

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION



Study Guide & Workbook

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INTRODUCTION

Before You Begin

Jesus told us to make disciples of all nations in Matthew 28:18-20. Unfortunately, He didn't leave a step-by-step instruction manual. Because of this, there is a lot of confusion as to what discipleship is supposed to look like. So, before we begin, let's touch on ***three important truths of discipleship***.

1) Discipleship is not a curriculum

You cannot purchase discipleship from a publisher. Discipleship is not accomplished by reading a book or by sitting through a Sunday School Class. Discipleship is **relational!** While curriculum is a wonderful tool to be used in discipleship, it cannot replace genuine fellowship with God and other believers.

2) Discipleship is not a one-time event

This course is not designed to put the chapter of discipleship behind you, but rather, to give you the tools you'll need in your journey of discipleship for the rest of your life. Not only does this include being discipled, but it also includes making future disciples.

3) Discipleship is not accomplished by man

While it's true that Jesus didn't leave us a step-by-step instruction for discipleship, He did leave us something better: **The Holy Spirit**. While this curriculum can provide helpful information, the growth that happens in us can only be accomplished through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. So, when you experience growth, give God the glory!

HOW TO BE A CHRISTIAN



DO YOU HAVE A FIRM FOUNDATION?

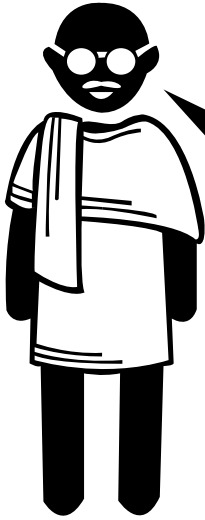
“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts on them, will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.”

Matthew 7:24-25 (NASB)

Having a firm foundation is critical for the future integrity of any building. When you have foundation problems, it causes structural issues all throughout the building. This is true, even if there isn't a major catastrophic event like a flood, tornado, or hurricane.

The foundation people build their lives on is even more important than any building or structure. Unfortunately, many people don't consider what they are building their lives on until catastrophe strikes. Because trouble isn't a possibility, but a certainty, we must spend time evaluating what we've built our lives on. Jesus promises that if we will build our lives on His teachings, we can withstand the worst that life throws at us. Jesus is the rock we must build our lives on!

It's important to point out that Jesus didn't just say that we believe what He says, but that we must act on what He says. In other words, if we don't take His teachings and put them into practice, we're setting ourselves up for disaster. We must do what He says.



I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.

- Mahatma Gandhi

Do you feel this is an unfair assessment of Christians? Why or why not?

How would you explain ungodliness in the church to an unbeliever?

WHY DO MANY PROFESSING CHRISTIANS LOOK MORE LIKE THE WORLD THAN LIKE CHRIST?

It's a sad reality that many people who claim to be Christ-followers are given over into worldly things. To explain this discrepancy, there can only be two Biblical explanations:

1) They are NOT a _____ believer

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits."

Matthew 7:15-16 (NASB)

-OR-

2) They are NOT a _____ believer

"But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still in the flesh..."

1 Corinthians 3:1-3a (NASB)

WHO'S TO BLAME?

Why do some people stay baby Christians their whole lives? Is it just because they are sinful and rebellious? Perhaps. However, while we each have a personal responsibility to seek after Christ, a lack of maturity might also be attributed to pastors and church leaders for failing to give proper instruction.

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

Hosea 4:6a (NASB)

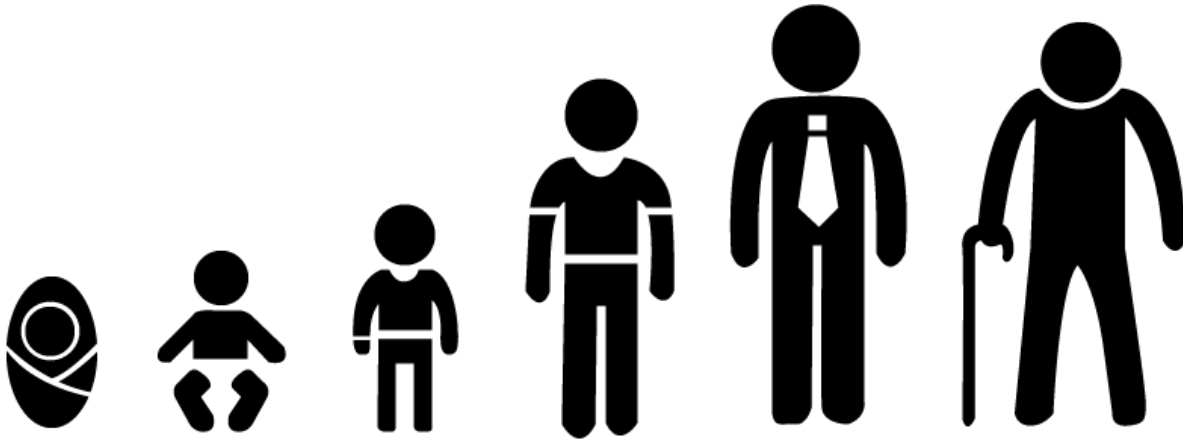
Leaders of churches bear the responsibility to shepherd, train and instruct their congregation. When they fail to do that, they will fall under God's judgment. It is for this reason that leaders are held to a higher standard.

"Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment."

James 3:1 (NASB)

Would you attribute a lack of Biblical Discipleship more to Callous Christians or Lazy Leaders? Explain your answer.

WHAT DOES A MATURE CHRISTIAN LOOK LIKE?



Can a person even know they have entered maturity in Christ? Yes! The Apostle Paul would have never attempted to exercise authority over new believers unless he was confident that he was mature in his faith. The goal is not to compare ourselves to others, but to compare ourselves to our past selves. While we will never be able to say that we have completed the maturing process, we can say we are more mature today than we were yesterday.

So, what are some Biblical indicators of maturity in Christ?

1) A Mature Christian surrenders his/her life to the Lord

_____.

"And [Jesus] was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Luke 9:23 (NASB)

No one can be a Spirit-led disciple of Jesus Christ without first surrendering his/her life over to Jesus!



Salvation is not a one-time event! The New-Testament presents 3 aspects of Salvation for every believer.

Three Aspects of Salvation in a Believer's Life

1. _____

"I have **been saved** from the **penalty** of sin."

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Romans 5:1 (NASB)

2. _____

"I am **being saved** from the **power** of sin."

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God."

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 (NASB)

3. _____

"I **will be saved** from the **presence** of sin."

"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

1 Peter 5:4 (NASB)

Salvation through sanctification requires that we surrender to Christ on a daily basis. Some believers may have experienced salvation through justification but are severely lacking spiritual maturity in their life because they either don't know they are supposed to surrender daily, or they refuse to.

"I affirm, brothers and sisters, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, that I die daily."

1 Corinthians 15:31 (NASB)

Every day we must make a conscious decision to follow Jesus. When we do this, the Holy Spirit transforms us little by little into the image of Christ. For Mature Christians, the decision to follow Jesus is an easy one because it is habitual.

2) A Mature Christian openly _____ Christ.

"Therefore, everyone who confesses Me before people, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before people, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."

Matthew 10:32-33 (NASB)

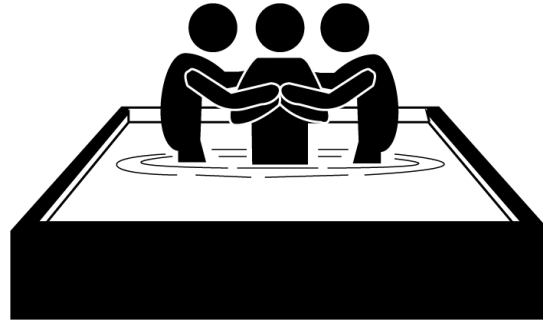
While an open confession of Christ is certainly done with our mouths, that's not all it consists of. In fact, if all we do is confess Jesus with our mouths, it is detestable to God.

"This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."

Matthew 15:8 (NASB)

How can we confess Jesus with more than our mouths? With our actions!

Many Christians misunderstand the purpose of Baptism. It's often believed that with Baptism, your sins are being washed away. It's understandable why someone might believe this. Why do you take a bath? To wash away the dirt and grime from your body. However, this is not the purpose of Baptism!



Baptism is the first open confession
that you are a follower of Jesus Christ!

When a person gets Baptized, what they are saying with their actions is:

"I've repented from my sins and have surrendered my life to Jesus. I am dead and no longer live for myself. Instead Christ lives in me! I want to be identified as a Christ follower and I need the church to help hold me accountable to that!"

"Therefore, we have been buried with Him into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life."

Romans 6:4 (NASB)

Baptism is critically important and must not be skipped! If you have surrendered to Christ but have not been Baptized, speak to your pastor as soon as possible! It makes no sense to promote that we confess Christ and yet put off Baptism. No where in Scripture do we read of such Christians, so let it not be said of us!

3) A Mature Christian has the _____
of his/her salvation.

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

1 John 5:13 (NASB)

Isn't it a little presumptuous and arrogant to say that someone knows they are saved? It's only presumptuous and arrogant to say this when it's not true! According to the Apostle John, he wrote 1 John for the explicit purpose of assuring those who believe in Jesus that they are saved! Why was this so important to John? Because....

Knowing you know Jesus is just
as important as knowing Jesus!

It's not arrogant to believe Jesus when He says:

“The one who believes in the Son has eternal life; but the one who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

John 3:36 (NASB)

Denying anyone can know they are saved is to call Jesus a liar! He does not want us to live in uncertainty, doubt, and fear. Instead, He wants us to have complete fellowship with Him. Without the assurance of our salvation, there can be no real peace, joy, and hope in the Lord! God does not want you to be crushed by doubt!



4) A Mature Christian lives by the _____.

