them to the service of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Unfortunately, we have come to believe that our skills are for our sole benefit. Thus, we find people who receive Christ and although they may still be successful in their businesses, jobs and careers, they do not use those skills to strengthen Christ’s Business. They only use those skills to make their business grow, being selfish to the One, who gave them those talents and gifts to enlarge God’s Kingdom and, incidentally, to bless them, but never the other way around.

“If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” **(2 Timothy 2: 21)**

5. INVESTING MY KNOWLEDGE

“Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah...” “As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams” (Daniel 1:6, 17).

This biblical story gives us a great lesson on how four young men, although they were made captive and taken to other lands with a different culture, their knowledge of God and faith in Him, helped them to make sure God’s name was known throughout the Babylonian Empire.

The knowledge and the wisdom of a follower of Jesus Christ will always be a blessing wherever he is. Although these young people had to go through trials, the hand of God was with them because they always shared their faith with others.

One of the apostles of the New Testament who expanded Christ’s business the most, was the apostle Paul, a man who knew how to place his skills and knowledge in the service of his Lord.

“And how nothing that was helpful I did not shrink from declaring and teaching you publicly and from house to house”. (Acts 20:20)

“And this I pray, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and all discernment”. (Philippians 1:9)

The knowledge we learn in school, university and church are to be used for bringing the lost ones to his Kingdom.

6. INVESTING IN OFFERINGS

“Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, My offering, my bread for my offerings made by fire for a sweet savor unto me, observe to offer their time” (Numbers 28:2)

God has provided a means for the expenses His Kingdom generates here on earth, through offerings and tithes. No church should need other means to obtain resources for God’s Kingdom. Food sales, raffles, etc., are not the means the Lord intended. Unfortunately, some pastors use those resources because people have not learned to invest in the business of our Father.

“These things ye shall do unto the LORD in your set feasts, beside your vows, and your freewill offerings, for your burnt offerings, and for your meat offerings, and for your drink offerings, and for your peace offerings” (Numbers 29:39).

“And the place which the Lord your God shall choose to set his name there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all chosen vows which ye unto the LORD” (Deuteronomy 12:11)

However, humanly speaking, nothing works without resources. No business can be carried on without an investment. The same thing happens with my Father’s business. It requires investment, sound equipment, chairs, musical instruments, projectors, temples, halls, lighting, maintenance, offices, payment, etc. refraining from giving means to limit God’s business.

“On the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him, as God hath prospered him, that when I come no collections will of-ferings” (1 Corinthians 16:2)

When we invest in His business does not have less to us, but He, as the business owner, will provide for us. So friend and brother, do not close your hand to the Lord. He will reward you what you invest in His Kingdom.

“And he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, supply and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness, so that you are enriched in everything for all liberal-ity, which produces through us thanksgiving to God.” (2 Corin-thians 9:10-11)

7. INVESTING MY TITHES

The tithe is a tenth of all that God gives me.

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s. And they marveled at him” (Mark 12:17).

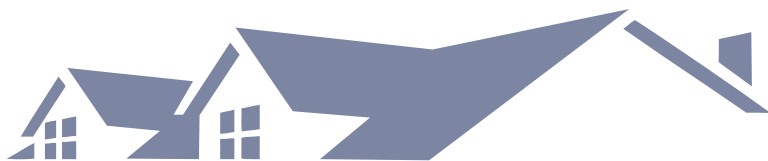
“To whom also Abraham gave a tenth of everything first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and also King of Salem, which is, King of peace” (Hebrews 7:2)

The men of faith have always given God the tithe. Before the law, Abraham and his descendants already gave tithes to the Lord. During the law, men of God continued to give, and now in grace, we continue to give God a tenth, by faith.

God will never ask what he has not given us. Therefore, Christ asked us tithes for His business exemplifying how we give the government (Caesar) to make it work, so we must give to God for His business so it can move forward on this earth: Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

"And concerning the tithe of cattle or sheep, of all that passes under the rod, the tenth shall be holy to the Lord" (Leviticus 27:32)

Let's magnify the kingdom of God by investing in it all that we can and even beyond our strength.



IN MY FATHER'S BUSINESS

Planting the Seed



BY ELIAS PAEZ

WELCOME

Icebreaker: Have you ever planted something that couldn't bear fruit?

Key Verse: *Matthew 13:3-9*

"And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth... And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear".

1. THE SOWER

The business of the Lord is to save the lost ones, and you and I are the farmers.

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” (1 Timothy 1:15)

Saving the lost is the priority of Christ’s Kingdom. He does not want anyone to perish but that all may come to repentance. For this, the Lord has assigned to us the task of seeding, that is, He has transformed us in agents of his Kingdom to carry out His project here on earth.

“The sower soweth the word.” (Mark 4:14)

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who proclaim peace, who bring good news!” (Romans 10:14-15)

The Lord’s kingdom needs people to share with others what God has done with them and carry he who has lost faith to the Lord, because: “And how shall they hear without a preacher?” Without growers, God’s Kingdom can’t grow. This meaningful work is up to those of us who are willing to magnify his kingdom.

2. THE SEED *It is the word of God.*

“This, then, the parable: The seed is the word of God.” (Luke 8:11)

The word of God is a lamp to illuminate the lost. Without it they’ll never find their way out. There is nothing wiser to direct our steps. Without His word, life is like a ship without a compass that does not know where it goes.

“And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which can make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:15-17)

This word is the seed to be planted in the heart of the lost so he may be born. Like a tree, he'll bear much fruit and new seeds to continue testifying what Christ does for mankind so that it be saved.

3. THE SEED SOWN THE WAYSIDE

“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.” (Matthew 13:19)

In any business there are losses and gains, although Christ's business profits are souls. We must also be aware that not all will follow the Lord. Some'll bring other personal agendas and will never let the word to be born in their hearts. But despite this, we must continue to sow the precious seed. Satan, who is the evil one, will steal God's seed that was sown in their hearts.

“And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.” (Mark 4:15)

Our work is to share with them this message of life; however, it's up to them whether they are willing to receive it in their heart or to let Satan steal what God has given them.

“Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.” (Luke 8:12)

4. SOWN ON STONY GROUND

“And he that was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, but has no root in himself, but is of short duration, for when tribulation or persecution on account of the word, immediately he stumbles”. (Matthew 13:20-21)

In the Lord’s Business, there will be profits that will not be consolidated; that is, our work will be to sow the Word, to water it, to grow it and so on. But as well as there are plants that aren’t resistant to the conditions of nature, there are also spiritual souls that will not resist the spiritual conditions, not wanting to take root. And when the test comes, they will leave the path of God. As in any business, there’ll be dealings which will not consolidate, the good businessman does not give up, knowing that he must insist until the word is born from good soil.

“They on the rock are those who when they hear, receive the word with joy, but these have no root, who believe for some time, and in time of temptation fall away”. (Luke 8:13)

5. SOWN AMONG THORNS

“He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word, but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22)

Most people do not come to Christ because they are too busy with the cares of this world, trying to satisfy their material needs and trying to get rich. They keep working alone without achieving anything but sadness and disappointment and as the word says, rather than grow, won't be able to add one cubit to their stature.

Such people or believers say they love God but are not willing to give up their desires, for the Lord's Business. They go to church and sing, raise their hands and even cry at the altar but never give any fruit (a soul) to the Lord Jesus Christ.

*"But the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful." **Mark 4:19***

*"The seed that fell among thorns are those who hear them, but leaving, are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit." **(Luke 8:14)***

"And do not bear fruit." We can't be effective in God's Kingdom unless we are willing to renounce unbridled zeal and the desire to get rich.

6. SOWN ON GOOD SOIL

*"And these are the ones sown on good soil, hear the word and receive it, and bear fruit, thirty, sixty and a hundredfold". **(Mark 4:20)***

The good soil bears good fruit. The work of the sower is to throw seed until it falls on good ground. The good soil will bear fruit at least at a 30 percent.

“But that which fell on good ground, these are the ones who hold honest and good heart having heard the word, and bear fruit with perseverance.” (Luke 8:15)

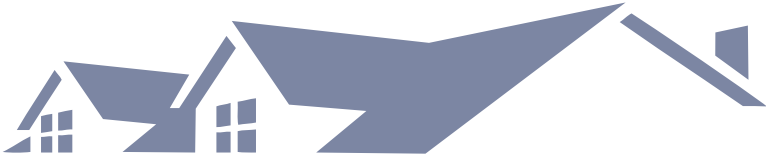
Stay bearing fruit (souls) for the business of Jesus Christ is our more urgent task.

7. THE NETWORK

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered fish of every kind, and once full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels and cast the bad away. This will be the end of the world: the angels will, and sever the wicked from the righteous”. (Matthew 13:47-49)

The fishing net is already in place and ready to go to catch the fish, no matter if they come out good or bad fish that will be the work of angels in the coming of the Lord for His church. So let's get up and go there for the field is ready for the harvest!

“Then came the servants of the family and said, Lord, did you not sow good seed in thy field? Whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. And the servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? He told them: No, lest while the tares are gathered up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together and until the harvest and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn”. (Matthew 13:27-30)

EXTENDING MY FATHER'S KINGDOM **PART 1**

Bearing Fruit



BY ROGELIO RAZO

Welcome

Icebreaker

Could you –in your own words- describe the meaning of the word “Kingdom”?

Key Verse: *(Isaiah 54:2)*

“Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes.”

Introduction:

Church has been given the privilege of extending God’s Kingdom all over the earth. The word extending means elongating, lengthening, prolonging, stretching, expanding, divulging and spreading. It could also be defined, in our context, as conquering, possessing, growing and obeying. Or, it could be summed

up in one phrase: fulfilling a goal. God's goal is also the objective that every Christian must reach for the expansion of the Kingdom. The word expansion is a term used by kings and empires which conquered entire kingdoms in phases, just as the Bible teaches us about the conquest by the romans, who constituted provinces as they moved forward (Luke 3:1). Next, we'll present some of the phases and characteristics which complement the kingdom.

1. The expansion of the Kingdom

a) Why: God's Purpose is that His Kingdom may extend all over earth, and that each person be reached for and filled by the knowledge of God. His Kingdom may be compared to the mustard seed: *"...The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs..." (Mathew 13:31)*. This means that growth begins with a small group of brothers and, as it grows, becomes a huge congregation. Here we have an example: "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47). As we preach the Word, our congregations grow in spirit, as well as in number.

b) Bearing fruit: The verb fructify, in this context, means to progress. Since the beginning of time, God created earth to populate it and to expand His Kingdom through the men He created. Unfortunately men fell into the enemy's trap by being tempted and disobeying Gods commandments. *"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:3, 6, 24)*.

From that moment on, man became separated of God's Glory and, because of that, Jesus came to bring man back in that intimate relationship with God: *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."* (**Romans 3:23-24**). Therefore, being reached through the expansion of the Word, means getting closer to excellence and life integrity, through the resources of the Kingdom.

2. The magnification of the Kingdom

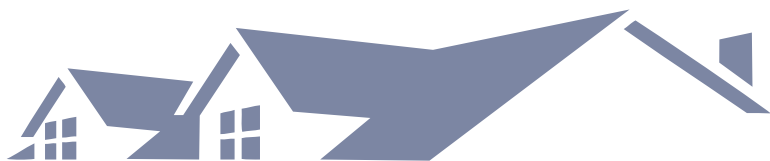
a) The vehicle for growth: The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is designed is designed to grow and magnify His name, as it advances through multiplication. In the book of Acts of the Apostles, church multiplied fenomenally, so that priests abandoned their Mosaic rituals and converted to the Lord. *"And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."* (**Acts 6:7**). You and I are part of that growth, since we were called to be saved, and at the same time, His Kingdom is magnified. Its important to emphasize that church is the expression that God has prepared for this era that we live in, with the purpose of reaching everybody regardless of race, social or cultural level; since the Gospel is for all of those who accept Jesus as their personal savior: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.."* (**Romans 1:16**).

b) The integration of believers: to achieve a growth of this magnitude, it's important that each member of Jesus' Body incorporates to the files of God's army and be willing to be trained through the mentors placed by Christ within His church. *"And he*

gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-13). It’s important to lead a life consecrated to Christ and to plea that His Holy Spirit leads those who shall become a part of Christ’s Body. As Apostle Paul said: *“I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.” (Romans 1:14).* If you have not integrated as a believer yet, Jesus invites you to become part of His people, redeemed by His precious blood.

Final Thoughts:

Could you describe how God’s Kingdom expands here on earth? If you had the privilege of being baptized in Jesus’ name, have you understood why and what were you saved for? If you have not surrendered to Christ yet, do you think God is calling you to be saved and used?

EXTENDING MY FATHER'S KINGDOM **PART 2**

A personal Commitment



BY ROGELIO RAZO

Welcome

Icebreaker: Have you ever been in a situation in which you have committed to participating?

Key Verse: *Mathew 4:18-20*

"And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him."

Introduction:

To extend God's Kingdom one must be willing to deny himself and follow the Lord's calling. It also requires to invest part of our life in the task of winning people for Christ, no matter the inconveniences, in order to win them. Apostle Paul is the perfect example to follow. He went through endless difficult

situations, all because of the love of Christ's work. *"Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep..." (2nd Corinthians 11:24-29).* Next, we'll consider what does to be devoted to the task of announcing and spreading Jesus' message mean.

1. The commitment to the kingdom

a) Total surrender: Christian life is not only about a confession of faith, but also a total commitment to the cause of Jesus. Each member of Christ's body must keep the passion to guide one more person to the knowledge of the gospel. To achieve this, it's important to go where people are, and to share with them what God has done in their lives. For instance, the Samaritan woman went to her community and gave them the message which transformed her life: *"The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:28-29).* People need to see a change in their lives. Just as the samaritans saw a change in the woman who spoke to them about the Mesiah, so that they came and experienced the same: *"And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did." (John 4:39).*

b) Personal testimony: God uses personal testimony to touch the hearts of His congregation, thus extending His Kingdom. Therefore, we need to commit ourselves to reach for people in a massive form, for glory and honor of Christ. That is what the church did in Jerusalem. The first massive manifestation took place in Jerusalem, where a harvest of three thousand people, added to Jesus' Kingdom, was produced. *"Then they*

that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." (**Acts 2:38-41**). Throughout the history of our church, a lot of brothers have converted through someone's personal testimony. For instance, we could remember the paralytic who used to seat by the temple door. Once cured, he entered the temple jumping and praising God, which opened the opportunity for Peter to preach the Gospel. This caused the second massive harvest of five thousand people who surrendered to Christ: "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand." (**Acts 4:4**)

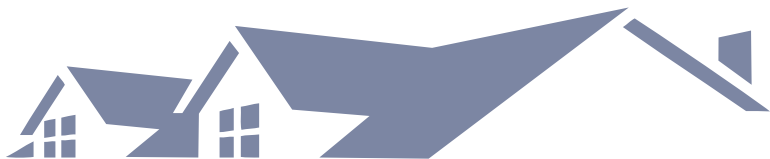
2. The expansion of the Kingdom

a) To produce: The first step that the believer must give, after surrendering to the Lord, is to turn into Jesus' ambassador to bear good fruit, just as the seed which fell on good soil yielded an abundant harvest. "And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred." (**Mark 4:8**). The Lord has chosen us so that our lives may be fruitful. Besides the talents we develop inside the Body of Christ, His church, we also need to bear the fruit of numerical growth, so that the Kingdom may grow and the knowledge of the gospel may come to more lives. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you." (**John 15:16**). The fields are white and ready for the harvest. That is, people are at the right moment to receive the Gospel, all there is to do is to pick up the tools and bring the sheaves to the Lord's church: "... Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." (**John 4:35**).

b) To Multiply: The second step is to multiply and treasure what God has entrusted us with; that is, we spread according to the fruit we bear: *“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” (John 15:8).* Achieving this requires effort. One can’t sow a large field when it’s covered with stones and weed, it’s necessary to clean it first and then to sow it. Christians are dressed up in Christ to conquer. When we extend the Kingdom, we find unclean spirits, which control the territory that we desire to possess. We have an example when Barnabas and Paul visited the deputy of the county, named Sergius Paulus. Although he wanted to hear the Word, a messenger from Satan kept trying to withstand him seeking to turn him away from faith: *“...O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?” (Acts 13:4-12).* We need to prepare the hearts so that they become sensible recipients, be willing to change bad habits, and appropriate of God’s word: *“We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.” (1. John 5:18-21)*

Final Thoughts:

As a Christian, how strong is your commitment to the cause of Jesus? If you haven’t surrendered to Jesus yet, would you like to assume a compromise with Christ and engross His army to expand His Kingdom?

EXTENDING MY FATHER'S KINGDOM **PART 3**

Under His Rule



BY ROGELIO RAZO

Welcome

Icebreaker: Have you ever been under someone's authority or governance?

Key Verse: *Psalms 24:1*

"The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."

Introduction:

The Bible speaks emphatically about God, who is the source of all authority. He is the absolute King of the universe for the definitive right, for being its creator, owner and governor. He is the supreme authority over all that is. Living in God's Kingdom means to live under His rule, doing His will, accepting Him as the King and absolute owner. It was precisely this will that Adam and Eve rebel against, and got expelled from God's Kingdom:

“So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.” (Genesis 3:24)- In this lesson we’ll consider the good news of the Kingdom and observe that the Gospel confronts us to make changes to our lives, binding ourselves to God.

1. The good news

a) Opportunity: In His earthly ministry, Jesus announces the good news and lets us know that God’s Kingdom has gotten closer to men: *“...The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” (Mark 1:15)*. Therefore, everyone can enter the Kingdom, regardless of his social or intellectual status. *“...God is no respecter of persons.” (Acts 10:34)*. To enter the Kingdom, there is a unique, unavoidable decree: to abide unconditionally to God’s rule within the Biblical margin. The Bible is filled with examples of men who were ready to live under this Divine authority. For example, Saul, once he met Jesus, became willing to follow: *“And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.” (Acts 9:6)*.

b) Submission: To enter God’s Kingdom it becomes imperative to hear the Good News, to believe it and to submit entirely to Christ’s authority. Therefore, the Gospel must confront men with God’s Kingdom and call them to commit themselves to Him. When Jesus called for His first disciples, He made sure they knew the cost to be paid for being His followers. Henceforth, these men –once independent and in control of their lives, yielded the authority to him. Should you wish to enter God’s Kingdom, you need to loose your earthly shackles and surren-

der your wntire life to Jesus: “...*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*” (**Mathew 16:24**). Nowadays, Jesus continues to call on men and women to live and enjoy His Kingdom.