“If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”

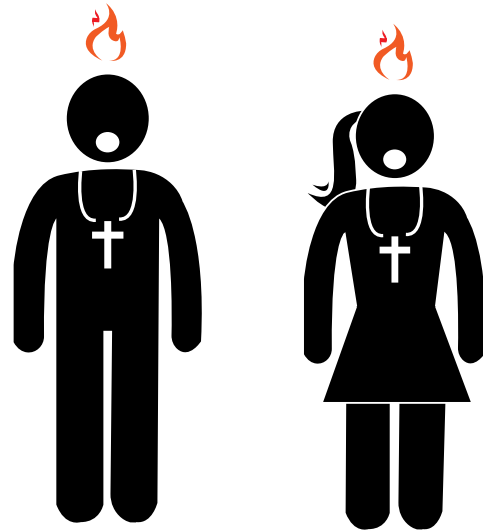
Galatians 5:25 (NASB)

Christians are called to live by the Spirit of God. But, at what point does a believer receive the Holy Spirit? Is it immediately when they repent from their sins and surrender to Jesus? Is it when they come down the aisle during an altar call? Can they only receive the Holy Spirit after Baptism? How does a believer know he/she even has the Holy Spirit?

In Acts 19, the Apostle Paul enters Ephesus and finds some disciples who did not have the Holy Spirit. They believed in God and had obeyed John the Baptist, but they had not yet publicly confessed Christ because of ignorance. As soon as they were Baptized into the name of Christ, Paul prayed for them, and they received the Holy Spirit and began to exercise their Spiritual Gifts. This shows us that *three things are necessary to receive the Holy Spirit*.

Requirements For the Holy Spirit

- 1) Repentance from all known sin
- 2) Open confession of Jesus Christ
- 3) Asking to receive Him through Prayer



We know we have the Holy Spirit when He manifests something in us that is not of us!

5) A Mature Christian is _____ among the body.

“Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

Hebrews 10:25 (ESV)

Some professing Christians stubbornly hold the position that they don't need to go to church to be saved, for church attendance isn't the condition for salvation. But this reveals a gaping contradiction in their lives. The Apostle John puts it this way:

“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and yet he hates his brother or sister, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother and sister whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.”

1 John 4:20 (NASB)

How can we claim we love Jesus and avoid the church? While it's true that the church is not a place or time, the church does show up at a place and time. If we're a part of the church, we would do well to show up with them.

6) A Mature Christian has a _____ for and _____ to God's word.

“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.”

1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)

Sometimes we can loathe dry Bible teachings because the speaker seems dispassionate about what he/she is teaching. This can leave us feeling unfulfilled in our desire to know God's word. Maybe we even say, “I don't feel like I'm being fed.”

Sometimes it's necessary for a new Christian to be spoon fed God's word, but this should not be the case for a mature believer! We must learn to feed ourselves if we're ever going to have long-term growth and maturity in Christ. Of course, this requires us to carve time out of our day to engage with God in His word. You cannot have maturity without personal Bible study!

7) A Mature Christian is _____ to prayer.

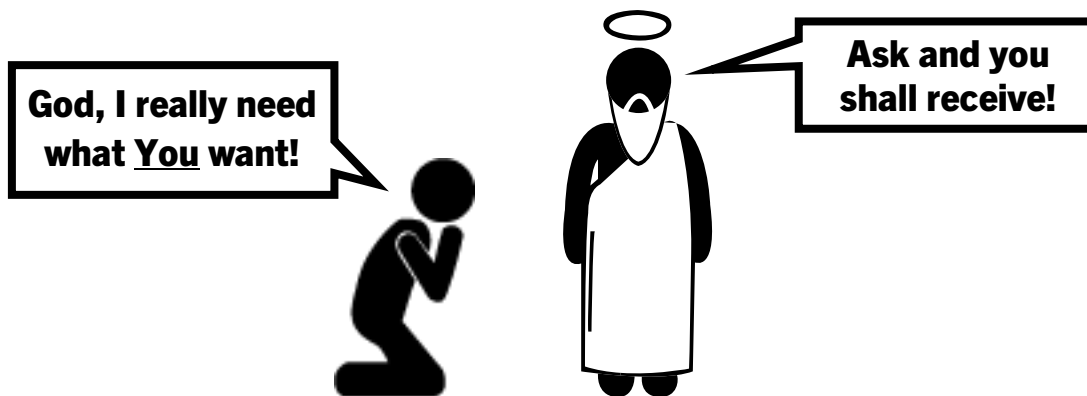
“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.”

Colossians 4:2 (NASB)

What is the difference between the prayers of immature and mature Christians? Not only is there a difference in consistency, but there is also a difference in the content. Immature believers tend to look at prayer this way:



Mature believers tend to look at prayer this way:



Mature believers are not devoted to prayer just to get what they want. Mature believers are devoted to prayer because they know that God uses prayer to conform us into the image of Christ and accomplish His will. Mature believers are devoted to prayer because it is the way to remain in constant fellowship with Him.

8) A Mature Christian consistently _____ God.

“Only fear the Lord and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.”

1 Samuel 12:24 (NASB)

Service to God should never be done out of obligation. We must serve God because we love Him. In short, the more we discover how much God has done for us, the more we will want to do for Him.

Wait a second! Why are we talking about works? We’re saved by grace, not by works, right? Every believer must understand the way to salvation does not rest on what we do for God. For the Apostle Paul did say:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB)

Paul couldn’t have been any clearer. We are not saved because of what we’re doing for God, but because of what He did for us. However, don’t miss what Paul says next:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

Ephesians 2:10 (NASB)

Paul’s message is simple:

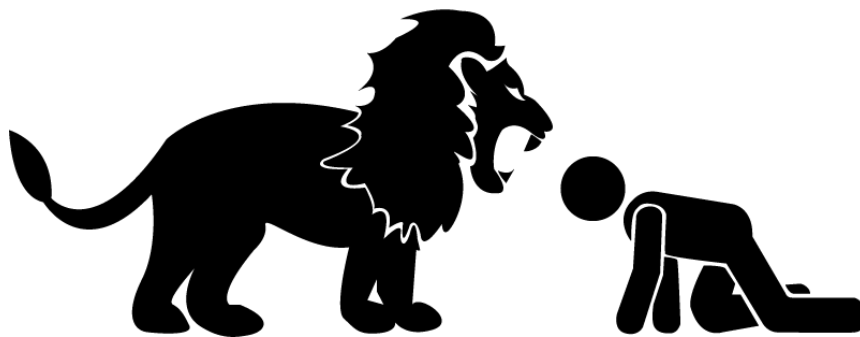
We’re not saved by works; we’re saved to do works!

9) A Mature Christian is _____ for his/her faith.

"Indeed, all who want to live in a godly way in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

2 Timothy 3:12 (NASB)

Be very careful not to misunderstand this verse! People all over the world suffer for Christ every day. However, when we look at our lives, we might begin to feel like we're not saved because we're not experiencing the same level of persecution of others. We might even begin to look for ways to be persecuted to affirm that we are His. Mature believers who are well versed in Scripture recognize that Christ is not calling us to go and find persecution so that we can suffer for His namesake. We don't need to look for lions' mouths to put our heads in.



Why don't we see more persecution in America?

We are blessed to have religious liberty and should never take it for granted. However, this is a double-edged sword. Sometimes, we hesitate to share the Gospel because we fear violating what others might consider their religious liberty. It's important to keep in mind that Jesus never promised us freedom from persecution; in fact, He promised just the opposite. All we need to do to experience persecution is promote this verse:

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man may come to the Father, except through Me.'"

John 14:6 (NASB)

**When we promote this teaching of Jesus,
rest assured that we will be persecuted for it!**

10) A Mature Christian has a _____ for the lost.

“And [Jesus] said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. The one who has believed and has been baptized will be saved; but the one who has not believed will be condemned.’”

Mark 16:15-16 (NASB)

It’s impossible to know the love of Christ and not feel the sting this verse delivers. All who refuse to trust in Jesus Christ will be condemned to hell! What a heart-breaking statement!

God could have used a variety of different means to deliver the Gospel. He could have decided to write the Gospel in the sky, or setup His headquarters at Mt. Horeb and continue to speak to us from the burning bush. Instead, God has decided to use us! God commands us to go. It is to our benefit that He uses us, not His! There is great joy to be found in being used for Christ!

When we grow in our understanding of God and we begin to get a picture for what a privilege it is to serve Him, we will want others to come to know Him as we do.

Can’t God save people even if we don’t share the gospel?

Of course He can!
However, every mature believer knows and believes the following:

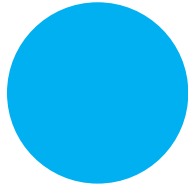
There are some things only God can do.

There are some things God refuses to do for us.

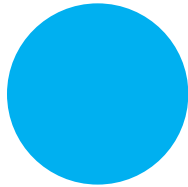
There are some things that can only be accomplished when we work together with God.

CONCLUSION

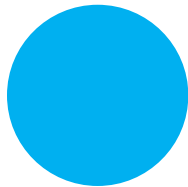
As you can see, a person's decision to come to Christ is just the beginning of their new life in Christ. Before we move into greater detail in the specifics of being a Christ follower, let's recap what we've learned so far.



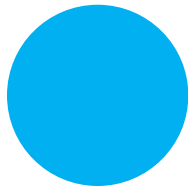
If we claim to be Christians, yet don't look anything like Jesus, it's either because we're not genuinely saved, or because we need to mature in Christ.



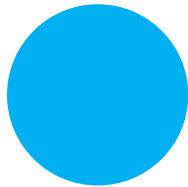
Our lives in Christ begin when we surrender our lives to Jesus and make an open confession that we are His followers. However, we must surrender to Jesus daily in order to grow into maturity.



When we grow in the Lord, we will develop a deep hunger for His word, stay in constant communication with Him through prayer, and watch for opportunities to serve Him.