2. The confronting message

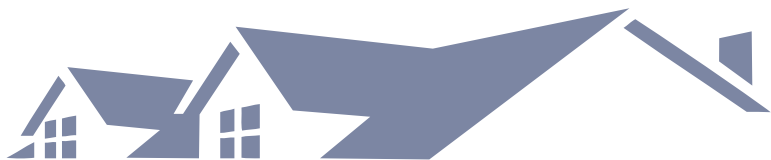
a) Rules of the Kingdom; The Gospel must confront men with God's govern and call them to commit to Him. In His ministry, Jesus confronted His disciples with the alternative to abide by His ruling: “*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not.*” (**John 21:18**). These men bind themselves to Jesus' authority and mandate. We, who have experienced an encounter with Jesus Christ, know that He confronted us with the possibility to live and enjoy what the Kingdom has to offer; that is, His Gospel: “*Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*” (**Romans 8:30**). There's still a place for you, if you haven't surrendered to Christ. He's still calling for you to come and enjoy what the Kingdom has to offer, His church.

b) Resistance to change: One day, a distinguished and wealthy young man came to Jesus and asked Him: *What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” Jesus spoke to him about leeping god's commandments, this man had kept the commandments since he was a child, After this, Jesus confronts him with God's Kingdom by saying: “*One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great pos-*

sessions.” (**Mark 10:17-22**)- This young man finds impossible to obey Jesus’ command; therefore, he is not willing to submit to Christ’s ruling and prefers his riches to eternal life. You can’t have a conversion without commitment, forgiving without regret, faith without obedience, salvation without abiding or christianism without a cross. God’s Govern extends as men and women acknowledge Christ as the supreme authority over their lives. Maybe you would like to come to Jesus; but something stops you. I invite you to accept Jesus’ calling.

Final thought:

Could you describe the meaning of the good news? Are you willing to live under God’s ruling? Do you believe that the young man who came to Jesus wasted his opportunity to be saved and become part of God’s Kingdom?

EXTENDING MY FATHER'S KINGDOM **PART 4**

Fulfilling the Mission



BY ROGELIO RAZO

Welcome

Icebreaker: Have you ever been commissioned to perform an important duty?

Key Verse: Romans 10:14

"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"

Introduction:

When Jesus began His ministry on earth, chose His first disciples to become assistants in the expansion of the Kingdom. Nevertheless, He laid responsibility on them, spoke about the price to be paid in order to become His followers. He called on them, trained them and sent them away: "And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew

4:19). They were willing to follow Him, showed their willingness by leaving their fishing nets, with no concern about the cost of taking the risk. And they told Him: “...we have forsaken all, and followed thee...” (**Mathew 19:27**). Henceforth, His disciples kept true to the cause which they were called to. Now, let’s analyze some important aspects to be considered, in order to become better messengers of the Word.

1. Emissaries of the Kingdom

a) The importance of communicating: The story of how the first Christians stood out for spreading the Gospel to the world of old, begins with Acts of the Apostles on. Apostle Paul said: “...so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” (**Romans 15:19**). Evangelizing means, in essence, give men the opportunity to enter God’s Kingdom. For them to achieve that, it’s necessary to believe in the Word and to submit to Christ’s authority. Our responsibility is to carry this message- We must work so that people convinced by the Holy Spirit accept the Gospel: “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” (**2 Corinthians 5:20**). Whatever your social or academic level, if you have been called to spread the message, is because Christ has seen something special in you, as He did in His disciples. If you haven’t decided to surrender your life to Christ, do it soon, so that you may become an evangelist.

b) The fulfillment of the mission: The spreading of God’s Kingdom is the dimension where every Christian strives to reach for those seeking an answer to their needs. The Church has the duty to announce the Word of Salvation. As the Word says: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not

believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14). As men and women acknowledge Jesus as king in their lives, the kingdom spreads. Every day, an increasing number of men and women are miraculously transported to Jesus's Kingdom, where they experience supernatural changes; that is, they make the transition from one state to another, just like Paul says: *"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." (Colossians 1:13)*

Jesus so proved His love to us, that HE didn't hesitate in surrender to the cross and spill His blood to give us eternal life: *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)*

2. Communication Bridges

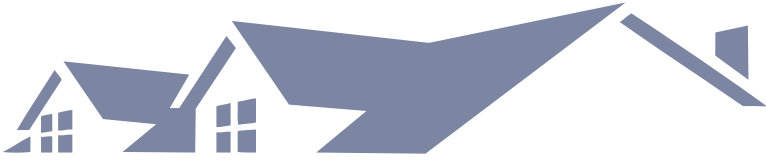
a) The conection: The bridges are designed to bring together things, roads and people. One someone surrenders to Christ, becomes a bridge builder. God calls us with a double purpose, **(1) redeem us and (2) use us for His labor.** There are many examples to be found in the Bible, one of them was Aquila and Priscilla, who brought Apollo to understand the biblical message *"And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." (Acts 18:26).* Like Apollos, there are many people who need to be led to the knowledge of Christ; all they have to do, is to leave their comfort circles and become bridges between this world and Church. Another example can be found when Philip arrived to Samaria. Despite the fact that Simon the wizard bewitched people with his tricks, Philip's message was more powerful, because it re-

leased people from the wizard's trickeries and connected them with Christ's message: *"But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."* (**Acts 8:12**).

b) The commitment: A bridge constructor is someone who has committed to better understand different people with different backgrounds and beliefs, in order to make the Gospel more meaningful to them. Let's take Jesus, for example. He dealt with many people from different cultures and subcultures. For instance, He spoke to Nicodemus about the need to be reborn: *"...Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* (**John 3:3**). He also offered the Living Water to the Samaritan woman, to satiate her spiritual thirst: *"But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."* (**John 4:14**). The ancient church followed Christ's model in building bridges to communicate the good news to all races and cultures, extending God's kingdom throughout all provinces of the Roman Empire: *"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word."* (**Acts 8:4**). It's now our turn to keep building bridges to make as many connections as we possibly can; that is, to guide people to surrender to Christ.

Final Thoughts:

As a member, do you feel compelled to spread the kingdom? Are you participating as an emissary of the Gospel? If you haven't surrendered to Christ, would you like to be a part of His church?



MY FATHER'S BUSINESS IS *THE HEALING OF THE SOUL* PART 1

When the Soul is Wounded



BY FRANCISCO QUEZADA

Welcome

Icebreaker : What comes to your mind when you hear the phrase “a wounded soul”?

Key Verse: *(Luke 4:18)*

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.”

Introduction

Just as the physical body needs healing when is wounded, the soul needs restoration too. Physical wounds heal fast, when compared to those of the soul. They say that a word or a deed is much more painful and harmful than a physical blow.

What is the Healing of the Soul?

It's the soul's renewal process, his mind and his heart. It's what brings him inner peace, releases him from the past and painful memories. It allows him restore his present life, according to God's will and plans.

Inner healing encompasses the healing of emotions, harmful feelings which bring depression, anguish and unease due to the need for God's forgiveness, and painful memories which distort thoughts.

Now let's analyze what the soul is, what is a soul's wound, how it's produced and how to heal it?

1. The mind or soul

1.1 Our mind or soul has three levels:

1) conscious, 2) subconscious and 3) unconscious

1.1.1 The **conscious** is all thought or knowledge that we can be aware of. The social character operates at this level.

1.1.2 The **subconscious** is the Kingdom that opposes reason. It's where feelings and selfish desires operate.

1.1.3 The **unconscious** is the Kingdom of hidden, uncontrolled thoughts.

1.2 Nothing is ever forgotten. Our mind is like a recorder.

1.3 The wounds that remain unhealed affect our consciousness, change, control our character and remain there until we take action to remove them.

2. Causes of the wounds

2.1 PRENATAL WOUNDS

2.1.1 Rejected pregnancy: for social or economic reasons, for being a product of a rape, etc.

2.1.2 Gilt feelings due to a sin.

2.1.3 Living under the influence of fear, sadness, hate, humiliation, etc.

2.2 CHILDHOOD TRAUMAS

It's the age more vulnerable to traumatic experiences. *"Children are like fresh concrete and adults are like dried concrete:"*

2.2.1 *Fear experiences:* to find oneself lost, or at risk of drowning, etc.

2.2.2 *Humiliation:* from parents, teachers or friends, being despised or ridiculed by a situation.

2.2.3 *Reject:* because of the arrival of a new brother, or because school friends ignored you.

2.2.4 *Sullenness:* for the need of parental love, for favoritism towards siblings, or for offenses received.

2.2.5 *After suffering sexual abuse.*

2.3 ADULTHOOD TRAUMAS

2.3.1 Love disappointment

2.3.2 Job failure

2.3.3 Homosexual practices

2.3.4 Rape

3. SYMPTOMS OF THE WOUNDS

3.1 *Sadness with no apparent cause*

3.2 *Low self-esteem*, self-rejection, obsessive guilt feeling, difficulty to relate with others

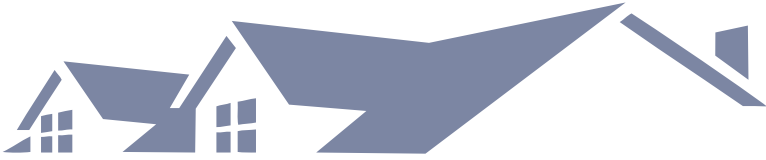
3.3 *Bitterness*: tendency to judge more harshly some sins than others, rejecting certain people.

3.4 *Obsessive fear*.

3.5 *Psychosomatic problems* (symptoms of illnesses without an apparent cause)

Time for reflection

- Why are the wounds of the soul harmful?
- What do I consider as holiness of the soul?
- What wounds do I have in my soul?



MY FATHER'S BUSINESS IS *THE HEALING OF THE SOUL* PART 2

God is your Healer



BY FRANCISCO QUEZADA

Welcome

Icebreaker: Why is it important to let God work in our hearts?

Key Verse: *Luke 4:18*

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised".

Introduction

When there's a problem with one household device, you can take it to a technician who might give you a solution; but if the problem is very serious, you'd better talk to the manufacturer, since he is the one who knows every detail of the artifact. We were made by God; He is the one that knows us best, and who can solve all our problems. *"Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O*

Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen” (Isaiah 44:2); however, it’s crucial that we surrender ourselves completely to Him for the solution to come. It is necessary to open unrestrictedly all the doors to our lives, so He can fix us from within.

4. God wants to heal you

4.1 Does God know what has happened to me?

“Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?” (Psalms 56:8)

4.2 Does God know what has wounded you?

“O lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.” (Psalms 139:1-6)

4.3 Does God know what harmed you in your mother’s womb?

“For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.” (Psalms 139:13-16)

4.4 What would God do with your wounds?

*“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.”
(Psalms 147:3)*

4.5 All resentment is a sin. What can be done to get rid of that sin?

*“Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.”
(Luke 6:37)*

4.6 You were created with an eternal purpose

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Ephesians 1:3-5)

4.7 We must confess all repressed and hidden sins

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

5. What do I have to do to be healed?

5.1 Remember the experiences which brought the damage and negative feelings.

5.2 Renounce to those negative feelings, callingiing them by their names (fear, etc.)

5.3 Forgive in all heart to that person calling her by her name and the harm she did.

5.4 Ask god for forgiveness for all your negative feelings and forgive yourself confessing from your mouth: *“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Romans 10:10)*

5.5 Accept and confess that Jesus suffered all the wounds of your soul and died in the cross, carrying them for you.

5.6 Believe that, in this moment, the Holy Spirit’s balsam is healing your wounds. *“Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” (Mark 11:24)*

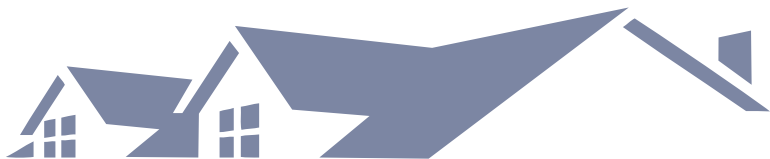
5.7 Thank God for your health and praise Him. *“Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.” (Psalm 139:5)*

Conclusion

God wants to heal your soul today. Satan might have inflicted you with a mortal wound; but Jesus, just like the good Samaritan, wants to bandage your wounds and give you life of plenty. Give Him a place in your heart and receive the healing of your soul.

Time to think

- ✓ How can Jesus save me?
- ✓ Does unforgiveness affect my healing process?
- ✓ Comment the necessary steps to become healthy



MY FATHER'S BUSINESS IS *THE HEALING OF THE SOUL* PART 3

The need to forgive and be forgiven

BY FRANCISCO QUEZADA

Welcome

Icebreaker: Have you forgiven or received forgiveness from someone? Talk about your experience.

Key Verse: *Ephesians 4:32*

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Introduction

When we attend to the scriptures, we learn that forgiveness has a unique importance. It's transcendental to you. Why? Because it's oriented in three directions: on one side, we receive God's forgiveness, on the other we receive forgiveness from those whom we offended to, and on the other we must forgive those who have hurt us in any way.

1. The process begins with asking

FOR FORGIVENESS

If you can comprehend that forgiveness is not a trivial matter; but something very serious for your personal and spiritual growth, you must begin by asking God to forgive your faults.

This is apostle John's instruction: *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* **(1 John 1:8-9)**

Note that, should you receive God's forgiveness, a big weight from your shoulders would be removed, peace would return to your life, and you could start living again. The Lord's forgiveness is possible thanks to Jesus' sacrifice in the cross. He died for your sins and mine, and He cleaned our souls in the cross.

Undoubtedly, Satan will try to unsettle you, to remind you of your old sins; but you must consider that, when God forgives, its final, as the sacred author indicates: *"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us"* **(Psalm 103:12)**

Thus, it's senseless to keep tormenting us for what we did yesterday, since we've been in God's presence with genuine regret and true intentions to change, forgiveness is ours.

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." **Ephesians 4:32**

2. If God forgave me, I must forgive others

Receiving God's pardon and still hold grudges toward those who offended us, would be egotistical and distant from what God expects from us.

The Lord Jesus taught us: *"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."* **(Mathew 5:23-24)**

Our beloved maker expects us, not only to exteriorize our faith and love to Him, but also that we manifest them in our actions, cleaning our hearts of grudges, hate and bitterness. Unquestionably, that's not the plan He holds for you and me.

3. Forgiving improves my relationship WITH GOD, WITH MYSELF AND THE OTHERS

Have you thought about the many benefits that asking for forgiveness and being forgiven brings to you? First, it improves your relationship with God. Second, it improves your relationship with yourself and third, it optimizes your interpersonal relationships.

The sacred author says: *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer."* **(Psalm 66:18-19)**

The Bible teaches us that, if we forgive others, God will forgive us. Of course, you want His pardon, right? He who doesn't forgive as we learn from the scriptures, becomes impeded by a

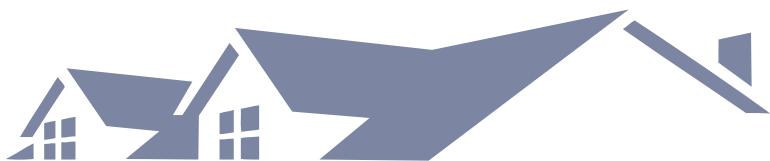
deep bitterness which spoils his life. *“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled” (Hebrews 12:15)*

Conclusion

It's important that you observe your life and be ready to be treated by God in the areas of forgiving and being forgiven. Your life is about to be transformed!

Final Thoughts:

1. Have you asked God's forgiveness for your sins?
2. Do you intend to postpone settling the score with God?
3. Do you hold grudges and resentment in your heart towards others?
4. What steps have you given to forgive others?
5. Have you discovered what makes it hard for you to forgive?



MY FATHER'S BUSINESS IS *THE HEALING OF THE SOUL* PART 4

Thoughts about the healing of the soul



BY FRANCISCO QUEZADA

Welcome

Icebreaker: What thoughts could an orphan hold?

Key Verse: *Isaiah 1:18*

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Introduction

The human being is divided by three main areas: body, spirit and soul. The soul is where will, emotions and mind can be found, and just like the body may come ill, also will the soul, through life circumstances. Furthermore, many times, illnesses from the body come as a consequence of a disease of the soul.

We will reflect on past lessons, focusing on three important questions: Why does the soul get sick? How do we know when that happens? How do we heal our soul?

1. Why does the soul get sick?

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”
(Romans 3:23)

The soul is hurt by sin, when one receives blows to the emotions, feelings, will and mind. For instance, the soul can get hurt when:

1.1 We lose something or it’s taken from us, against our will. Like a divorce, a separation, a loss, a parent’s abandon, when we’re made redundant...

1.2 We go through circumstances that we can’t change. A disease, a financial breakdown, family troubles, drug problems...

1.3 We’re emotionally wounded through insults, violence, abuse, abandon, rejection, disdain, treason...

1.4 We suffer a trauma: a violent accident, the loss of a loved one, a rape...

2. How do we know when the soul GETS SICK OR WOUNDED?

We can evaluate whether our soul is sick, if we react to life in the following way:

2.1 Through complains and gossip against life situations and other people. This is an awful day! Everybody is mean! It's impossible to go on with this!

2.2 When we're mad all the time, we become ill by speaking, and we curse all the time.

2.3 When we isolate ourselves, we don't like to share with others, or people don't like to be with us, because we always hurt those around you.

2.4 When we tend to fall into depression, in a perpetual sadness, in despair and suicide wishes. When we feel less than the others and incapable of coming through.

2.5 When we're aggressive and defensive, we don't like to be corrected.

2.6 Sometimes, physical illnesses don't originate in physical trouble, but in the soul's pain. Some of them can be: arthritis, ulcers, colitis, insomnia, migraine, back pain, etc.

3. How do we heal the soul?

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18)

3.1 Acknowledging that our soul has been hurt by past or present situations.

3.2 Forgiving. Since most of the times, our soul might have been hurt by other people or circumstances, it's necessary to decide to forgive those who hurt us.

3.3 Surrendering all the soul's pain to the Lord and confessing your hurt. Remember that Jesus came to heal those heart-broken.

3.4 Making a list of people and things that have hurt you throughout all your life.

3.5 Repent and ask for the Lord's pardon for keeping grudges in your heart.

3.6 Express your forgiveness in a verbal form to those who have hurt you.

3.7 Renounce to all resentments, bitterness, hate, depression and lack of forgiveness.

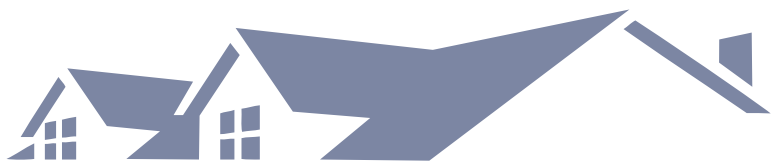
3.8 Leave your past behind, change your negative forms of expression, Talk to God everyday and fill yourself with His word.

Conclusion

Whatever the reason why your soul might have been hurt, Jesus came to this world to heal, both those physically ill, as well as those who are heartsick. Don't go walking around with a wound from the past. Jesus can heal your heart today. He can erase all your pain and bring you joy, happiness, peace and love.

Time to think

- ✓ What steps must be followed to heal the soul?
- ✓ Take a few minutes to consider about each one of them.
- ✓ What decision must I take?



MY FATHER'S BUSINESS IS *THE HEALING OF THE SOUL* PART 5

Steps to the Healing of the Soul



BY FRANCISCO QUEZADA

Welcome

Icebreaker: What characteristics can be observed in an ill person?

Key Verse: *Luke 15:18*

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee"

Introduction

Because of sin, the human being has suffered of "spiritual orphanhood" and at the same time, thinks that God is distant. However, this spiritual disease caused by the "**spiritual orphanhood**" can be exiled from our heart, if we receive a revelation of God's love.

In the Prodigal Son's story, our Lord Jesus, presented us with an extraordinary example of the intentions of our precious Heavenly Father. These simple steps will help you to approach God, to receive the adoption Spirit and be healed from the shame of the past.

1. Acknowledge that God loves you.

The first step to relate correctly to God is to accept that He longs for you. His interest is pure, and His intentions are to secure your welfare. One of the most encouraging truths that the Bible has taught us is that God always makes the first move. Today, we can get close to Him because He came closer before you did, we can love Him because He loved us first.

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

2. Arise and go to your Heavenly Father

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee" (Luke 15:18)

If God loved us and provided the way back home, our duty is to rise from failure and frustration, repent and approach Him humbly.

Even when you feel you lack the strength to keep on, praise to God. This action unwinds your faith, and it's the first step towards the healing of the soul.

"And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me." (Mark 10:47)

3. Believe that your Heavenly Father loves you

“And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (Luke 15:20)

The experience with the love of God that will fill you up and overflow your goblet is your inner healing. This experience will allow your psyche to be healed of all disease, affliction or trauma with which you approach to Christ’s feet.

God’s love is unconditional. He’ll never stop loving you. It’s very important that you know this truth, because your faith will strengthen and resist the lies of the enemy of your soul. Remember, there’s nothing you can do to stop Him from loving you, and there’s nothing you can do to make Him love you more. He loves you with eternal love!

“The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” (Jeremiah 31:3)

4. Acknowledge that your Heavenly Father accepts you

“But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.” (Luke 15:22)

The three most important words which feed the work of restoration that your Heavenly Father wants to do with your life are: Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness. God wishes to heal, not

only your body but also your emotions and self-esteem. The father of the prodigal son dressed him with the finest clothes and placed a ring in his hand, symbol of the favorable position to which he was being restored.

5. Rejoice with your Heavenly Father

“And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:” (Luke 15:23)

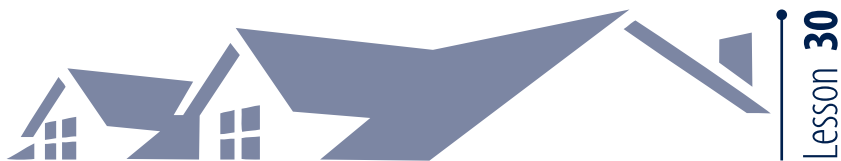
God is not angry with you. Actually, He is so happy that you decided to approach Him, that He prepared a party in your honor. Indeed, a happy heart, which recognizes the love and acceptance of the Heavenly Father is the most important source of healing to our body, soul and spirit.

Conclusion

If you acknowledge God’s yearning for you and receive His love and acceptance on a daily basis, your faith will be indestructible. You’ll know that you are a son and not an orphan, and you’ll enjoy the heritage and peace that He has prepared for you.

Time to think

- ✓ What do you understand as “spiritual orphanhood”?
- ✓ How can you get to be a son of God?
- ✓ Mention the benefits of being a son of God.



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The Blessed Man and the Cursed Man



BY ARTURO OCEGUERA

Welcome

Ice Breaker:

Have you ever tried to do something but were unable? How did it make you feel?

Key Verse:

Jeremiah 17:5-8

The purpose of this lesson is to understand that a blessed man is one who trusts in God and not in his own efforts to obtain righteousness.

A question that you can ask someone walking down the street is, "***How can a person enter heaven?***" More than likely

they will answer, ***“You can get to heaven by being good and doing good works.”*** The emphasis is in your behavior, your efforts and your works that merit going to heaven. In other words, if you do well, it will go well for you. If you do badly, it will go badly for you. In certain parts of the world, this is called karma (Buddhists) and they don't have any problems understanding the concepts of rewards and judgment. But if you have Christ in your life, you have something called grace, which the world does not understand. It is God's unmerited favor toward you. You did not do anything to obtain grace because Christ did it all for you on Calvary and made it possible for you to receive blessings.

Because Christians live under the covenant of grace, they must establish their righteousness through Christ. As a Christian, you must realize that no one can keep the Law perfectly and be made righteous. We are only made righteous by faith for the Bible says, ***“The righteous will live by faith.” (Romans 1:17, HCSB)*** What must the righteous believe? They must believe in the finished work of Calvary. They must believe in the gospel, that Jesus died for their sins and resurrected to give them hope that they too can live a life of love, joy, peace and hope.

In ***Jeremiah 17:5-8***, we find that when a person ***“trusts in mankind” (HCSB)*** instead of God, he is a cursed man. Trusting in mankind refers to only putting your trust in your good works and efforts to obtain God's blessings. It means you reject God's unmerited favor toward you. In verse six it says, ***“he cannot see when good comes,”*** meaning that there may be some good things that the cursed man has, such as a good marriage or a wonderful church, but he does not recognize it or appreciate it.

The contrast is the blessed man who, “*trusts in the LORD.*” He is “*like a tree planted by water*” and not a bush in the desert as the cursed man is described. Verse eight says, “it doesn’t fear when heat comes” meaning that problems and trials will come to him but he will continue to flourish and be strong.

King David, in **Psalm 32**, describes the blessed man as one whose sins have been forgiven. It was David himself he was speaking of, for the Psalm describes the interval of time from David’s attempt to cover up his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the killing of her husband to the time Nathan the prophet openly accuses David of sinning. But Nathan tells David, “*The Lord has taken away your sin.*” This Psalm teaches that David was in great anguish, even pain until he confessed his sin and received forgiveness.

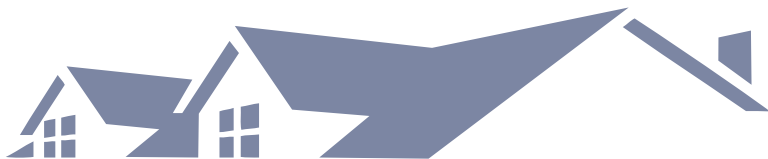
In **Romans 4:6-8**, Paul quotes **Psalm 32** to describe the blessed man under God’s grace. Paul did not write that the man who does not sin is blessed, but that he is blessed when his sins are forgiven. Why is he blessed? He is blessed because all his sins have been placed on Jesus when He died on the Cross.

Your righteousness is not dependent on your right doing but on your right believing in Jesus. Do not believe like the world but believe in God’s covenant of grace.

If you want to be a blessed person, repent of yours sins, surrender your life to Christ and God’s grace will come upon you. You will be become a blessed person. You will be like a tree planted by the waters. Because you trust in the Lord, you will not fear when the heat comes. You will always be strong and flourishing.

Question: *How can a person trust in God?* You can trust in God by believing in the finished work of Calvary that forgives all sin, not just past or present but in the future too.

Question: *Has there ever been a time in your life that you felt you were getting nowhere? How did it make you feel?*



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Success is a Result of Who You Have



BY ARTURO OCEGUERA

Welcome

Ice Breaker: Describe a successful person.

Key Verse: *Genesis 39:1-2*

The purpose of this lesson is to define true success as having God's presence with you.

There is a poem written of an old violin being sold at an auction that no one was interested in buying. The auctioneer was having a difficult time auctioning the violin until an elderly, white haired man walked up to the old violin, picked it up and began to play it. The music that came from the violin was the most beautiful that anyone in the crowd had ever heard. When the old man finished, he put the violin back and there was silence in crowd. The auctioneer once again asked, "Who will bid for this valuable violin? The bidding went high. One touch

of the master's hand changed the value of the old violin. The world may see you as having no value but with the touch of the Master's presence, you are successful.

God's definition of success is contrary to the world's definition. Corporate America measures success based on what you have done, what you have accomplished and what you have accumulated. It is based entirely on you focusing all your time, energy and resources earning titles and accomplishments. But it is the presence of the Lord in your life that makes you a success. From the story of Joseph, it is clear that success is not what you have, but rather who you have!

Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery. He was poor and without hope in a foreign land but the Bible says he was a success. Why? He was a success because God was with him. When you have a relationship with God, you are successful because His presence brings God's unmerited favor. It is God's grace—unmerited favor—that saves you and makes you successful.

If you have Jesus, you are successful because His first job is saving you from sin. The Bible says, *"and you shall name him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins"* (**Matthew 1:21 TLB**). The name Jesus means The Lord is our Savior. Every time you call on the name of Jesus, you are calling God Himself to save you. Whatever the challenge or circumstance, whatever your crisis—physical, financial, or emotional—you can call on the name of Jesus and Almighty God Himself will come to your rescue!

Another name for Jesus is Immanuel which means God with us (**Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 7:14**). When the Bible says Jesus is with you, He is with you to help you turn things around and

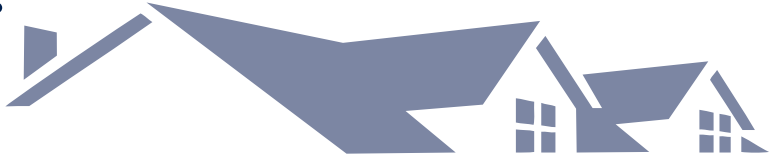
make good things happen. This is true prosperity. He is not with you, as some believe, to condemn, judge or find fault. In **Genesis 3:11**, God asked Adam, “*Who told you that you were naked?*” God hadn’t come looking for Adam and Eve to condemn them. Your conscience and Satan accuses you, not God. Even though God was forced to bring curses on man, the serpent and the world, He provided hope of redemption in the “seed of the woman.” This was to be Jesus, Immanuel—the God that is with us.

When it comes to the presence of Jesus, don’t go by your feelings. Feelings can be deceptive and are not based on truth. God’s Word is truth and it says, “*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*” Practice forgiving yourself when you have sinned by thanking him for His forgiveness. You may not feel that you deserve forgiveness but when you believe in God’s unmerited mercy you will see His power of forgiveness. His presence in your life is true success.

Question: Why do you think that Joseph’s success was better than the man who bought him?

Joseph had the presence of God that kept him from committing sin and gave him strength to push on.

Question: Have you ever felt you didn’t deserve God’s unmerited favor?



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When God Trusts You



BY ARTURO OCEGUERA

Welcome

Ice Breaker:

Describe a time when someone trusted you completely.

Key Verse:

Genesis 39:2; Job 1:1

The purpose of this lesson is to show that when God trusts you, He will bless you.

When God knows you so well and trusts you to do the right thing He will empower you. If you have a strong, loving relationship with God, He will bring His presence to your life. God's presence is the most important thing we can possess. Material wealth does not compare to true happiness and joy that

it brings. We see this when Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. The Egyptian general Potiphar bought him and though a slave, the Bible says the "LORD was with Joseph and he became a successful man." God's grace is the presence of God that brings success to your life.

When God trusts you to do the right thing, He knows you will obey. He knows you will surrender to him always, even when you sin. Your faith will allow you to receive God's grace which is the unmerited favor of God toward you. God's unmerited favor forgives, heals all spiritual wounds and lifts you up when you can't lift yourself up. To accept God's grace is one of the hardest things to do because our lives are based on merit. You merit your salary, you merit your position and you merit respect, but grace is the unmerited favor of God toward you, an imperfect person.

In the story of Job, God says he is a perfect and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. Satan comes before God and they have a conversation. The Lord challenges Satan to test Job knowing that he would not "curse God." In the testing, Job loses everything. He loses his wealth, his children and finally his health. But God knows that Job will keep his vows of loving faithfulness.

Job wasn't perfect, though God saw him that way. Because of the Cross of Jesus, God sees you as being perfect. In truth, no man is perfect but Jesus. He died so that His righteousness and His perfection are given to all believers when they receive salvation. When God sees you, He doesn't see you with your imperfections, but He sees Christ on the Cross.

God's testing brought Job suffering and he struggled to keep his faith. At times you struggle to believe God's promises too.

Sometimes God speaks to us roughly to snap us out of self-pity as He did with Job, “Gird up thy loins now like a man” (**Job 40:7 KJV**). Job’s reply was, “Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (**Job 42:6 KJV**). The word “abhor” means “overpowering disgust or hate.” Instead of blaming God and cursing Him, Job repented of his doubting.

When God trusts you, He knows you will do the right thing. You will worship, you will pray and you will come to church when you don’t feel like it. God may need to speak harshly to you but He knows you will respond correctly. God trusted Moses, not when he was a prince of Egypt but when he was a humble shepherd. God trusted Peter, not when he was a prideful man but after the rooster crowed and Peter was a broken man. God trusted Paul, not when he was an arrogant Pharisee but when he was blind and surrendered to Christ.

God knew Job so well that He trusted Job to do the right thing: to repent, to trust God’s sovereignty and surrender totally to Him. God wants to bless you with salvation because He loves you. He wants you to repent, to trust Him and surrender completely. He wants you to accept His grace and entrust you with spiritual gifts that will benefit your life and the church. In **1 Corinthians 12:7-10**, several spiritual gifts are mentioned. In verse seven we see that they are manifestations of the Holy Spirit given to men and women that are beneficial to the church. When God trusts you, he will empower you with gifts.

Question:

Accepting God’s grace is one of the hardest things to do because our lives are based on merit. What do you need to do

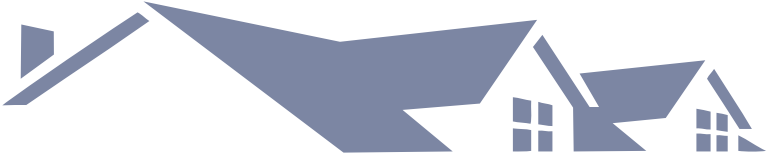
to accept God's unmerited favor? Believe—in Jesus and what He did on the Cross to bring forgiveness of sins, healing and strength.

Question:

Do you believe God can trust you with a spiritual gift that will bless you and those around you?

Question:

Can God trust you to do the right thing, such as surrendering to Him when you have "messed" things up?



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Forgiven



BY ARTURO OCEGUERA

Welcome

Ice Breaker: Have you ever found out a truth that brought you joy or perhaps pain?

Key Verse:

John 8:30-32, 36

The purpose of this lesson is to present the truth of Christ's salvation and how it sets you free.

Many believed Jesus with their minds and not their hearts. They could tell He was someone special because of the miracles and healings He performed. But when He said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" they became offended. They believed they were free already, but Jesus meant the heart and soul of a man would be free. The dictionary defines truth as that which is in accordance with fact and therefore accurate, reliable. The truth is that Christ loves you and died for you so that your sins would be forgiven yesterday, today and forever.

Forgiveness gives true freedom. The worst cases of bondage are not of slaves in chains but those who pretend to have liberty. Truth frees you from sin and self-condemnation. If you believe that Christ died on the Cross to pay the price of your sins, you will repent of your sins and be baptized in water and Spirit. The divine work of creation will begin in your life and you will be forgiven. Trust in Christ's redeeming work, in His unmerited favor toward you and find freedom.

You must recognize His death for the freedom it brings you every day. The devil wants you to feel that you are not forgiven because of past and present sins. The more you are sincerely thankful for forgiveness because of Christ's unmerited favor toward you, which is God's grace, the less you will commit sin. The more grateful you are, the stronger you will become spiritually and emotionally.

There is myth of a certain serpent kept in a zoo that would cast a spell on its victim. It would stare at them until they jumped into its mouth. The truth is, there is no such serpent with hypnotic powers. When a small animal is placed in a cage with a snake, the animal's fear of death is so great that they stand paralyzed until the snake eats them. When you look at your sins, fear of God's judgment can keep you paralyzed, not knowing the love, joy and peace of Christ. This same fear of judgment leads to guilt. Self-effort is the chain that keeps us bound to guilt and leads us to sin more because when you try to be perfect, on your own effort, you will fail sooner or later.

One of the meanings of the word sin is missing the mark, referring to shooting with a bow and arrow toward the center of the target. But even the greatest of archers don't always hit the bull's-eye. Figuratively speaking, by not hitting the center, you sin. In other words, you will sin again; you will miss the mark

even if you are trying to do your best. Therefore, it is imperative that you let truth shine on your soul and heart. Deliverance from sin and guilt comes through Jesus Christ, who died on the Cross to save you from sin—yesterday, today and forever!

Question:

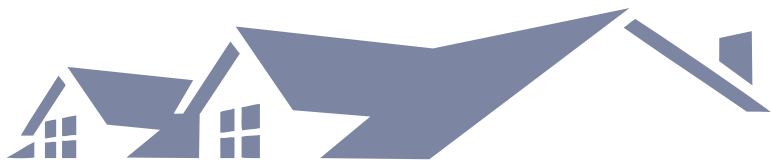
What is God's truth in reference to man's salvation? Christ died for you that you may be free from sin, the devil and self.

Question:

What does fear of God's judgment bring?

Question:

Have you ever been presented a truth about yourself that made you uncomfortable?



Wonderfully Made



BY STEVE MORAN

Welcome

Icebreaker:

What part of the human body do you marvel at in considering the magnificence of its creation?

Key Verse: *Psalms 139:13*

For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works.