When we live by the Spirit and take advantage of opportunities to promote Christ, we will suffer persecution from the world. When this happens, we must not despair, but take refuge in Christ!



When we come to know the goodness of God, He will place on our hearts a desire to tell others about Him. When we walk in obedience to Him and share the Gospel, we will experience profound joy in being used by God to bring others unto salvation.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

This section is to help you reflect on the information presented in this lesson. It is to your benefit to answer honestly and whole heartedly.

1. When did you make a Profession of Faith and when were you Baptized?

2. Who do you believe to be a genuine believer? Why do you think this about them?

3. Do you believe that if Christians were more vocal about John 14:6 (Jesus is the only way), they would experience persecution more often? Why or why not?

4. Evaluate how the following statements reflect your life:

a) "I surrender to Christ on a daily basis."

Not really				Absolutely
1	2	3	4	5

b) "I have no problem letting people know I'm a Christian."

Not really				Absolutely
1	2	3	4	5

c) "I have the full assurance of salvation."

Not really				Absolutely
1	2	3	4	5

d) "I can see many evidences of the Holy Spirit at work in me because I recognize many characteristics in me that are not 'of me'."

Not really				Absolutely
1	2	3	4	5

e) "I never miss an opportunity to gather with other believers."

Not really				Absolutely
1	2	3	4	5

f) "I study the Bible on a daily basis."

Not really				Absolutely
1	2	3	4	5

HOW TO BE A CHRISTIAN

g) "I never try to tackle a problem without praying about it first."

Not really				Absolutely
1	2	3	4	5

h) "I actively serve in the body of Christ."

Not really				Absolutely
1	2	3	4	5

i) "Whether people agree with me has no bearing on what I believe and promote."

Not really				Absolutely
1	2	3	4	5

j) "I regularly engage in conversation about Jesus with others."

Not really				Absolutely
1	2	3	4	5

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE



ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

According to a survey done by LifeWay Research in 2017, 90% of Protestant churchgoers say they want to please Jesus in all that they do, but only 19% of them report they personally read the Bible every day. Additionally, only 20% of church-attenders say they have read the whole Bible.¹

Does this survey make perfect sense to you? Have *you* ever tried to read the Bible only to give up after a short time? How do people get through such a massive book? Do you find the verses to be cryptic and confusing?



Perhaps you become easily frustrated when you study the Bible because you find it to be extremely boring. Maybe you made it to Genesis 5 and thought, *who cares who Noah's daddy was?*

Are others faking their enthusiasm when it comes to studying the Bible, or do they simply know something that you don't? Perhaps the psalmist was simply exaggerating when he penned these words:

"How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"

Psalm 119:103 (NASB)

Before we shove pages in our mouths, we should consider some reasons why many people fail to study Scripture.

¹ Americans Are Fond of the Bible, Don't Actually Read It
<https://research.lifeway.com/2017/04/25/lifeway-research-americans-are-fond-of-the-bible-dont-actually-read-it/>

THREE ERRORS MOST PEOPLE MAKE

1) We _____.

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

Hebrews 4:12 (NKJV)

The Bible is unlike any other book in that it is alive! This means that the words recorded in the Bible are God’s words! It is alive because God is alive and His written word is the primary means by which He communicates with us.

2) We _____.

“Make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; For if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God.”

Proverbs 2:2-5 (NASB)

Did you find something you didn’t understand? Pray about it! If we ask God for understanding, He will give it to us! Remember, the Bible’s primary purpose is to cultivate the relationship between the creator and His creation!

3) We _____.

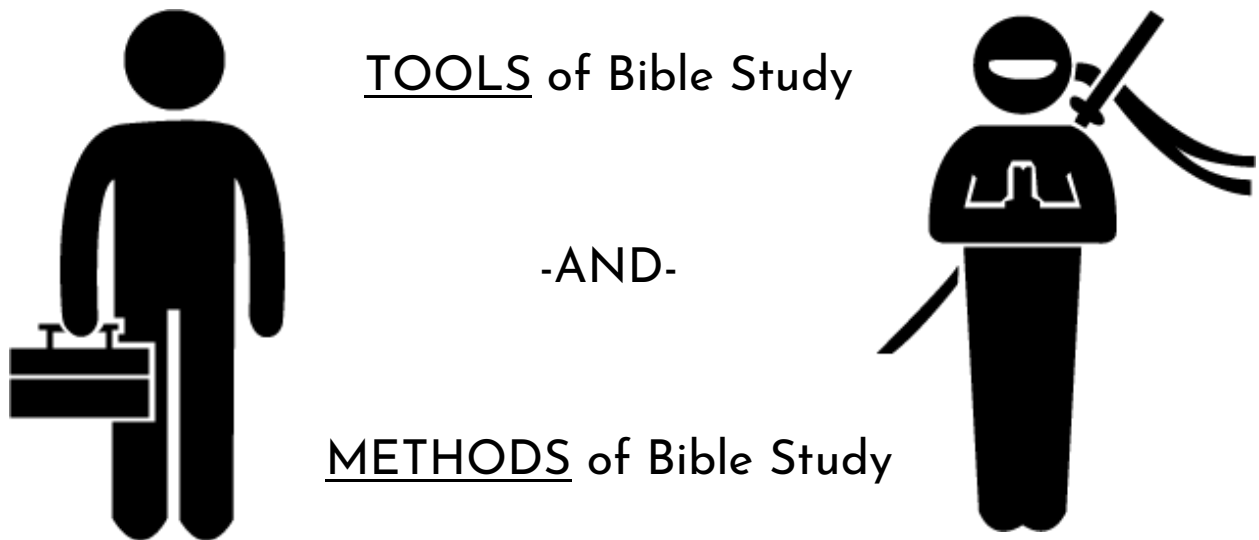
“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 6:21 (NASB)