Creation

In the beginning it was the Spirit of God that moved upon the face of the waters in preparation for the creation of the world we know today. Just on consideration of the creation of

God with all the intricacies makes one just marvel at the immenseness of our God. He was at once able to form the cosmos putting galaxies together with the million of stars being set into place and into motion to function as a universe that would support life and reflect his grandeur. As the a contemporary song states, ***"Our God is an awesome God..."***

Not only is God the Creator of a gigantic unfathomable universe but also the Creator of the microscopic and minute. He created such small entities such as viruses that cannot be seen by the human eye or even a light microscope but only by special electronic microscopes as they measure a mere 10-300 nanometers.

The God we serve is a God of tremendous detail, not one even the smallest detail is ignored by him. He has orchestrated not only the formation of all these elements but the interaction of these same elements to fulfill his master blue print of all he wants to do including the past, the present and the future. Our mental capacity is limited in trying to understand the mind of God.

Paul declared that all things were made by him and for him. When the Bible (***Colossians 1:16***) states that ***"all things"***, that is absolute. Literally, all things were made for him and by him meaning it was a deliberate calculated effort by the Lord.

There is not one aspect of all of creation past, present or future that God has not been or will not be involved in. Well pointed out by the psalmist David is that the heavens and all creation are the handiwork or masterpiece of God (***Psalms 19:1***).

Spirit of Awe and Humility

Upon considering the magnitude of this creation we stand in awe of all that surrounds us but at the same time we prostrate before him in reverence as we take into consideration all that is the world that we live in and abide in. How many times have we not looked into the heavens and been humbled by just contemplating what lives and lies above us.

As we look into ourselves we become even more humbled as we see the marvel of what we are composed of. To think that God took the dust of the ground and formed man breathing into his nostrils the breath of life is simply miraculous. From the mere lifeless dust he formed us into his image. As one looks into the mirror or even at one's own body what an incredible creation has God made. To see the softness of a hand in unity and harmony with hardness of a nail is mind-boggling.

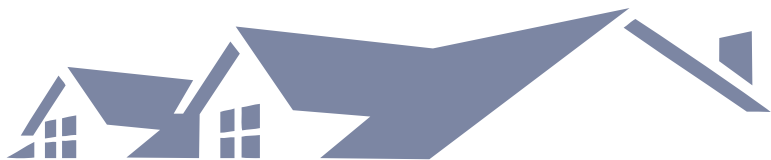
Truly as the psalmist was inspired to write we have been made fearfully and wonderfully. Each one of us is the workmanship of God Almighty. Everyone who God has made is product of his handicraft and workmanship. We are all special in the eyes of God, as he does not give life, however short or long, that is not special and wonderful to him.

God has made you and me in such a manner that even the most intricate microscopic detail has been taken into consideration and placed into its place. We will never understand our existence until with have relationship with the one who is responsible for our lives. Only through this relationship will we be able understand the **"why"** and **"what for"** and **"why me"** of our existence. The excitement of our lives should revolve around discovering what our life mission is according to the

master plan of the Creator. Are you curious about what God has in mind for your life? The first step is to open your heart and be sensitive to sound of his voice and listen to what saith the Lord about you. Remember we have a desire for our lives but God has even a greater desire for our lives that we must unfold.

Final Thoughts:

1. What part of the universe captures your imagination?
2. How does the universe help us believe in God?
3. Have you ever questioned your existence?
4. Do you know what God's desire is for your life?



Bearers of Fruit



BY STEVE MORAN

Welcome

Ice Breaker: What are some of the New Year's resolutions you have made in the past? Did they come to fruition?

Key Verse: *John 15:16*

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

Why does the beginning of a New Year draw such attention? Each year around the world people await and celebrate as a New Year is ushered in. As each New Year unfolds, in the air there is a great sense of anticipation. Somehow there is a hope that this next year will be better. There is hope that all the different goals that are declared will be somehow reached. These hopes may be desired experiences or a new opportunity to become something one has not been before.

Everyone has a desire to do better or be better. There is a longing in each of us to be useful or have a sense of purpose or value in our lives. The desire is innate, having been placed there by God. The trials and tribulations of life may try to cover up what is inherent to the point that we may no longer be able to see beyond those challenges. We must remember however that we have been made for the praise of his glory.

Psalms 138:8 states, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands."

As we consider this passage it further enlightens us that God's desire for our lives is more than something trivial. His desire is to perfect everything within each of us. We therefore do not have to endure life on our own for there is someone who loves us and desires nothing but the best for our lives. He actually wants to make us his long-term project and will not hold back anything within his resources to accomplish that perfection in us.

Here we see that God's desire is to perfect his work in us according to divine plan. Many cannot believe that God who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords would desire such. He has such aspirations for our lives that he wishes us to only be open to such an opportunity. Within this opportunity we need to trust him completely allowing him to govern the direction our lives are to go.

Today is the day to take advantage of this opportunity. Every day that passes by is a lost opportunity that we could enjoy and see unfold before us. ***In the third chapter of Proverbs*** the

Lord invites us to, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto thy own understanding, acknowledge him in all thy ways and he shall direct thy paths.”*

Unfortunately people today, because of all evilness in the world, have a very hard time putting their trust in anyone or anything. Do you have a hard time trusting? People generally lack trust in a person or thing because during the course of their life they experienced a let down to some degree that has forever affected their trust in people. Seems like everyone is looking for some sort of angle in taking advantage of people for solely their benefit.

The desire of the Jesus was best expressed in **John 10:10**, where he compared what Satan’s goal and his goal was for everyone’s life. Satan, on the one hand, has as his goal to rob, kill and destroy **whereas Jesus wants to give life and that more abundantly.**

What does this life of abundance mean? Does it mean prosperity and material wealth? These are clearly options to be taken into consideration and may be fulfilled within our lives. However, more than material possessions, he seeks to bring out the best in us through his light, which shines through us everyday.

The beauty of life is that we have not chosen him but he actually has chosen us. He not only has chosen us but also appointed us to perform exploits that will produce something fruitful. God has created fruit, for the purpose of providing nourishment, sustenance and delight to humanity. His reference to bearing fruit here in our lives lets us know that his

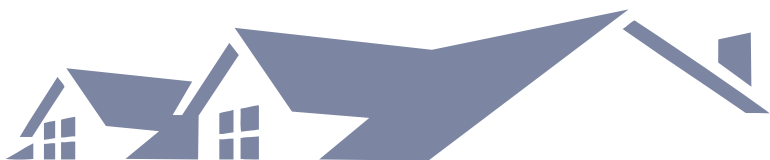
working within our lives will transform us into someone special whose life will be a blessing to those around you. As you stay connected to the main vine you cannot go wrong but will eventually bear fruit that is long lasting. This means that what God does is not a work that is here one day and gone tomorrow, but lasts and endures.

In closing

God wants you to know, that what he has in store for you will bring delight and joy into your life not just for a season but for all eternity. Your life will make a difference in a positive and powerful way.

Final Thoughts:

1. What do think God's intentions are for your life?
2. What is the fruit that you have produced that brings delight to others' lives?
3. What is holding you back from trusting God?



Talented *Beyond Belief*



BY STEVE MORAN

Welcome

Ice Breaker:

What talents do you possess? Do others see talents in you that you have not seen in yourself?

Key Verse:

Matthew 25:14 (KJV)

“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.”

Matthew relays a parable of Jesus that gives hope and significance to us mere men. In Galatians 2:19-20, the Apostle Paul stated, *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”*

As we give ourselves to Christ we become not only his children, kings, and priests but servants. Our lives no longer are centered on us, as we are crucified with him, signifying death to our defective human will. Now it is time for his will to become our will, that as he gave his life for ours now we in turn give our lives to him who gives us life.

We must realize that heaven is his and all resources belong to him. He is the distributor of every good and perfect gift. The Bible makes reference stating, ***“Every good work...”***

Here in this parable Jesus compares himself to a man who travels to a far country. The far country he refers to here is that of heaven after his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension into heaven. Jesus declared that he was going to prepare a place that where he is there we may be also. He is preparing many mansions for those that have given their lives to him and are committed to his kingdom.

We see that before he leaves for this journey he rounds up his servants and delivers unto them his goods. What he places into the hands of his servants, therefore, does not pertain to the servants but actually belongs the Lord. Before the Lord leaves he wants to make certain that they continue in his business affairs. Seeing that Jesus left the earth over 2000 years ago, he made sure that those who were left behind would continue in the father’s business. Though Jesus left, he came in the manifestation of his Spirit to dwell in the hearts of men and empower them to carry forth the work that needs to be done until he returns once again.

The Lord therefore wants us to realize that as part of his kingdom we must not be idle but be about our Father’s business. In the Spanish language the word for business is “negocio” which

broken down signifies to not be lazy. When we come to know Jesus as our Lord and Savior, he has no intention of us just sitting idly around awaiting the train from heaven but to be active and accomplish some task to enlarge the kingdom of heaven.

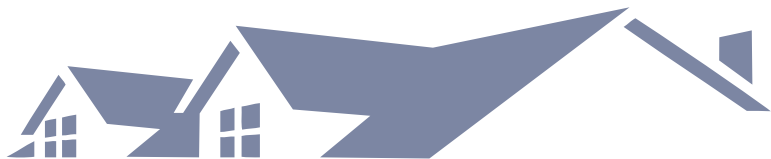
The Lord, realizing our limitations and lack of resources, joyfully distributes to each servant talents according to his purposes and their capacity. These talents here referred to literally an amount of money being put into the hands of these servants. The talents were to be worked and invested in such a way that they would generate revenue and profitable return.

The Lord of glory has indicated that each of us, according to **1 Corinthians 12:27**, are members in particular. This means that as we become part of the spiritual body of Jesus he designates to each of us a certain function with divine given abilities and resources. Each of us, therefore, upon conversion, must immediately take action and begin to work those talents he has blessed us with. Though these talents may be new and unknown to us we are to take these talents, familiarize ourselves with them and, with the help of the Lord, develop them according to his divine purposes for our lives.

Whether we are given one, three, five or more or less talents, the reality is that each of us has been entrusted with these special gifts to use for the enhancement of the kingdom. Although there is an element of fear, the excitement and anticipation of the yield from God is worth the effort. The working of these talents will not only be a blessing to our own lives but to those within our sphere of influence around us. **John 9:4** encourages us to do something for the kingdom of God today as the night is coming when no man can work. If one is sincere with God he will guide you and give you the capacity to do great things for him, beyond your "wildest imagination".

Final Thoughts:

1. What is your definition of a servant?
2. What have you felt prompted in your spirit or mind to do for God?
3. What are your fears or reservations?



Payday



BY STEVE MORAN

Welcome

Icebreaker: Have you ever been surprised on payday and received more or perhaps less than was anticipated? What was your reaction?

Key Verse: *Matthew 25:14 (KJV)*

“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.”

In the previous lesson we learned of the Lord of a certain land who has three servants. To each he distributed a given amount of talents before he went on his journey. To one he gave 5 talents, to another 3 talents and to another one talent. Knowing their abilities, he distributed to each respectively. We don't know for certain but perhaps the one given a single talent complained that he was not given five or three as the other servants. He may have said, “What can I possibly do with one talent, such a small amount to work with.”

Many times one may consider the talents they have been given by God to be too small to make a difference. The Lord however does not look at the amount given to each but looks to see what each does with what is given to each. God does not weigh the quantity as his measure but how one works the talents the Lord has designated each.

We see that the Lord went away confident in each of his servants as he entrusted each with a specific amount of talents. The Lord we serve has more confidence in us than we have in ourselves. The talent that God has given you is not random but demonstrates his confidence in you to perform great feats that will be productive and be of blessing.

Upon returning from his journey we see that the lord called all his servants to see the results of their efforts. The servants of five and three talents respectfully had traded and doubled the talents they had received. However, the servant with the single talent ended up burying the single talent his master had given him. The parable goes to say that after a long period of time the lord finally returned. This emphasizes that each had plenty of time to work his given talents. We can imagine the first two, busy on a daily basis trying to work their talents. However, the other servant, what he did all day is left for speculation. Maybe he just sat and guarded where he buried the talent. Perhaps he just buried it and then just relaxed and took it easy for all that time. A life of leisure and recreation was his to enjoy for a season.

As each one comes forward there must have been a certain sense of fear or anxiety as to what the lord would say regarding their effort. Would he be elated or disappointed? As the first two servants came up and presented a doubling of the talents they had been issued, the lord was overcome with joy

and pride as he states in **Matthew 25:21**, “...well done though good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.” The servants were undoubtedly filled with elation upon hearing the words of their lord as well as a great sense of relief that they had pleased their master.

As the final servant came forward, upon hearing the report of the other two, he began to set up his defense for not producing as the others. The common human tendency of justifying our lack of fulfilling our responsibilities prevailed. He first tried to blame the lord for causing him to be fearful. The servant knew that the lord was anticipating some evidence of production. The servant did not lose what he had been given but merely did not do anything with it. The lord would have been more pleased had he at least tried to do something with talent, even if it was lost, it would have shown at least some effort on his part.

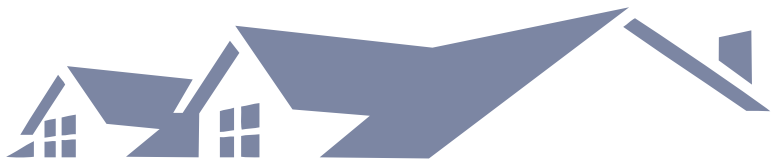
His reward or payday was to receive words, not commendation but condemnation. In verse 26 he calls him, “...wicked and lazy servant...” He told the servant that at least he could have put the talent into the bank to gain some interest, but he did not even do that. His final demise was to be cast out into outer darkness where there is the weeping and gnashing of teeth. His fate was sealed for not doing anything for the kingdom.

The Lord Jesus, upon calling you, does not expect perfection, as only he is perfect. He however has given everyone talents with which to work. Our calling is not only to accept a title but a responsibility to do something to bless the lives of those around us. He is a God of action. He wants each of us not to trust ourselves but God in that he has given us talents with which to work for the exaltation of his name and kingdom. God

only wants you to do your best with what you have and, where you come up short, he is able and willing to make up for your shortcomings. We cannot afford to be lazy or just sit on our salvation. We must do our part so that the fullness of what God desires for our lives will be realized.

Final Thoughts:

1. Are you ready to accept the challenge?
2. What fears or doubts do you have? What dreams do you have?



The Gift of God's Love



Welcome

Ice Breaker:

What has been the greatest expression of love you have ever seen?

Key Verse:

John 3:16

Introduction:

The only real hope that you and I have is found in God's unconditional love. So many have tried to illustrate and explain it. Songs have been written about it. Sermons have been preached. Books have been written—all hoping to somehow gift-wrap God's love to the world. However, John 3:16 is still unbeatable when it comes to portraying the blessing of God's love.

John 3:16 is more than just a Sunday school memory verse, a banner to display at large gatherings, or a theme to musical lyrics, it's the lifeline—the absolute core of our promise for eternal life. Let's visit, or perhaps revisit this pearl of hope for all humanity.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
(John 3:16)

In God's love as discussed in **John 3:16**, we learn three of God's character traits.

Three Character Traits of God:

1. God's Inclusive Openness

(God so loved the world)

a) He Includes us. Any time there is a prestigious ceremony with distinguished guests, the red-carpet is rolled out from the entrance to the sidewalk. If someone other than a special guest strolls down the red path, security guards will swiftly escort him or her off. God doesn't have a red-carpet kind of love, where only certain people are allowed. Jesus Christ said, "whoever believes". No matter where you're from, or who you are, God accepts you just as you are.

b) He Invites us. If God had a doormat to heaven, it would definitely say, "**Welcome**". Everyone is welcomed to know God on an intimate level. Just because God doesn't have a red-carpet, doesn't mean you are any less special. You are priceless, a

rare gem in God's eyes. Because you're so special, He hopes to spark a personal relationship with you.

2. God's Self-Offering

(He gave his one and only Son)

a) Consider His Gift. Most gifts that we give or receive have a short lifespan. The coat you bought your wife last year may already be out-of-style. The bottle of fragrance you received two years ago may already be empty. This is why most of us enjoy gifts that keep on giving. The love of Jesus Christ is a gift that never runs dry. It never loses its splendor or appeal. It never tarnishes or breaks down. Jesus once told a Samaritan woman, *"whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."* (**John 4:14**)

b) Consider His Grave. The greatest demonstration of God's love is that He clothed himself in human flesh and died on a cross for our sins. Jesus Christ, who was sinless, paid the wages of sin so that we could have eternal life, and know him personally. The Creator became our loving Savior by dying a criminal's death. Yet three days later, He rose from the dead and walked out of the tomb. Romans 5:8 says "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus Christ gave the ultimate gift—His life.

3. God's Inviting Favor

(whoever believes in him shall not perish)

a) Grace works with Faith. Notice how Jesus says, **"whoever believes"**. Although God's love is open for everyone, not every-

one will experience it. Believing is the key to receiving. **Ephesians 2:8-9** says, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”* Faith doesn’t create grace, but it unlocks the power of grace in our lives.

b) Grace is Free. Grace is God’s unmerited favor towards humanity. There is nothing we can ever do to earn God’s acceptance. In fact, most religions in the world believe that salvation is earned through how well you perform, or the deeds you do. Remember what **Ephesians 2:8-9** says about grace, *“it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”* Grace makes it possible for us to experience God’s love—despite our weaknesses, imperfections and impurities.

Gift Idea:

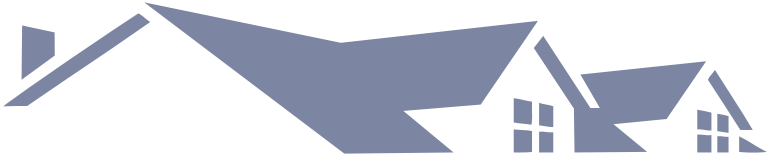
God’s love is the most powerful force humanity has ever seen. Not only did love motivate God to come to earth, but love lead Christ to the cross of Calvary. Jesus once said, *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”* (John 15:12-13) Truly Jesus Christ followed this model when He laid down his life for us. That’s the blessing of God’s love!

Unwrapping the Gift:

a) Accepting God’s love starts with believing that Jesus Christ died for your sins. Discuss what this means, and why it’s so important to “believe”.

b) Of the three character traits mentioned in this lesson, which one is the most significant to you, and why?

c) Jesus Christ said, *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.”* (**John 15:9**). Discuss some ways you can “remain” in God’s love, once you have believed in Him.



The Gift of Forgiveness



Welcome

Ice Breaker: Is practicing forgiveness easy or hard?

Key Verse: *1 John 1:9*

Introduction:

Forgiveness is a simple, yet difficult concept to live by in today's culture. Many people choose revenge instead of forgiveness when someone offends them. It's a natural impulse to "get even" or perhaps punish those who hurt you. However, Jesus Christ taught that forgiveness is the key to living in peace. This is a principle He demonstrates to us every day.

Sin is the ultimate offense, and even warrants judgment. According to the Bible, everyone is marked with sin and living

short of God's glory. However, out of pure grace and love, Jesus Christ offers us undue forgiveness through the shedding of His blood. Consider words of the Apostle Paul, *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace."* (**Ephesians 1:7**)

Together let's consider three important ideas from God's forgiveness.

Three Ideas from God's Forgiveness

1. The Idea of Sacrifice

a) The Price was Paid. *Hebrews 9:22 says, "...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."* In the Old Testament, flawless lambs had to be continuously sacrificed for the sins of the people, and to satisfy God's judgment. This is no longer the case because Jesus Christ became the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. His innocent blood paid the debt of sin against humanity.

b) The Path was Paved. Since Jesus Christ shed his blood for our sins, we can live a life that is totally forgiven. Not only were your past sins excused, but even your future sins and mistakes can be forgiven. God doesn't just pardon your past, but his forgiveness covers your whole life—from start to finish. As the Apostle Peter remarked, *"For Christ died for sins once for all..."* (**1 Peter 3:18**). Jesus Christ doesn't need to die again, every time we sin; He's covered us once and for all.

2. The Idea of Honesty

a) Our Sincerity. When a suspect in a criminal case wants to come clean and be honest about his actions, he must give a formal confession. This is simply an open acknowledgment. Of course, nobody is accusing you of being a criminal—however, this principle applies to sin and forgiveness. **1 John 1:8-9** says, *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* God isn’t looking for shame; He’s looking for honesty.

b) God’s Security. When we openly confess our sins to God, He doesn’t accuse us or degrade our value. In fact, his goal is to prove his faithfulness and fairness in our lives. No matter what you’ve done, God wants to be approachable. For that reason, He uses forgiveness as an opportunity to cleanse our hearts and improve our relationship with Him. If we are sincere about sin and confess them when we are aware of them, God will faithfully secure us with grace.

3. The Idea of Seventy-Times-Seven

a) Forgive openly. It is also our duty to forgive others. In fact, God requires those who have received forgiveness, to openly pardon others when they offend, insult or hurt us personally. Instead of leveraging people’s guilt, or seeking revenge, forgive them. Jesus said, *“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”* (**Luke 6:37**). For us to continue benefiting from God’s forgiveness, we must exhibit grace and mercy to others. Forgive because you’ve been forgiven.

b) Forgive often. The reason why the third factor of God's forgiveness is called "seventy-times-seven" is because of what Jesus told Peter about forgiving others. *"Then Peter came to Him and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times? Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.' (Matthew 18:21-22, NKJV).* Jesus isn't giving us a math lesson, but a life lesson. Live a forgiving life and don't keep track of people's sins.

Gift Idea:

Whether you're considering giving your life to Jesus Christ, or simply wanting to improve your relationship with Him, the blessing of God's forgiveness makes it possible.

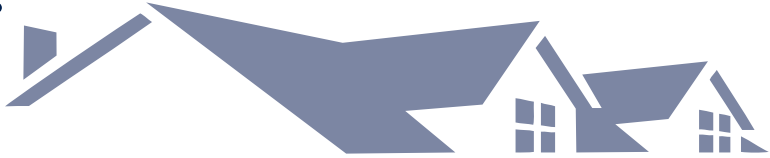
God could have decided to leverage His kingdom with guilt, but thankfully he chose to set us free. Forgiveness is as much about relationship, as it is redemption. Jesus Christ shed his blood to purchase our salvation and to initiate a personal relationship with us all.

Unwrapping the Gift:

a) According to The Idea of Sacrifice, why was it so important for Jesus to lay down his life?

b) Why is it at times difficult to be sincere with God and confess our sins?

c) Jesus Christ said, "...Forgive, and you will be forgiven." (**Luke 6:37**). Discuss why God would implement this principle.



The Gift of Faith



Welcome

Ice Breaker: Why do we trust certain people? Why do we trust certain things?

Key Verse: Hebrews 11:6

Introduction:

Contrary to popular belief, faith is not a blind leap in the dark. It's actually a solid trust based on real substance and true evidence. With so many attempting to redefine faith, its pure meaning has been watered down with man's philosophies. Let's quickly debunk some misconceptions:

- ***Faith is not a religion.*** Some will say, "I am of this faith, or that faith." However, this is not the Biblical concept of faith.
- ***Faith is not a mental consent.*** Simply being optimistic or positive about life is not genuine Biblical faith.

- **Faith is not a manipulation tool.** Many believe that faith is a magic formula to manipulate God for personal gain. This is far from reality.

There's no need to repaint or refurbish Biblical faith. The most important thing is that we understand faith and desire to grow in it. During this lesson, we are going to explore three clues about faith and how believing in God produces so many benefits.

Three Clues about Faith:

1. First Clue: Faith proves God

a) Proved with Substance. The first half of **Hebrews 11:1** says, *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for..."* Faith is the material that God uses to build and create the things we hope for. If God were a silversmith, faith would be the silver he uses to craft fine utensils. If God were a potter, faith would be the clay he uses to mold and shape ceramic objects. Since God exists in the unseen spiritual world, He uses our faith in Him to create the solutions to our deepest desires. Faith doesn't make God more powerful, but rather allows him to work his power in our lives.

b) Proved with Support. The second half of **Hebrews 11:1** says that faith is, *"the evidence of things not seen."* Faith works as support and evidence. One example of how evidence works is found in our judicial system. Most all court cases are decided upon the evidence that is presented. Intellectual arguments, emotional debates or rebuttals are not evidence. True evidence is physical proof or testimony that asserts the truth of a matter.

Faith is the proof for things not seen—including God and the rewards He has for us.

2. Second Clue: Faith pleases God

a) God is Real. **Hebrews 11:6** tells us *“without faith it is impossible to please God...”* From this we discover that without faith we cannot truly satisfy God. However, let’s consider “why” faith is so pleasing to Him. The verse goes on to say, *“...because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”* Firstly, God is delighted when you believe that He exists. He smiles wide when you acknowledge and embrace his realness in your life.

b) God is a Rewarder. Secondly, faith pleases God because it recognizes his ability to reward our lives. It places trust in his sovereignty and capacity for meeting all of our needs. Like a child who jumps in his father’s arms without concerns about falling, God is pleased when we leap into his love and trust him without reservation. His heart is warmed when we faithfully rest in his supreme care. The greatest reward we have for believing in God is eternal life. **Ephesians 2:8-9** says, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

3. Third Clue: Faith invites God

a) Faith moves God. Faith creates opportunities for God to showcase his power over human circumstances. Often times God is not able to perform miracles or wonders due to a lack of faith. Even Jesus Christ was at times unable to reveal his power or change lives because of unbelief (**Ref. Matthew 13:58**). However, when there is faith in the heart, God is able to defy every law of nature. Our faith in God determines the

extent of his influence in our lives. Our faith can either loose or limit his power.

b) Faith moves Us. When you're faced with an impossibility or problem, and you live by faith, you expect God to take action on your behalf. So then, faith will compel you to trust him. It will move your heart into action like it did for so many others who came to Jesus Christ for help. Whether it was a woman with a blood problem, or a centurion whose servant was paralyzed—when your faith is alive, it will move you closer to the Master.

Gift Idea:

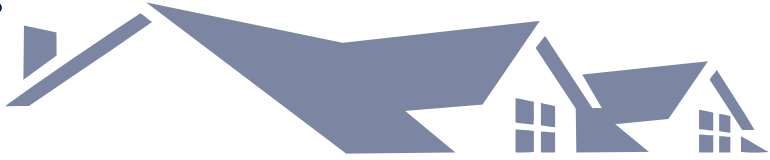
If you desire to growth in faith, simply be open to God's word. **Romans 10:17** says, *"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."* Believing in God and his power to help you will add invaluable rewards to your life. You will begin to discover a path that is rich with peace and joy.

Unwrapping the Gif:

a) With regards to the misconceptions about faith, discuss the kinds of problems they can create.

b) Based on **Hebrews 11:6**, what are the two reasons why faith pleases Him? Discuss these values together.

c) The third clue in this lesson is that Faith Invites God. What are some other reasons why faith moves the heart of God?



The Gift of Transformation



Welcome

Ice Breaker: How difficult is it to change others or ourselves?

Key Verses: 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV)

Introduction:

The most common misconception about repentance is that it means to apologize, feel sorry or feel remorse after doing something wrong. However, both of these descriptions are untrue. The Biblical meaning of repentance is a change of mind and direction.

Take a close look at our key verse. **2 Chronicles 7:14** says, *“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”* Based on this verse, repentance involves three changes.

Three Changes of Repentance:

1. Change your mind (*humble yourselves*)

a) Be convinced. When Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost and preached that the people had rejected the Messiah, they were humbled and deeply convinced that Jesus Christ was actually God in flesh (**Ref. Acts 2**). The word “*repentance*” in its original Greek form means “a change of mind”. Repentance requires a change of mind about Jesus Christ and his kingdom. You must repent for rejecting or simply ignoring Christ as your Savior.

b) Be convicted. When the audience heard Peter’s message, their hearts were pierced with reverence and dishonor. Suddenly, they saw the error in their ways. The sins in their hearts were exposed. They were now fully aware of their offenses. Today, we all must allow our hearts to be humbled and convicted—not with guilt, but with the awareness that we need God’s grace.

2. Change toward God (*pray and seek my face*)

a) Pray. Prayer is simply our spoken or unspoken communication with God. It’s how we plug ourselves in to God’s Spirit. Turning to God involves beginning or rekindling a relationship with him. Notice how God said, “**pray and seek my face**”. God wants a personal, face-to-face relationship with you. He desires for you to know him intimately.

b) Pursue. In order to turn to God, we must shift our priorities. Perhaps you’ve spent most of your life chasing a career or some other personal interest. Repentance involves seeking

God's will and purpose for your life. It's about placing his desires above yours. Jesus once told a crowd, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."* (**Luke 9:23**) When you turn to God, you must disown your selfish desires and pursue him.

3. Change away from Old Ways

(turn from their wicked ways)

a) Be Changed from the Past. **Acts 3:19** says, *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..."* Oftentimes people will confess Christ as their Lord and receive baptism, but avoid the power He has to transform their lives. Old habits still rule. Old tempers still flare. Past addictions and behaviors still thrive. Turning to God means giving up your old ways. It means leaving your past...in the past.

b) Be Challenged to Produce. John the Baptist challenged people to *"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance"* (**Matthew 3:8**). A challenge to produce fruit has been issued to all those who have repented, and have been forgiven. Fruit is simply the practical proof that you have repented. For example, if you used to use profanity when you got angry, the fruit of repentance is that now you choose better ways to let out your steam. "Fruit" typically represents our conduct and the attributes of a person that is filled with the Holy Ghost.

Three Benefits of Repentance:

Benefit #1

The Benefit of Remission (will forgive their sin)

When you humble yourself and seek God's forgiveness, He has the power to remove the consequences of sin in your life.

Benefit #2

The Benefit of Relationship (then will I hear from heaven)

When you turn to God, by praying and pursuing, you open the doors to a meaningful relationship with Him.

Benefit #3

The Benefit of Restoration (and will heal their land)

When you fully turn to God and allow His Spirit to change your life, He has the power to restore and heal broken areas in your life.

Gift Idea:

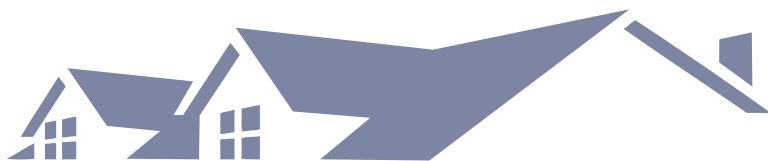
Every turn of repentance points toward where you will spend eternity. Ultimately, this is God's search and rescue plan for our salvation. Also, repentance is God's gift to us. **Acts 11:18** says, "...God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life." God grants us the opportunity to turn our lives towards Him and become citizens of his kingdom. God has already made His move to save you, now it's your "turn".

Unwrapping the Gift:

a) Of the three changes in repentance, which one do you feel we struggle with the most and why?

b) Of the three blessings of repentance, which one means the most to you and why?

c) Review and discuss the differences between feeling remorse, and repentance.



The Gift of God's Family



Welcome

Ice Breaker: Is the church the people or the building?

Key Verses: *Ephesians 1:5 (NIV)*

Introduction:

God desires a family, and he created us to be a part of it. In fact, the Bible can be viewed as God's family album, where he shows His desire for us to love him, respect him, and reign with him for eternity. When we give our lives to God, He becomes our Father and we become his children. When it comes to God's family, we have to consider the facts below:

- God created everyone, but not everyone is a child of God.
(Matthew 7:21)

- Being born again is the only way to get into God's family. **(John 3:3)**

- Although we don't deserve to be God's children, His love gives us this benefit. (Romans 8:15)

As our key verse implies, it has always been God's plan to form a family by making us his children. All baptized believers become our siblings, and the church becomes our spiritual family. Together let's look at three levels in God's family.

Three Levels in God's Family:

1. Getting Involved

a) Membership through *Rebirth*. Jesus Christ once said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." Then he went on to say, "*no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.*" **(Ref. John 3).** Membership in God's family doesn't start when you fill out a guest card or attend a class. It starts when you are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. You must be born again into God's family.

b) Membership through *Relationship*. **Romans 12:5** says, "*so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*" Simply being born into a family automatically makes you a member. However, this does not mean you have a relationship with your family. Even after being born again, many people are estranged from God's family. In order to belong to the body of Christ, you must build relationships with other members. This provides a net

of strength, unity and purpose. Remember, you are called to belong, not just believe.

2. Living Together

a) *Share your life.* Fellowship goes a step further than relationship. You can relate with others without sharing similar experiences. Fellowship requires an investment of time and energy. When the Bible talks about believers in the book of Acts, it says, “All the believers were together and had everything in common” (Acts 2:44). The key to fellowship is togetherness and commonality. These are the traits you’ll find in any loving family.

b) *Shoulder the load.* **Galatians 6:2** says, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” Part of having fellowship is shouldering the burdens and troubles of your spiritual brothers and sisters. As members of God’s family, it’s our duty to protect and care for one another. Life’s burdens are easier to handle when you have godly family members who help you, pray for you, and lend their support.

3. Giving Back

a) *Learn your part.* You have a role to play. If you have ever acted in a drama, you know that everyone on the cast and crew must play their part in the production. That’s the only way to successfully tell the story. The same is true in God’s family. You offer extraordinary qualities that no one else can replace. When you give your life to God and join His family, you learn your special part in telling God’s story.

b) *Live your part.* **Ephesians 4:16** says, “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting liga-

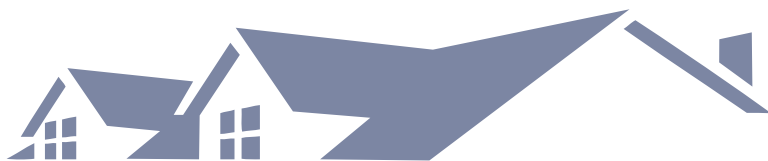
ment, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." It's so important that after you discover your special role, you begin to live that role to the fullest. Join a ministry in your church family where you can bless others. If such a ministry isn't available, seek to find other ways where you can live out your part in God's family.

Gift Idea:

Whether in a small group atmosphere or worship service, meeting together is greatly encouraged. It is much like having a weekly family get-together. You interact, inspire, and cultivate a strong community of faith. **Hebrews 10:25** says, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another..." Nothing pleases a father more, then when his children come together in unity. The same is true about God, our heavenly father. When His family comes together, you're in good company.

Unwrapping the Gift:

- a) Based on the level of Getting Involved, why might it be difficult for people to form new relationships within God's family?
- b) Based on the level of Living Together, what are some real ways you can shoulder the load of your brothers and sisters in Christ?
- c) Based on the level of Giving Back, what challenges might one have to overcome when attempting to carry out their role in God's family?



The Gift of a Life with Purpose



Welcome

Ice Breaker:

How important is it to live for something? What happens when you have nothing to live for?

Key Verses:

Proverbs 19:21 (NIV)

Introduction:

You are not an accident or mistake. Whether or not your birth was planned, God recognized and chose you long before your father ever knew your mother. You are alive today because God wanted to create you. That alone says that you are special and extraordinary. However, God didn't just make you for the fun of it. God made you for a purpose, and everything about your life is designed to support that purpose.

Discovering your life's purpose is probably the most important discovery you'll ever make. It's more valuable than a buried treasure and more fulfilling than a high-paying career. Knowing and living your God-given purpose is the secret to true significance in life. Our key verse says, "*Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails*" (**Proverbs 19:21**). Truly we all plan our lives out, but God's purpose will always take precedence. In this lesson, we will briefly discover three factors that should drive our lives.

God's Three Life Factors:

1. Adoration: Living with God

a) Grow in Worship. Our primary purpose in life is to worship God. Worship represents anything we do that pleases God. It isn't just a style of music or hymns sung by a congregation. Worship a lifestyle made-up of acts and attitudes that bring God pleasure. You could say that worship is about having reverence for God and living a life that satisfies him. **1 Corinthians 10:31** says, "*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*"

b) Grow in Friendship. There is nothing more important than knowing God and building a real friendship with Him. The apostle Paul wrote, "*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death*" (**Philippians 3:10**). Knowing Christ as a friend means sharing his values, his sufferings, and his mission. It also means spending valuable time with Him, such as prayer and reading the Bible.

2. Communion: Living with others

a) Grow “in” Fellowship. Fellowship is simply a relationship with purpose. You can relate with people and still lack common values and goals. However, fellowship requires a harmony of heart and principle. The book of Acts describes fellowship when it says, “All the believers were together and had everything in common” (Acts 2:44). Seek out opportunities to link up with other believers. You will find strength and support for your life.

b) Grow “the” Fellowship. Not only is your purpose to grow “in” fellowship, but to also grow and extend “the” fellowship. You do that by simply befriending others and being a living example of God’s love. This is about creating new friendships, and along with it, the opportunity to meet practical needs and introduce Jesus Christ. This is to show that God’s love is real and present. Proverbs 18:24 says, “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly...” This applies to your family relationships as well.