The most common excuse why we fail to study Scripture is that we can believe we don’t have time to study. However, we must recognize that **we don’t have time not to study Scripture**. God is most glorified when we don’t have time to seek Him but do. We must prioritize His word because our future decisions depend on it!

THE TWO AREAS OF FOCUS FOR BIBLE STUDY

Because we will spend the rest of our lives studying Scripture, the subject of how to study the Bible is vast. To summarize, we will focus on two specific areas:



Before we dive into the first of these two areas of focus, it cannot be overstated how valuable a good Study Bible is! Within the past 50 years, several Christians have undertaken the task of making the Bible more accessible and interactive for believers everywhere. Study Bibles are a wonderful resource because they can help you interact with God's Word in a deeper and more meaningful way.

If you've walked into the Bible section of a Christian bookstore in the last twenty years, you've likely been overwhelmed by the variety of Study Bibles available to us. With so many different kinds, which one is right for you? Which translation should you choose?

Buying a Study Bible can be extremely simple, or extremely complicated depending on the person. If you're curious which Study Bible is right for you, check in the **Additional Resources section (page 86)** of this study guide for help. For the purposes of this study, we will be focusing on the tools available in the *John McArthur Study Bible* among other resources.

TOOLS OF BIBLE STUDY

1) Table of Contents

While it might seem silly to include the Bible's Table of Contents as a tool for proper Study, it's incredible how many people skip over this resource. In the Table of Contents, one can not only see where to find the books of the Bible, but also where to find additional information, such as: how the Bible was written, where to begin, an overview of Theology (the Study of God), charts, tables, maps, etc. It's important to become acquainted with the Table of Contents in your Bible because it shows everything that's available to you.

2) Commentary

If you've ever read a Bible verse and didn't understand what the verse was communicating, then you can understand why this is one of the greatest selling factors of a Study Bible. Commentaries provide clear and concise explanations of what we're reading. Of course, there is a danger associated with developing a dependence on commentaries. Relying on the commentary can be detrimental in that we can cut out our reliance on the Holy Spirit. Where commentaries can provide helpful information, we must also understand that they are written by men and women who have thought very hard about the verse. Although helpful, commentaries are not God's authoritative word!

3) Cross-Reference

It's been said that the best commentary on the Bible, is the Bible! That's where a good Cross-Reference comes in especially handy. If there is a challenging teaching in the Bible, the Cross-Reference allows us to find where similar verses in the Bible can be located. With this section of the Study Bible, a person can go as deep as they like into understanding a verse without fear of ending up on the dark side of the internet!

4) Concordance

Do you remember what a Bible verse says but struggle to know exactly where it's located? With a good concordance, all you need is one of the main keywords of a verse. For example, if we know the verse:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.”

Perhaps we don't remember where the verse is located even though we know what it says. In the concordance section, you might look under the words: trust, heart, or understanding and discover that the verse is in ***Proverbs 5:5!***

Special note: this might not provide any results in that the concordance at the end of your Bible is not exhaustive. For this, you might purchase an *Exhaustive Strong's Concordance*, or you might look it up in google like lazy people do!

5) Index of Key Bible Doctrines

Do you ever wonder how it is that your pastor seems to know the Bible so well? More than likely, this is just because he knows how to use the Index of Key Bible Doctrines. For example, for the advent season, how does the Pastor know where all the Messianic prophecies are not only located in the Old Testament, but Fulfilled in the New Testament? He's likely not a Bible Wizard, he has simply looked under the “Prophecies Fulfilled in Christ” in the Index of Key Bible Doctrines!

6) Chapter Introductions

In most Study Bibles, each book of the Bible comes with an Introduction explaining when it was written, who wrote it, why it was written, challenges the text presents/overcomes, the text outline, etc.

It is highly recommended that before you begin studying a book of the Bible that you read the introduction to that book first! It provides very helpful information that can give insight on why something was written.

7) Lexicon

Have you ever gotten into a debate with someone about what a Bible verse means, and you discover that, while you're both quoting Scripture, one of you is using one translation and the other is using another? Which one is right? This is where a good Lexicon comes in extremely handy. The Lexicon breaks a verse down by word in the original Greek or Hebrew. It also explains what the Greek or Hebrew word means.