3. Mission: Living for others

a) Grow through Ministry. God created you to make a difference. This is called your “ministry”, or your “service”. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” We are God’s craftsmanship, a reflection of His power. He designed us with the gifts and abilities to do good works. Ministry, then, is your heavenly assignment to serve other people and reveal God’s grace.

b) Grow through Missions. God had a mission in mind when he made you. A mission puts legs to your ministry potential. Unlike an ordinary job, a mission has eternal impact and importance. Part of our shared mission is to continue the work of Jesus Christ. The Bible says, “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...” (2 Corinthians 5:18). We have been given the mission to reconcile the world’s relationship with God.

Gift Idea:

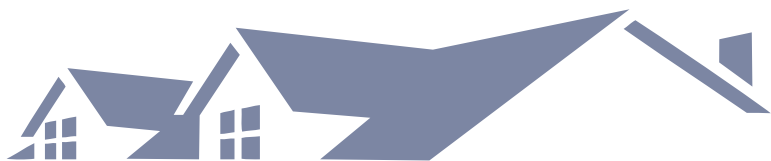
Most if not all people will ask themselves the question, “why was I born?” That question alone has baffled even the sharpest minds. Yet, God clearly explains our purpose throughout the Bible. Like a father, God wants a healthy and vibrant relationship with his children. Secondly, He wants his children to all get along and work together. Last but not least, he wants us to reconcile those lost people who are estranged from his family. This was made clear in the parable of the Prodigal son. God desires to have all of his children under one eternal roof. Hopefully this helps you understand what your primary purpose in life is.

Unwrapping the Gift:

a) How is a friendship with God similar to any other friendship, and how is it different?

b) What are some of the barriers that keep us from loving and caring for each other?

c) What are some of the typical fears people have when it comes to ministering?



The Gift of Baptism



Welcome

Ice Breaker: What is Baptism for? Is Baptism necessary to be saved?

Key Verses: *Acts 2:38 (NIV)*

Introduction:

Throughout these seven weeks of blessings, you've learned about everything from God's forgiveness, God's family, and even God's purpose for your life. Yet today, we will discuss how you can access all of these blessings, and most importantly inherit eternal life. Our key verse says, *"Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:38).*

Practically every religion claims to have the formula or key to eternal life. Even Christians debate over which method is

the correct. However, **Acts 2:38** clearly states what “**every one**” must do to be saved. The primary keys to avoiding judgment and spending eternity with God are **1) repentance, 2) water baptism** (full immersion) *in the Name of Jesus Christ*, and **3) receiving the free gift of the Holy Ghost. Let’s consider three reasons for being baptized in Jesus’ Name.**

Three Reasons for Being Baptized

In Jesus’ Name:

1. To respond to Jesus’ love

a) Your faith Expressed. One purpose of water baptism is to express your absolute faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It shows that you believe—that your heart is convinced about Christ, and has accepted His sacrifice. When listeners in the New Testament believed the Gospel message, they were baptized (**Ref. Acts 2:41**). Water baptism is a sign, a public declaration that you have believed in Jesus Christ. It is not just a ceremony or religious act; it is a personal assertion that you have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior.

b) His Name Confessed. **Acts 19:5** says, “*When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*” Expressing your faith is important, however, there is also a Biblical method for baptism. The proper way to express saving faith in Jesus is to have His Name confessed at the moment of baptism. In the verse just cited, the candidates expressed their faith in Jesus by being baptized in the name of Jesus. Any other method is incorrect according to what Jesus and his apostles taught.

2. To participate in Jesus' salvation

a) Into the Water. Without doubt, baptism is a vital part of our salvation experience. Although some conclude otherwise, the Bible specifically says, *"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned"* (**Mark 16:16**). In order to be saved and receive eternal life, you must be baptized. The Bible never suggests that sprinkling or dousing is a form of baptism—only full submersion into water.

b) Into the Name. **Acts 4:12** says, *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* The proper way to mix water baptism with New Testament salvation is to invoke the Name of Jesus. Some will use other names, titles or descriptions of God when baptizing, but the Biblical way is clearly identified in **Acts 2:38**.

3. To share in Jesus' life

a) Baptism is a Burial. Another reason for being baptized is to empathize with Jesus Christ. To empathize is to identify with another—to put yourself in someone else's shoes so that you can relate with them. Baptism is part of our personal discovery with Jesus Christ. Through it, we symbolically identify with his death, burial and resurrection into new life. The Bible says, *"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life"* (**Romans 6:4**).

b) Baptism is a new Birth. Baptism is part of our new birth into the family of God. **Titus 3:5** says, "...He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." *To experience the new birth, you must be baptized with water, and with the Holy Ghost. Jesus said, "...no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5).* No other formula, prayer or spoken confession can produce a new life. Your fresh start begins when you receive baptism in Jesus Name.

Gift Idea:

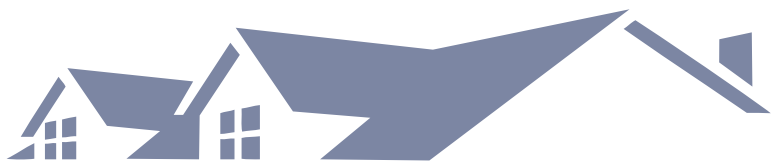
In summary, baptism in the name of Jesus shows that we trust in Jesus alone. It's an expression that we believe He is our Lord and supreme Savior. Only Jesus Christ can take away our sins and grant us eternal life. When we are baptized, we take on His precious and powerful Name. Every blessing we have discussed in this series hinges on the blessing of baptism. If you have not been baptized in Jesus Name for the remissions of sins, perhaps it's time to consider making that step.

Unwrapping the Gift:

a) Of the three reasons for baptism, which one is often overlooked and why?

b) Discuss why it's important to identify with Jesus Christ through baptism.

c) Ask if anyone is interested in baptism, or learning more about it. Pray with them and follow up.



Reading God's Word



Welcome

Ice Breaker: What are some popular ideas about the Bible? Are these ideas always true?

Key Verse: Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)

Introduction:

To know the message or story in any book, you have to read it page by page. However, it's been said that the Bible is the only book that actually reads "you". As you read each line, each page and chapter, the Bible is actually revealing the script of your heart and helping you to fulfill your life's story.

God's word is alive and potent. It has the unique power to change your circumstances and shape your character. God's word penetrates the heart and soul with the precision of a sur-

geon's scalpel. It opens our lives to receiving divine guidance and assistance. As our key verse indicates, God's word examines the innermost desires and attitudes of the heart. Let's look at three key benefits to reading, hearing and applying God's word to your daily life.

Three Advantages to Reading God's Word

1. Guides your Steps (*Direction*)

a) We are Enlightened. Have you ever hiked a trail at nighttime? It's nearly impossible to see your steps and navigate your path when darkness falls. Life is no different. In fact, many of the crossroads we come to, happen in the dark of uncertainty. Your heart is troubled as you question what to do and where to turn. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." The word of God lights your path, and guides you into safety. It is a spiritual flashlight that gives you insight and wisdom into life's most important decisions.

b) We are Equipped. God's word doesn't just enlighten your path; it equips you with tools and principles to accomplish His purpose. The Apostle Paul told young Timothy, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful...so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). God's word equips you to carry out His mission. Consider the Bible your ultimate "how-to" manual for ministry and life.

2. Grows your Character (*Development*)

a) Reflects your Image. *James 1:23-24* says, “Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.” God’s word is a mirror that reflects the contents in your heart, and enables you to adjust your lifestyle accordingly. However, when God’s word reveals an area of improvement and we don’t act on it and obey, it’s like looking into a mirror only to forget what you look like. In other words, the mirror didn’t do anything positive because you didn’t change anything about yourself. The same is true with God’s word. It won’t affect or influence change unless we respond to its reflection.

b) Removes your Impurities. *Ephesians 5:26* implies that holiness and spiritual cleansing comes through “the washing with water through the word...” God’s word is like a spiritual soap that removes impurities and the build up of sinful debris. The more His word gets in you, it begins to flush out the attitudes, motives and unhealthy desires that live secretly in the heart. It develops your character and slowly brings your soul into alignment with God’s will. Psalm 119:9 says, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.”

c) Refreshes your Inner Being. Moses penned a powerful metaphor when he said, “*Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants*” (*Deut. 32:2*). The teaching that comes from God’s word is like rain showers that fall on new grass. As you know, water brings refreshment and vitality to every living thing. God’s word does the same for us; it refreshes and quenches the parched areas of the heart.

3. Guards your Faith (Defense)

a) Protects against Sin. *Psalms 119:11* says, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” Hearing and holding God’s word close to your heart builds a defense against temptation and sin. It’s easy to just listen to sermons or read the Bible and not grab onto it. However, if you take God’s word to heart, it will improve your judgment in situations and protect you from falling prey to sin.

b) Protects against Satan. When writing about the Christian’s armor, the Apostle Paul said to, “take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (*Ephesians 6:17*). A sword is meant for military combat and defense. Basically, the word of God is a weapon against Satan and all of his spiritual attacks. That’s why it is important to study and know the scriptures—even more, to speak them aloud! Each time Satan tempted Jesus, His response was “It is written” and then quoted him God’s Word. (*Ref. Luke 4:1-13*). Jesus Christ showed us how to use the Word as a weapon.

To Wrap Up:

The only way to know God is through His word. The more you read it and apply it, the more you discover about God and His will for your life. Each day you will find new strength and inspiration for all of life’s difficulties. You could say that one purpose of the Bible is that it helps you write your own story. It isn’t just a book to be read, it’s a book to be lived. God’s word provides the spiritual nutrients and sustenance we need to thrive as believers. Jesus said, “...Man does not live on bread alone, but on

every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). What food is to the physical body, God’s word is to the spiritual body. That’s why we can’t go a day without it.

Share your Thoughts:

- a) What do you find most difficult about reading the Bible? (Terminology, not knowing where to begin, etc.)
- b) Why is it important that God’s Word “wash” us on a daily basis?
- c) Of the three advantages of God’s Word, which one do you think is most overlooked, and why?

Bible Reading Plans:

God’s Word isn’t just for Sundays. In fact, it’s meant to nurture everyday of your life. But like many of us, you may not know where to start. To begin or rekindle a Bible reading lifestyle, consider the following plans:

a) 30 Days with Jesus – Spend 30 days reading through the life of Christ. Travel back in time, 2000 years, and learn from the Master Himself. Get to know your Lord and Savior personally. See chart on page (#).

b) 30 Days in the Psalms – Devote 30 days to reading the Psalms. These are a treasure chest of prayers, poems, songs and meditations that will align your vertical relationship with God.

30 Days with Jesus

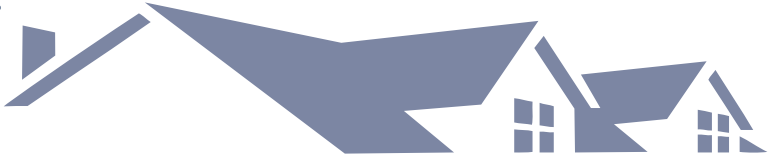
Bible Reading Plan

<i>Day</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Passage</i>
1	Jesus Foretold	Isaiah 53
2	The Birth of Jesus	Matthew 1:18–25
3	John the Baptist Prepares the Way and Baptizes Jesus	Matthew 3:1–4:11
4	Water to Wine and the Samaritan Woman	John 2:1–11; John 4:1–26
5	Jesus Rejected in his Hometown	Luke 4:14–30
6	Jesus Calls his Disciples	Luke 5:1–11; Matthew 9:9–13
7	Sermon on the Mount	Luke 6:17–46
8	A Centurion, a Widow's Son and a Sinful Woman	Matthew 8:1–13; Luke 7:11–17; 7:36–50
9	Encounters With the Pharisees	Matthew 12:1–13; 22–45
10	Parable of the Sower, Weeds and Seeds	Matthew 13:1–43
11	Jesus Calms the Storm and Later Walks on Water	Luke 8:22–25; Mark 6:45–56
12	Jesus Heals a Man, Woman and Girl	Mark 5:1–43
13	Feeding of the 5000	John 6:1–14
14	Peter Identifies the Christ and the Transfiguration	Luke 9:18–27; Luke 17:1–8
15	Healing by Faith	Mark 9: 14–32
16	Teachings and Parables	Matthew 17:24—18:20
17	Teachings and Parables	Matthew 18:21—19:15
18	The Rich Young Ruler	Mark 10:17–31
19	Disciples Sent Out	Luke 10:1–24
20	The Good Samaritan	Luke 10:25–37
21	Jesus Teaches how to Pray	Luke 11:1–13
22	Jesus Revives Lazarus	John 11:1–44
23	Jesus Comes to Jerusalem	Matthew 21:1–27
24	The Last Supper	John 13:1–17; Matthew 26:17–35
25	Comfort for the Disciples	John 14–15
26	Jesus Arrested and Disowned	Matthew 26:36–75
27	Jesus' Trial	John 18:19—19:16
28	Jesus Crucifixion and Death	John 19:17–42
29	Jesus' Resurrection and Appearances	John 20–21
30	The Great Commission and the Ascension of Jesus	Matthew 28:16–20; Luke 24:50–53

30 Days in the Psalms

Bible Reading Plan

<i>Day</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Passage</i>
1	Blessing	Psalms 67, 72, 84, 128
2	Calling to God	Psalms 4, 5, 22
3	Confidence	Psalms 27, 36, 71, 125
4	Deeds of God	Psalms 9, 18, 118
5	Doubt	Psalms 42, 73, 77
6	Faithfulness of God	Psalms 105, 119: 137–144, 146
7	Fear	Psalms 37, 49, 91
8	Glory of God	Psalms 19, 24, 29
9	God Is a Helper	Psalms 54, 115, 119:169–176
10	Identity	Psalms 8, 139
11	Justice of God	Psalms 7, 26, 82
12	Meditation	Psalms 119:9–16, 41–48
13	Mercy	Psalms 13, 28, 86
14	Music	Psalms 6, 149, 150
15	Nature	Psalms 50, 104, 147, 148
16	Peace	Psalms 23, 133, 119:161–168
17	Power of God	Psalms 68, 93, 135
18	Praise	Psalms 65, 98, 138
19	Prayer	Psalms 17, 20, 102
20	Protection	Psalms 59, 62, 124
21	Safety in God	Psalms 11, 16, 142, 46
22	Rejoicing	Psalms 30, 47, 97
23	Righteousness	Psalms 1, 15, 112
24	Salvation	Psalms 3, 14, 121
25	Sin and Repentance	Psalms 25, 32, 38, 51
26	Thanksgiving	Psalms 75, 106, 136
27	Trust	Psalms 31, 40, 56
28	Victory	Psalms 21, 76, 144
29	Wisdom	Psalms 90, 107, 111
30	Worship	Psalms 33, 34, 145



Communication with God



Welcome

Ice Breaker: What are some reasons we begin to communicate with new friends?

Key Verse: *Ephesians 6:18 (NIV)*

Introduction:

What separates Jesus Christ from all other manmade gods is that He desires, and is capable of having a personal relationship with you. In fact, that is one of God's ultimate purposes for creating humanity. He desired to share His kingdom and relate with His creation on a personal level. This is where prayer comes in. Prayer is our mode for conversation with God.

If you learn to pray daily, by withdrawing to a quiet place, you will experience a fulfilling relationship with Jesus Christ.

But maybe you're asking, "How exactly do I pray? And what should I pray about?" If so, don't feel ashamed or embarrassed. Jesus' own disciples asked Him the same question. This was His response:

"This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."
(Matthew 6:9-13)

Jesus gave us a general pattern for prayer—so that we would know how to pray effectively. Let's look at four important facets of prayer.

Four Facets of Prayer:

1. Relate

a) Relationship. (Our Father in heaven) – Before anything else, God wants a relationship with you. He desires a close, intimate relationship, where you see Him not only as Creator and Lord, but also as your loving father. Jesus removed all of the excessive regulations and religious "red tape" to entering God's presence. When you pray, approach God as your heavenly father. Doing so will develop the kind of connection God wants to have with you.

b) Reverence. (Hallowed be Your name) – To "Hallow" simply means to show reverence, honor and sacredness. Showing reverence for God is a powerful way to relate to Him. God is

pleased when we revere His name and glory. This is a form of worship. It's a sincere acknowledgement and fear (utmost respect) of his holiness. Although God is your heavenly father, He is still a King. In prayer, we should put on a mindset of reverence and do our best to handle that time with care and purity.

2. Release

a) Pray that God's kingdom Come. (Your Kingdom Come)

– “Your kingdom come” suggests that you are asking God to release, or loose His kingdom in your life. The kingdom of God is simply the reign of God in the hearts of believers. This request then, is asking God to exercise His kingship and authority. As you pray, ask God to reign over every area of your life. You can ask him to reveal his power over a sickness, impossibility, or a situation that seems hopeless.

b) Pray that God's will be Done. (Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven)

– Unlike releasing His kingdom, our personal releasing deals with surrendering our will. Asking God's will to be done in your life is one of the greatest struggles we face as believers. Why? Because often times what we want is different from what God wants. Even Christ, before being crucified, prayed three times regarding the Father's will. If Jesus had difficulty with this, we will too. However, prayer is where we trade our will for God's will.

3. Request

a) Praying for Providence (Give us this day our daily bread)

– In Biblical terms, bread represents sustenance, what you need to stay alive. That's one of the reasons why Jesus said

He was the Bread of Life. Yet Jesus wasn't just talking about a loaf of bread. He was talking about finances, provisions and wealth. When we ask for His blessings, we acknowledge our dependence on Him, and His ability to supply our needs.

b) Praying for Pardon (And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors) – 1 John 1:9 says, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* Prayer is the opportunity for God to align our hearts through forgiveness. In prayer we confess our sins and faults. The second part to this verse is that we also forgive others. Ask God to help you forgive your offenders.

c) Praying for Protection (And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.) – We need to ask God to protect our minds and lead us towards holiness. Prayer is an opportunity for God to strengthen your resistance against temptation and other seductions. If there is a particular area that you're struggling with, ask God to help you overcome it. In addition, you can ask God to set you free from Satan's influence in certain areas of your life.

4. Rejoice

a) Praise Him for His Position. (For Yours is the kingdom) – When you pray, praise God for His position, His sovereignty. God bows to no one. He reigns above all the kingdoms and monarchs in the world. He is great and highly exalted. Always remember to praise God for His greatness and majesty. Praise him for being in control of all things, even when you're faced with uncertainty. This will also help you remember that God is sovereign and oversees everything.

b) Praise Him for His Power. (and the power and the glory forever.) – When you pray, also praise God for His power. Thank God for every time He has demonstrated His strength in your life. There is nothing impossible for God. Through His awesome power, He can accomplish whatever He desires to do. Devote some time in prayer for praise and worship. As you begin to praise God, you will also be strengthened, encouraged and uplifted.

To Wrap Up:

Jesus Christ simply gave us a pattern, an example of how to pray. He showed us that prayer should be a daily practice, but also that it should not become a stale routine. Prayer should be a fresh experience, an intimate encounter. According to Jesus' pattern, prayer is about Relating, Releasing, Requesting, and Rejoicing. Keep in mind that it all starts with relating. God is most interested in building a personal relationship with you. So whether you spend fifteen minutes or one hour in prayer, He's looking for closeness. He's not impressed with fancy words or religious catch phrases. All He desires from you is an authentic heart.

Share your Thoughts:

a) Of the four facets of prayer, which one to you suppose is hardest to do, and why?

b) What are some common difficulties that arise when you attempt to pray? Examples:

a. Finding adequate time.

b. Not knowing what to say. (Running out of words.)

c. Distractions. (Cell phones, text messages, TV.)

c) Now that we know some distractions and difficulties that arise, let's discuss some tips to dealing with them:

a. Set a time and stick to it.

b. Try your best to be consistent.

c. Find an isolated place.

d. Turn off your cell phone or other devices.

e. Write down some notes of what to say and meditate on.

Prayer Plans:

Below are some practical ways to help jumpstart or perhaps rekindle your daily prayer life.

The 20-Minute A.C.T.S. Prayer:

You may find this simple outline useful when praying. This structure combines the principles you learned in this lesson.

A – Adoration: Worship and praise God for who He is.
(5 minutes)

C – Confession: Admit your sins and personal areas of improvement. (5 minutes)

T – Thanksgiving: Thank God for all He has done in your life.
Be specific. (5 minutes)

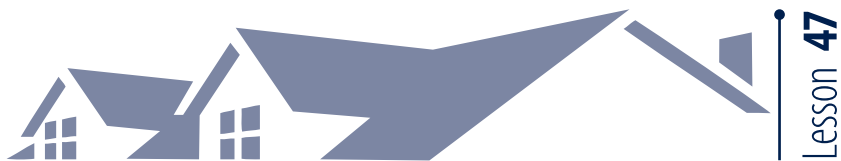
S – Supplication: Make requests for others and ourselves.
(5 minutes)

After a few weeks of praying this way, try to bump up each letter to 8 minutes. That will bring your prayer to 32 minutes. Every couple of months, try to increase your minutes per letter, until you reach one hour.

The Psalms Prayer:

Instead of using a technique every time you pray, try praying the Psalms. When praying the Psalms, the Holy Ghost unlocks new vistas of prayer, and before long you are:

- ✓ Listening to God
- ✓ Praising God
- ✓ Thanking God
- ✓ Exploring your own soul
- ✓ Blessing other people
- ✓ Empathizing with the pain of others
- ✓ Recalling God's goodness
- ✓ Asking God questions
- ✓ Seeking God's face
- ✓ Enthralling at His majesty
- ✓ Trembling before His holiness
- ✓ Basking in His love



Hunger of God's Presence



Welcome

Ice Breaker:

What is fasting? What do people do when they fast? Why do people fast?

Key Verse:

Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV)

Introduction:

Whenever you talk about fasting, people tend to have different ideas about it. Nearly every world religion has fasting as a part of their rituals. Christian fasting is different in the same way everything else is different from the religious community. We worship, pray to, and fast for a living God who can respond and relate to us personally. According to the Bible, fasting is refraining from food, drink, sleep or other fleshly desires to focus on a period of spiritual growth or influence.

Specifically, fasting is to humbly deny something of the flesh to glorify God, grow a deeper relationship with God, and to gain spiritual authority. More often than not, fasting involves abstaining from food because it has the most tangible affect on the body. This is the tendency and practice we find in the scriptures, including with our Lord Jesus Christ. With that in mind, let's explore three purposes of fasting:

Three Aspects of Fasting:

1. Glorify God

a) It's about Dedication. Fasting itself is an act of sacrifice. When you fast, you forgo the time you spend eating or drinking, and dedicate it to prayer, worship and reading God's word. It's to submit yourself and to dismiss your physical desires in order to allow the Holy Ghost to work in your life. God takes notice any time we sacrifice something in order to please him, or draw closer to him. **Romans 12:1** says, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship."*

b) It's about Devotion. When you fast, it's also a spiritual act of worship. Fasting adds another layer to your worship and spiritual devotion to God. Worship is often viewed as music or singing. However, worship involves more than lyrics, it involves your lifestyle. Fasting is about pleasing God, and pleasing God is what worship is all about. When talking about the Prophetess Anna, the Bible said, *"...She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying"* (**Luke 2:37**). Here we see fasting as a form of worship.

2. Grow Closer to God

a) For the Hungry. In the Bible, fasting falls under the category of “highly recommended”. God never demanded or required anyone to fast. However, it is the path of those who desire a deeper and closer relationship with Jesus Christ. When you fast, your body experiences physical hunger. It yearns to be filled. This is the hope for your spiritual man—that you would deeply hunger for God, and that His Spirit and Word would fill you. Fasting gives you a physical picture of what your spirit is longing for. Matthew 5:6 says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

b) For the Hurting. In some cases, fasting was a way to feel closer to God during a particularly difficult time. While fasting, you can communicate feelings of fear, anxiety, distress, or grief to God. When David’s son became ill, “David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground” (2 Samuel 2:16). Anytime you’re emotionally hurting, or struggling with a certain issue, fasting can be a mode of healing and recovery.

3. Gain Spiritual Influence

a) Spiritual Dominion. – Isaiah 58:6 says, “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?” The secret power of fasting is that it can give you spiritual authority over bonds of wickedness. Fasting brings greater power when preparing to confront situations or people who are oppressed. There was an occasion where Jesus’ own disciples were not able to deliver a demon-possessed

man. When they asked *“why”*, Jesus said, *“This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:29).*

b) Spiritual Direction. – Fasting causes a heightened sense of the presence of God. It also brings freshness to the spirit and allows God to speak clearly into your life. In other words, your heart picks up on a spiritual frequency that you normally wouldn't hear. We see an example of this in **Acts 13:2-3**, *“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”*

To Wrap Up:

It's important to note that prayer and fasting often go hand in hand. This isn't always the case however. You can pray without fasting, and fast without prayer. It is when these two practices are combined that they produce the best results. Fasting is not about self-punishment or self-rejection. God doesn't receive any glory when we afflict ourselves. In addition, fasting is not a way to manipulate God into blessing or approving your desires. Fasting is, however, a way to sharpen your spiritual focus and deepen your relationship with God.

Share your Thoughts:

a) Of the three aspects of fasting, which purpose do you find most interesting, and why?

b) Discuss the key differences between Biblical fasting, and the fasting that other religions practice, such as Islam.

c) Why do you think fasting is often overlooked and not emphasized enough in our relationship with God? (Maybe because it's recommended, not required).

Types of Fasts:

There are many types of fasts that you can use. Below are the three most common in the Bible:

1. The Complete Fast – A complete fast is described in **Es-ther 4:16** *"...Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day..."* A complete fast is abstaining from both food and drink. Paul went on a complete fast after his encounter with God on the road to Damascus. *"For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything" (Acts 9:9).*

a) A Word of Caution: You should never go on a complete fast for more than three days. Limit your fast to three days because you cannot go without water for more than four or five days. Also, do not use fasting as a weight-loss plan. It's about focusing on Jesus Christ, not dieting.

2. The Regular Fast – A regular fast is abstaining from only food, not drink. When Jesus fasted in the desert, the Bible says, *"After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry" (Matthew 4:2).* This verse does not mention or suggest Jesus being thirsty.

a) A Word of Caution: During regular fasts, do your best to stay hydrated with water. Some find it helpful to drink juices.

3. The Partial Fast – A partial fast generally means omitting a specific meal or type of food from your diet. **Daniel 10:2-3** says, *“At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.”* This is often called The Daniel Fast. In **Daniel 1:12**, their diet only allowed vegetables and water.

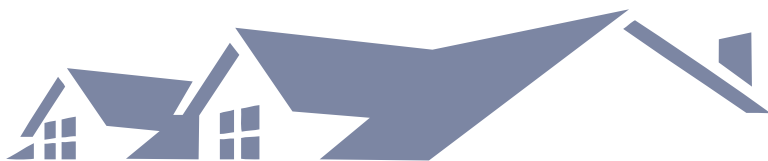
a) A Word of Caution: For extended fasts, longer than four or five days, you should consult with your doctor to ensure your body is not at risk.

Before you Fast:

Below are some simple preparations you should make before fasting.

1. Prepare your heart – Get ready for your fast by praying and asking God to give you direction. It is important that you have a clear purpose for fasting. Ask yourself, “What do I hope to gain from this fast?” Also, ask God to reveal the motives in your heart, to ensure that your heart is in harmony with God’s word.

2. Prepare your body – In addition to heart preparation, get your body ready. A couple of days before an extended fast, reduce your food intake, eat raw fruits and vegetables, and avoid foods that are high in fat and sugar. It’s also recommended that you create a schedule of how long your fast will be and what activities you should avoid (i.e. sports, heavy labor, etc.).



Giving because God has Given



Welcome

Ice Breaker:

When you hear the word 'Tithe' what comes to your mind?

Key Verse: *Leviticus 27:30 (NIV)*

Introduction:

God owns everything. That's a big statement, but a true statement nonetheless. ***Psalms 24:1***, "*The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.*" Because God owns everything and all blessings come from him, it's our job to be faithful managers of our financial resources. Simply put, money isn't our possession—it's God's possession. We are merely entrusted with the responsibility of managing it.

Giving is a testimony of God's ownership. And "***tithing***" is the leading standard of giving we find in the Bible. Tithing is a

plan that God Himself created. The word **“tithē”** actually means **“tenth”**. Our key verse says, *“A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD” (Lev. 27:30)*. When we tithe, we return to God ten percent of our financial increase. So then, when we withhold the tithe, we actually steal what belongs to God. **(Ref. Malachi 3:8)** Let’s consider three keys that tithing gives us to unlock God’s promises:

Three Keys of Tithing:

1. Encourages Greater Faithfulness

a) Greater Trust. It takes faith in God to give up some of what He has given us. When you tithe of your income, you are putting your trust in God to supply your needs. Proverbs 3:5 says, *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”* Deepening your trust in God is like learning a new language, the more you do it—the more it grows. Tithing shows God that you believe He is able to sustain you, even through financially difficult times. Investing your money into stocks, bonds and real estate can be a wise decision. However, investing into God’s work is the surest bet you can ever take.

b) Greater Tribute. **Proverbs 3:6** says, *“in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”* Tithing offers tribute and acknowledges how great God is. Don’t worry; God isn’t broke, so He doesn’t need our money. However, giving is a tangible testimony that God owns both the material and spiritual things of our lives. Essentially, He desires a trusting acknowledgement that He is “your” God, and that you fully de-

pend on His goodness. Returning your tithe is a physical form of worship, one that actually requires a material sacrifice. Remember this; worship is the greatest motivation for giving.

2. Expands Kingdom Work

a) Spreading the Gospel. When you tithe and give to God’s work, you become a partner in spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. When the Apostle Paul wrote about his partnership with the Philippian church, he said, “Moreover, as you Philipians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only” (Phil. 4:15). Although this church couldn’t physically travel with Paul on his missionary trips, their financial gifts made it possible for him to minister. Through their generous giving, they became co-laborers.

The Storehouse System	
Old Testament Purpose	Present Day Purpose
<i>Tithing Supports:</i>	
1. The tribe of Levi and the priests of Aaron	1. The pastor and staff
2. The prophets	2. Missionaries and evangelists
3. The Hebrew widows and orphans	3. Widows, orphans, single parents, etc.
4. The widows and orphans of the Gentiles who were living in and around the city	4. The unsaved who surround the local church and community

b) Supporting the Gospel. Tithing not only helps to spread the Gospel, but it creates a support system for the men and women who dedicate their lives to ministry. In the book of Malachi, we're told that God wants us to bring our tithe into the storehouse (**Ref. Mal 3:10**). A storehouse in Old Testament times had four purposes, which still holds true today. Based on the table below, briefly discuss the importance of these four purposes.

3. Enlarges Financial Blessings

a) Brings Blessings. **Malachi 3:10 says,** *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse...Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."* Giving your tithe opens the window of heaven over you and your entire household. This is a promise we have from God, that if we bring the tithe, He'll bring us invaluable blessings. God's financial system has a better return than any stock, bond, or investment you can make. He guarantees your success when you give generously to His kingdom.

b) Brings Balance. When you learn to tithe, it actually changes the way you view money. Tithing helps you prioritize your finances and guards your heart against greed and the love of money. The Apostle Paul told Timothy, *"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs"* (**1 Tim. 6:10**). When you give to God, it helps to bring balance to your spending habits and even helps you to become more content with what you have.

To Wrap Up:

Tithing is not a “get rich quick” program or a manipulation tool. It is God’s system for sustaining the work of His kingdom and blessing your life. It’s a system that has worked for ages and continues to work today. Not only does it provide a basic need, but tithing also opens up a new landscape of opportunity for you. **Proverbs 3:9-10** says, *“Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.”* Some will say, **“I can’t afford to tithe”**. However the truth is, “You can’t afford not to”.

How to Tithe:

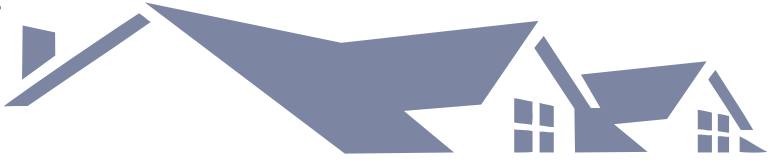
Being a good manager of what God has given you involves giving a portion back to Him. The tithe (10 percent) should be paid on your gross income, the amount before taxes. For instance, when you tithe on your paycheck, simply move the decimal point one digit to the left. That will give you the “tithe” amount.

Share your Thoughts:

a) Discuss why **“money and church”** tend to be a sore subject for certain people. (Idea: people haven’t learned the correct Biblical viewpoint.)

b) Of the three keys of tithing, which one makes the biggest impression on you, and why?

c) Discuss when and where your local church accepts tithes from its members. Answer any questions your group might have about this process.



Dedicating our full life to God



Welcome

Ice Breaker:

What is Holiness? What does Holiness look like?

Key Verse: *1 Peter 1:13-16 (NIV)*

Introduction:

You may or may not realize it, but the closer you get to God, the more like Him you become. Not that we could ever be equal with God, but as our relationship with him grows, there also grows a desire to please him and become more like him. When you are baptized in water and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, a holy desire is birthed in your spirit. However, you begin to realize that there is a new inner battle being waged—between your old sin-led nature and your new Spirit-led nature. (**Ref. Galatians 5:17**)

Because your Spirit-led nature hungers for God, a lifestyle of purification begins. This lifestyle is referred to as **“holiness”**. Living a life of holiness is simply saying and doing what pleases God. Let’s dispel a few misconceptions about holiness:

✓ Holiness is about legalism – In fact, holiness is not about legalism, but about having a pure relationship with God. (**Psalm 24:3-6**).

✓ Holiness demands perfection – In reality, holiness is not about being perfect; it’s about being obedient to God’s word and passionate about pleasing Him. (**1 Peter 1:14-15; 1 Thessalonians 4:1**)

✓ Holiness is unachievable – The truth is, it’s possible to live a holy life. God would not call us to do something if He knew we couldn’t achieve it. (**1 Thessalonians 4:7**)

Romans 12:2 says, *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”* This means we can live and interact with all people, but not to adopt or conform to a secular lifestyle. God desires for us to be holy and distinct. Let’s consider three purposes for holy living.

Three Purposes for Holy Living:

1. Distinction from the World

a) You are Sanctified. Some think that holiness is simply about being different. However, it’s far beyond that. God has

called his people to be distinct. To become distinct, we must undergo what the Bible calls **“sanctification”**. **Leviticus 11:44** says, *“For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy...”* The word **“sanctify”** means to be **“separate”** or to be **“set apart”**. God desires that we be set apart for his divine purpose in our lives. It is a process of inner and outer change, where the Holy Ghost and God’s Word begins to separate us from lifestyles that prevent a pure relationship with God.

b) You are Special. Being distinct isn’t just about separating from old habits or customs; it’s about recognizing and living in your true significance. **1 Peter 2:9** says, *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”* Living a holy life means remembering how special you are to God. It means living in a way that reveals the change in your life—both in your inward and outward reflection. The more you realize how special you are, the more cautious you are about what you do and say.

2. Disciplined in Lifestyle

a) Do your best to Try. **Hebrews 12:14** says, *“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”* Holiness doesn’t just come natural. It takes effort and may even make you a little uncomfortable at times. That’s because your old and new natures don’t agree—especially when you try to change something about your lifestyle. However, don’t give up. If God is speaking to you and asking you to change an area in your life, make the effort!

b) Do your best to Train. **1 Timothy 4:7-8** says, *“Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”* Living a holy life requires teaching and guidance. Paul’s advice to **“train”** means that holiness is a process of learning and becoming who God has called you to be. Have a teachable attitude regarding the principles of holiness in your everyday life.

3. Devotion to Spirituality

a) Purify yourself. **2 Corinthians 7:1** says, *“Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”* To grow in holiness, we need to purify ourselves of things that pollute the body and spirit. For example, doing drugs, drinking alcohol, smoking, and even certain foods poison the body. Likewise, certain things we watch, read, listen to and even places we visit can pollute our spirits. Living a holy life means getting rid of impurities in your body and spirit.

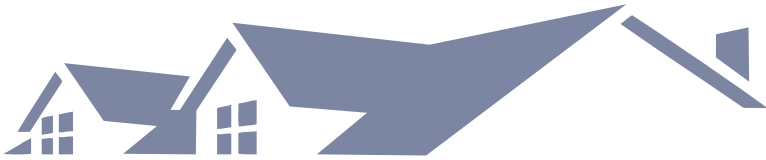
b) Pursue God. **Hebrews 12:14** says, *“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”* Here’s an interesting fact: Separation leads to the greatest connection. When we strive for holiness, which is separation, we’re able to plug ourselves into God’s presence. Like the scripture says, without holiness no one will see the Lord. In other words, without separation, we cannot fully experience and enjoy God’s presence. Holiness, then, is a personal pursuit of God. When you strive to live holy, you send a message to God that his presence is a priority in your life.

To Wrap Up:

The more of God we desire, the more important our quest for holiness becomes. Perhaps the Apostle Paul said it best, *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1)*. Living a holy life is about pleasing God and having an unbroken relationship with Him. As the scripture implies, offering your body—your whole being—is your spiritual act of worship. Don’t let holiness become a forgotten act of worship in your life.

Share your Thoughts:

- a) Of the three purposes for holy living, which one seems most interesting to you, and why?
- b) Discuss some of the misconceptions about holiness. What are some ways we can dispel these misconceptions, or prevent them from forming?
- c) Of the three purposes for holy living, which quality tends to be overlooked, and how can we refresh its value?



In **SHAPE** to Serve



Welcome

Ice Breaker:

What is a natural ability or interest that you can use to bless the lives of others?

Key Verse: *Psalm 139:13-16*

Introduction:

After giving their lives to Jesus Christ, many wonder, **“What next?”** **“What’s my unique role in the church?”** If you have ever asked these questions, don’t worry—you’re not alone. In fact, the greatest challenge for many is figuring out what their distinct function is. Each of us have been uniquely designed and shaped for God’s purpose. Everything about who you are and what you can do is no accident. God skillfully created you with a combination of strengths, abilities and gifts that make up your character. Here is a simple acrostic to help you remember these qualities:

- S** Spiritual gifts
- H** Heart
- A** Abilities
- P** Personality
- E** Experience

Knowing your purpose and place in God's family can be discovered when you realize your God-given SHAPE. For the remainder of this lesson, let's reveal each capability that enables you to serve with purpose.

Discovering your S.H.A.P.E:

1. Unwrap your Spiritual Gifts

a) Your Specialty. *1 Corinthians 12:4-7* says, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." Your spiritual gifts add a twist of flavor that cannot be replaced. What you have is special. Mistakenly many think that when they don't serve, someone else will pick up the slack. Unfortunately, no one else can substitute for your special abilities. Your gifts are desperately needed in the family of God.

b) Your Spirituality. *1 Corinthians 2:14* says, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." Every Spirit-filled believer is equipped with certain spiritual gifts for the purpose of ministry. The keys to these gifts are found in our spiritual connection to God. In other words, in order to receive

and develop your spiritual gifts, you must receive the infilling of the Holy Ghost. These gifts can only be unwrapped or realized through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Remember, an unopened gift is useless.

2. Understand your Heart

a) Enthusiasm. The term *“heart”* represents the total package of your desires, hopes, interests and affections. The heart embodies what you love to do and care about the most. It creates enthusiasm and motivation. **Proverbs 27:19** says, *“As water reflects a face, so a man’s heart reflects the man.”* Your heart is a reflection of who you really are. It affects what you say, feel, and even your behavior. God has blessed each of us with a distinct heart that beats when we think of certain subjects, activities or situations. Listen to your inner heartbeat; it will give you hints and clues as to where you should serve.

b) Effectiveness. Serving from your heart is the key to being effective in any ministry, great or small. The more you care about a task or assignment, the likelier you are to excel in it. If you volunteer time to a certain ministry that you’re not passionate about, you will eventually lose motivation. This, of course, means that your work won’t be very effective. When your heart is fully submerged into your area of ministry, you will produce greater results. Not only that, but you will feel a sense of accomplishment.

3. Unlock your Abilities

a) Abilities from God. In addition to your spiritual gifts, you also have inborn gifts and natural abilities. These are the tal-

ents that take little effort to utilize, but have big payoffs. God gave these to you. **Romans 12:6 says**, “*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us...*” Being that our natural gifts come from God, they are just as valuable as our spiritual gifts. Studies show that the average person has anywhere from 500 to 700 various skills and abilities. The common objection to getting involved in ministry is, “***I don’t have anything to offer.***” That’s nonsense! God loaded you with plenty of natural abilities, which you can use for His glory.

b) Abilities for God. Once you recognize your most obvious abilities, you have to apply them for God’s purpose. Paul said, “*...whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God*” (**1 Corinthians 10:31**). The Bible offers many examples of abilities that were used for God. Here are just a few of those mentioned: artistic ability, architectural ability, administering, baking, boat making, candy making, debating, designing, embalming, embroidering, engraving, farming, fishing, gardening, leading, managing, masonry, making music, making weapons, needle work, painting, planting, philosophizing, inventing, carpentry, sailing, selling, being a soldier, tailoring, teaching, writing literature and poetry. There is a place in the church where your abilities can flourish and make an impact.

4. Uncover your Personality

a) You are Unique. The Psalmist David said, “*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well*” (**Psalms 139:14**). When God formed you, He broke the mold. Your individuality is a scientific fact (i.e. DNA). You are God’s custom design. There has never been, nor will there ever be another “you”. Your personality is no accident. God made both introverts and extroverts. Some are

“thinkers”; and others are **“feelers”**. Some play it safe, and others take risks. By now, you should know what type of personality God gave you. When you stay true to your personality, you not only give God glory, but you add irreplaceable value to the world.

b) You are Useful. **1 Corinthians 12:6** says, *“There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.”* God exhibited his greatest craftsmanship when he molded your personality type. And few things bring him glory as when you use your personality for ministry. If you study the lives in the Bible, you will soon realize that God uses personalities of all shapes and sizes. The clearest example is found within Jesus’ twelve disciples. The mixture of their different personalities often created some conflict. However, when combined for a purpose, they produced immeasurable results. Your personality plays a major role in determining what area of ministry is best for you.

5. Unleash your Experience

a) Examine your experiences. **Romans 8:28** reminds us, *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* God doesn’t throw away your experiences, but rather uses them for his purpose. Even your bad experiences contribute to who you are today. Life experiences help mold your “shape”—smoothing out rough edges and defining your attitude. Let’s examine six types of experiences:

1. Family experiences: Things you learned growing up in your home.

2. Educational experiences: Your favorite subjects in school.
3. Vocational experiences: The jobs that you enjoyed and were effective in.
4. Spiritual experiences: Your most significant moments with God.
5. Ministry experiences: How you have served God in the past.
6. Painful experiences: The problems, hurts and failures that you have learned from.

b) Employ your experiences. Now that you know what types of experiences define your shape, it's time to start employing them for God's purpose. For instance, your family experiences, good or bad, have molded the way you handle difficulties and manage situations. If you are the firstborn, perhaps you have untapped leadership skills. What many don't realize is that God uses painful experiences for His glory. Sometimes people think, "I've been through too much, been hurt too many times, or made too many mistakes." The truth is, all that you've been through has given you a viewpoint that others can't see. Therefore, you are able to identify the silent hurt in others and minister to their needs.

To Wrap Up:

Knowing and applying your God-given shape is the key to living with purpose and serving in your local church. Don't be afraid to try ministries that interest you, or to expose a hidden gift that could bless the work of God. Unleash your abilities for God's glory and you will discover one of the most satisfying feelings in the world. Remember, gifts are meant to be opened, shared and enjoyed. Your distinct **SHAPE** will allow you to unwrap the gifts within you. Let the discovery begin!

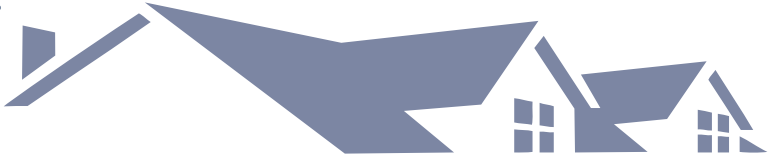
Share your Thoughts:

a) Ask yourself, “How much of my abilities am I actually using?” Discuss some examples of natural abilities that could be used for ministry.

1. For example: recruiting, researching, writing, landscaping, interviewing, promoting, decorating, planning, entertaining, repairing, drawing, and even feeding.

b) Discuss the types of personal experiences we can offer the church. As a group, try to dispel any fears or misconceptions there might be about revealing and using your personal experiences.

c) What can our group do to serve our church family?



Share **the Love of God!**



Welcome

Ice Breaker:

How did Jesus approach crowds and individuals with his message?

Key Verse: *1 Corinthians 9:19-22*

Introduction:

Jesus Christ knew how to connect with others. He mastered the art of relationships, and knew how to use them for the purpose of salvation. He made friends with the friendless and understood the power of personal connection. In a world that thrives on technology and electronic means of communication, the personal touch has been lost to some degree. For instance, instead of walking over to your co-worker's desk (20 feet away), you send them an email. This may improve business productivity, but it doesn't do much for leading others to Jesus Christ.

Before we move on, let's deflate the fears that often hold us back from sharing your faith.

- **Fear of Rejection** – Most people don't witness because they fear being rejected. But remember, they are declining the offer, not you personally. Also, just because they're not interested right now, doesn't mean they won't be later.

- **Fear of Not Knowing what to Say** – Some are scared that when they talk, they won't have the right words. Remember, you don't need be to perfect or rehearsed—just be yourself. You don't have to explain the whole Bible.

- **Fear of Embarrassing Others** – Some fear that they will embarrass or make the other person feel uncomfortable. Remember, it's all in your approach. Be clever about when and where you bring up the subject of Jesus.

Bringing people to Jesus requires a personal connection, an authentic relationship. Because after all, we are often the first impression people have of Jesus Christ, and what living for him is about. Fortunately, Jesus provided us the best method of connecting with people and leading them to salvation. Using the example of Jesus and the Samaritan woman (Ref. John 4), let's take a look at 3 points of contact for evangelism.

Three Points of Contact:

1. Be Courageous and Take the Initiative

- a) **Be Slow.** When Jesus witnessed to the Samaritan woman at the well, He started by saying, ***“Will you give me a drink?”***

(John 4:7). There is sometimes a tendency to rush or force the issue upon people. For instance, you turn every conversation into a Bible study. However, this could possibly push them away. And they may only be listening out of courtesy, not curiosity. Take your time. Invest into their interests, before you expect them to invest into yours. Jesus asked a question that pertained her job—before his.

b) Be Simple. In our enthusiasm to save a lost soul, we sometimes try “too” hard, and may say things that don’t have much value to an unchurched person. For instance, telling someone how powerful your worship services are won’t mean much of anything. Keep things simple. Build relationships with people and choose practical ways of introducing Jesus Christ and spiritual topics. Jesus kept his approach simple by focusing on things that the Samaritan understood—such as water from a well. In addition, he didn’t start by talking about spiritual things. Maybe your evangelistic connection will start with treating someone to dinner, a game of golf, or a drink at Starbucks.

2. Be Considerate of their Needs

a) Be Sensitive. Jesus told the Samaritan woman, *“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water” (John 4:10).* It’s important that when reaching out to someone, you be sensitive to his or her needs. Jesus immediately recognized a spiritual thirst in her heart—without her having to confess it. Jesus had great interpersonal skills. He could read body languages, moods, and personalities with accuracy. And it wasn’t just because he was God. It’s because we was paying attention, listening to and watching her gestures.

b) Be Selfless. Not only did Jesus utilize his relational skills, but he focused first on her needs, not his. It wasn't until later on did he mention his search for true worshippers. Creating an evangelistic connection with someone happens when we think outside of our bubble of circumstances and needs. It happens when we refuse to live selfishly, and make ourselves available to others. An old Chinese proverb says, "Seek to understand, before seeking to be understood." You have to remember that the world does not revolve around you. And leading people to Christ means stepping beyond your wants and wishes.

3. Be Constructive with your Lifestyle

a) Your Words. There was something about Jesus that stood out. So much so that the woman said, "*Sir, you must be a prophet...*" (**John 4:19**). Interestingly, Jesus never disclosed His identity or marketed His purpose for being there. Just by the way he talked and listened to her, she was able to tell that Jesus wasn't an ordinary man. How we communicate (speak and listen) builds a bridge between you and your unsaved friends. **Ephesians 4:29** says, "*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*"

b) Your Ways. Not only is healthy communication necessary, but perhaps the greatest factor in leading people to Christ is your lifestyle. How you live and conduct yourself outside the church walls will be your best instrument of evangelism. Although Peter is counseling on how to win your unsaved spouse, his advice is relevant for any relationship. "*Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them*

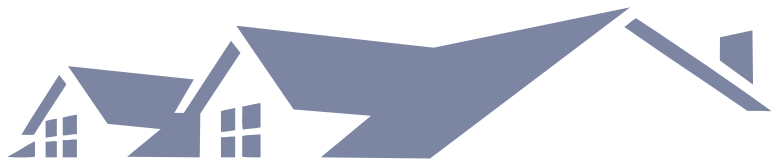
do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives” (1 Peter 3:1-2). The Gospel must be demonstrated, not just spoken.

Gift Idea:

Our greatest commission is to save lost and dying souls (**Ref. Matthew 28:19**). However, many Christians cringe when they hear the word “evangelism”. Likely because older evangelism tactics were very impersonal and often required a gregarious personality. But if you truly understand that it’s all about relational connection, you’ll find that it’s the most natural thing you can do. That doesn’t mean it won’t require some effort or practice, but you will definitely find your personal role exciting and rewarding.

Share your Thoughts:

- a) What would you say is the most common excuse for not reaching our unsaved friends and family?
- b) Of the three points of contact, which one would you say is the most overlooked or underestimated?
- c) How do you think this Friendship Group can play a key role in winning the lost?



Obey to Growth in God



Welcome

Ice Breaker:

How necessary is order in any society? What happens when order is lost?

Key Verse: *Romans 13:1-5*

Introduction:

God's throne is built on authority. In fact, anything we do as Spirit-filled believers, we're able to do because of God's authority upon our lives. Take prayer for example. When you pray for healing, you are simply exercising your spiritual authority when you invoke the Name of Jesus. You are using the delegated authority and power of Jesus' name. So, the sickness isn't subject to you individually, it's subject to the authority of God that works in you.

If you can grasp this simple example, then you can understand spiritual authority as it relates to God's leaders. Through God's framework of represented authority, we are required to obey and honor those who lead us. As Paul said, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established..." (Romans 13:1). In the local church, these authorities are the pastors and leaders who are responsible for guiding, guarding and governing the family of God. Let's examine the positive and negative responses to spiritual authority.

Two Reactions to Spiritual Authority:

1. Rebellion

a) Disobedience. *Romans 5:19b* says, "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners..." God told Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Was the fruit itself poisoned? Perhaps not. However, God wanted to teach Adam the principle of obedience. Eve was placed under Adam's authority, as Adam was directly under God's authority. So when Eve was tricked into eating the fruit, she disobeyed God. Ultimately Adam was responsible (he also ate the fruit), so their collective disobedience caused the great downfall.

Points to Ponder:

- **Value God's Leaders.** *1 Thessalonians 5:12-13* says, "Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard

among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work..." It was easier for Eve to justify disobeying her "**husband**", than it was "**God**". There is a danger when you undervalue your spiritual leaders. Even though they are human, they represent God. So whether you agree or disagree with them, be careful not to depreciate their authority.

- **Value God's Laws.** David told Solomon, "Observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements..." (**1 Kings 2:3**). God is a God of principle. The more value we place on His principles, the less likely we are to disobey spiritual authority.

b) Defiance. Defiance represents those who blatantly oppose. Such was the case with Korah and his followers. **Numbers chapter 16** records that Korah, Dathan and Abiram, plus a large group, gathered together and planned a revolt against Moses and Aaron. They attacked him by saying, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD's assembly?" As described in **Numbers 16**, Korah and all his partners had to pay a severe penalty for their error.

Points to Ponder:

- **God's leaders Represent God.** Korah mistakenly thought he was only rebelling against Moses and Aaron. However, God and His delegated authorities are inseparable. Even when His leaders make mistakes, God will never side with a rebellious campaign.

- **God judges the Heart, not the Issue.** Korah's appeal may have been honest. But their mission was pointless the moment they aimed fire at Moses. A good cause against the wrong person is the wrong cause.

2. Obedience

a) Obedience. The definition of "**obey**" is "**to follow the commands or guidance of. To conform to or comply with**". When King Saul tried to recompense his disobedience with burnt offerings, the prophet Samuel said, "*Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams*" (**1 Samuel 15:22**). Samuel's point was clear: obedience to God is the highest tribute we can offer. Because Saul didn't obey Samuel's instructions to destroy everything in Amalek, God rejected him.

Points to Ponder:

- **Obedience involves your Conduct.** Obeying is simply following orders, listening and doing as we're instructed. Be prepared, because your heart may not always be totally persuaded.

- **God Blesses those who obey.** If God frowns upon disobedience, the opposite is also true. Jesus said, "*Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.*" (**Luke 11:28**)

b) Submission. The definition of "**submit**" is "to yield oneself to the authority or will of another". When referring to church

leaders, Paul said, “Submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it” (**1 Cor. 16:16**). Paul isn’t just talking about following orders, but about getting under the spiritual governance of God. As members of God’s family, we should humbly submit to those who are over us, providing that they don’t violate God’s word.

Points to Ponder:

- **Submission involves your Heart.** It’s possible to obey, and not submit, or have a submissive attitude. Obeying is simply following instructions. Submitting engages your heart and mindset.
- **Submission is about Authority, not Superiority.** Submitting to spiritual authority is not about becoming a slave to a superior person. We are equal in God’s eyes. Its okay to ask questions when your motives are pure.

To Wrap Up:

The truth is, Jesus himself also submitted to authority, not only to the Roman government (as a man), but to divine authority (as God in flesh). Let’s not forget how troubling it was for Jesus to submit as he prayed and fought with God’s will in the Garden of Gethsemane. God’s will required Jesus Christ to obey and submit himself to the sufferings of the cross. Living under authority is a process of spiritual growth and sometimes discomfort. As you grow in a relationship with Jesus Christ, this principle will become more and more significant in your life.

Share your Thoughts:

a) Based upon what you've learned in this lesson, why do you think God places such high emphasis on spiritual authority?

b) What are some of the most common reasons why people disobey?

c) Discuss the main difference between obedience and submission, and also how they work together.