8) Podcasts, Books, Online Sermons, Article, Bible App

If you have a question about the Bible, chances are someone has already asked that question and someone else has already answered it. We live in an age of information where just about anything can be googled. However, **please exercise caution** when you proceed with this step! Just because something has been published online does not make it true!

A pretty good rule of thumb when observing anything online, if it doesn't quote the Bible often (or at all) when explaining parts of the Bible/formulating opinions/principles, don't put a lot of stock into it. There are some resources for well-done podcasts, sermons, and online articles in the **Additional Resources section (Page 86)**.

9) Dramatized Audio Bibles

Sometimes an extremely helpful Bible Study tool is a Dramatized Audio reading of the Bible. Listening to the Bible acted out can be illuminating in that it can help us to understand what's written. However, sometimes there are religious liberties taken in the recording. While this can be helpful, It is not recommended that you allow an audio reading of the Bible to replace your physical reading of it if you are able. Both together, on the other hand, can be wonderful!

10) Daily Devotionals

One of the most useful tools for Bible Study is a Daily Devotional. Not all Daily Devotionals are created equally, however. The material we use at Runge FBC is *Table Talk* and *Open Windows*. As we get into methods of Bible Study, we will talk more about what these Daily Devotionals provide. For information in how to order these for yourselves, check the **Additional Resources section (86)**.

11) Parallel, Journaling, & Wide-Margin Bibles

There are many kinds of Bibles that can prove helpful as well. For example, in a Parallel Bible, multiple translations are presented side-by-side to help give the reader a better understanding of the meaning of a verse. Journaling Bibles allow you to reflect on what you're reading in journal format, and Wide-Margin Bibles allow you to make notes in the margins.

DISCLAIMER FOR BIBLE TOOLS

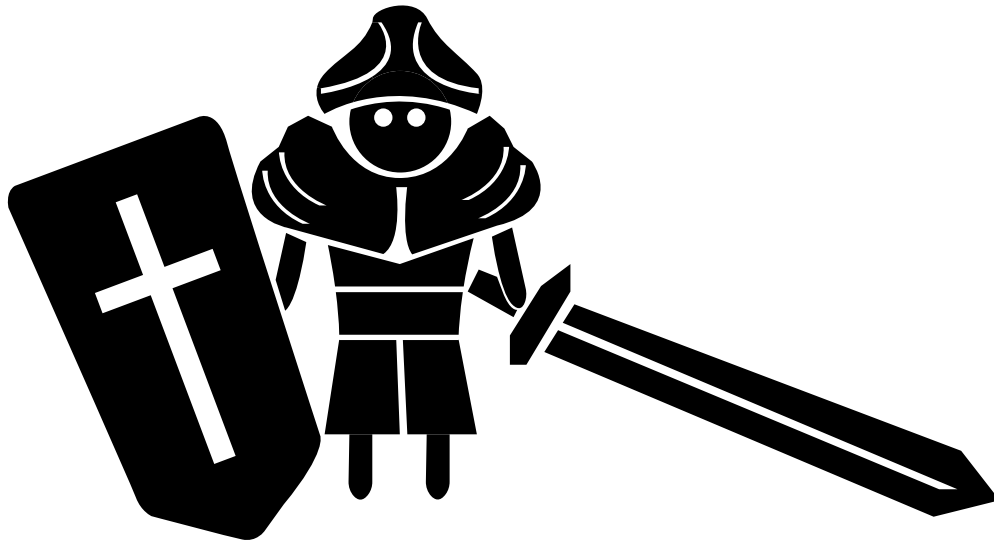
It should be noted that while an exhaustive list of Bible study tools has not been provided, the tools that have been provided will take you some time to master. Studying the Bible is a life-long process!



Hopefully, after reviewing these tools you're not disappointed that the Great and Powerful Oz you see preaching on Sunday Morning is just another man behind the curtain. Your pastor is likely an educated man, in that he knows how to use these tools. However, your pastor is still just a man! That shouldn't be a disappointment to us, it should encourage us! If God can use our pastor, He can also use us! Learn to use these tools and you can study the Bible like your pastor does!

DISCLAIMER FOR METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

Before we jump into individual methods, we must recognize that if we're looking for the go-to Bible Study that will fit our situation perfectly for the rest of our lives, said Bible study doesn't exist. No method or resource can/should replace your dependence on the Holy Spirit. Also, while these methods can be helpful, if you're not careful, they can also resemble David in King Saul's armor.



Don't get stuck in a method someone else uses because you respect them. The method of study you use needs to be personalized and developed over time to be most effective. It will be very unlikely that the method you use will stay the same forever. As we develop and grow in maturity, what we need for supplemental material will decrease.

Also, while the Bible is God's authoritative word, it's also your Bible. One of the saddest things in the world is a person's Bible which has no marks in it. Bible studies are designed to be interactive and if you don't interact with it, it is less effective.

To get the most out of your Bible Study, don't be afraid to write/highlight/take notes in your Bible!

METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

1) The _____ Approach

Think of this as trying to get the big picture of Scripture. This is done by reading large sections of Scripture (several chapters / books) in one sitting to get the big picture of what is being communicated. The Bible in a Year resource in *Table Talk* is a great example of how to take on this approach.

2) The _____ Approach

Where the previous approach focuses on the big picture, this approach looks at individual words and verses. This is done by reading small sections of Scripture (several words / verses) to go deeper in application of each verse. *Table Talk* does this well because, in each daily study, the reader only studies a few verses at a time.

3) The _____ Approach

This approach takes a topic or theme and studies it extensively. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways. One approach is to look up a key word in the Index to Key Bible Doctrines. You can also purchase Bible Study Software (like *Illumina* or *Logos 9*) but this can be expensive. You can also check out the *Bible App* which provides themed Bible Studies and daily readings for the user.

4) The _____ Approach

With this approach, you will focus on one chapter at a time. After reading the chapter, you commit to memory what you are reading by writing a paragraph explaining what the chapter is about. You will also choose one verse to memorize which will help you remember the overview of the chapter, along with some key words.

Example of the Chapter Outline Approach:

John 18 Overview:

Christ is arrested. Despite the arrest and trial of Jesus, He remained in full control, willingly and humbly submitting Himself over to the authorities in order to do His Father's will and bring salvation to the lost world.

Memory verse:

"So when He said to them, 'I AM He,' they drew back and fell to the ground."

John 18:6 (NASB)

Key words:

"In Control"

5) The _____ Approach

In this approach, you attempt to memorize chapters at a time. It can be extremely beneficial to commit Scripture to memory, especially whole chapters. Verbatim memorization also helps us to meditate on each word.

6) The _____ Approach

Here, you will focus your study on specific words. If you look in your concordance, you can find many verses that have a specific word in it and meditate on those verses. For example, find and study every verse that has "forgive" in it. This could then help you articulate why it's important to forgive others.

7) The _____ Approach

It can be very fruitful to make marks in your Bible. However, it's especially helpful to have a method for the madness. With this approach you will have a legend of markings somewhere in your Bible explaining what each mark/highlight means and use those marks/highlights as you study a passage.

Example of the Marking System Approach:

Marking Legend:

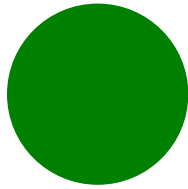
- = Interesting Point
- ? = Something I don't understand and need further study on
- _ = A Command in Scripture
- = Promise from God
- △ = Spiritual warfare
- = Repeated words in a passage

Marking Example:

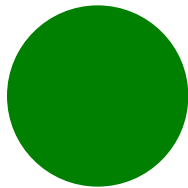
“When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, [?] ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs in the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.’ ”

CONCLUSION

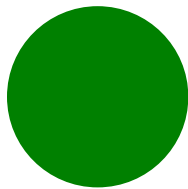
As you study the Bible you may decide to use some of these methods, or none of them. It's up to you to build a system that works for you! Before we end this section, let's re-consider these main points:



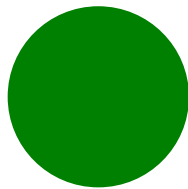
If we desire to please the Lord in all that we do, we must learn what the Lord wants us to do from His written word. If we don't enjoy reading the Bible, our treasure is elsewhere, and we must pray that God changes our heart.



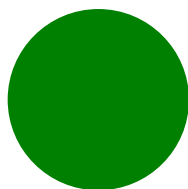
Treating the Bible like it's any other book, giving up too easily without praying, and failing to commit to daily study are common mistakes that many people make regarding the study of God's word.



To get the most out of our Bible studies, we must learn to utilize the tools that are available to us either inside our Study Bibles or available online or other places.



We should experiment with methods to discover what works best for us as we open God's word and look for what He has for us to receive.



We will receive the most from Scripture when we believe that there is treasure located within its depths. The more time we devote to discovering what God has in store for us, the more we will receive from Him!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

This section is to help you reflect on the information presented in this lesson. It is to your benefit to answer honestly and whole heartedly.

1. Do you believe that the Bible is unlike any other book? Why or why not?

2. Do you think you give up too easily when it comes to things you don't understand? Why or why not?

3. Does your pastor's knowledge of Scripture seem more attainable after you know about the tools he uses to study? Why or why not?

4. Which of the tools of Bible Study do you find most and least appealing? Why?

5. Which of the methods of Bible Study do you find most and least appealing? Why?

HOW TO PRAY



WHY NOT, LORD?

“You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask with the wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

James 4:2b-3 (NASB)

Have you ever wondered why it is that we don't see more people come to Christ? Why is the church often full of worldliness? Why don't we see more Spiritual activity such as miraculous healings? Why is it so difficult to get some people to get excited about the things of God?

The answer to each of these questions has to do with prayer. As James says, either we're not spending time on our knees asking for God's provision, or we're asking with the wrong motives.

Which of these two are you often more in danger of, not praying or asking with the wrong motives? Explain your answer.

NEGLECT OF GENUINE PRAYER

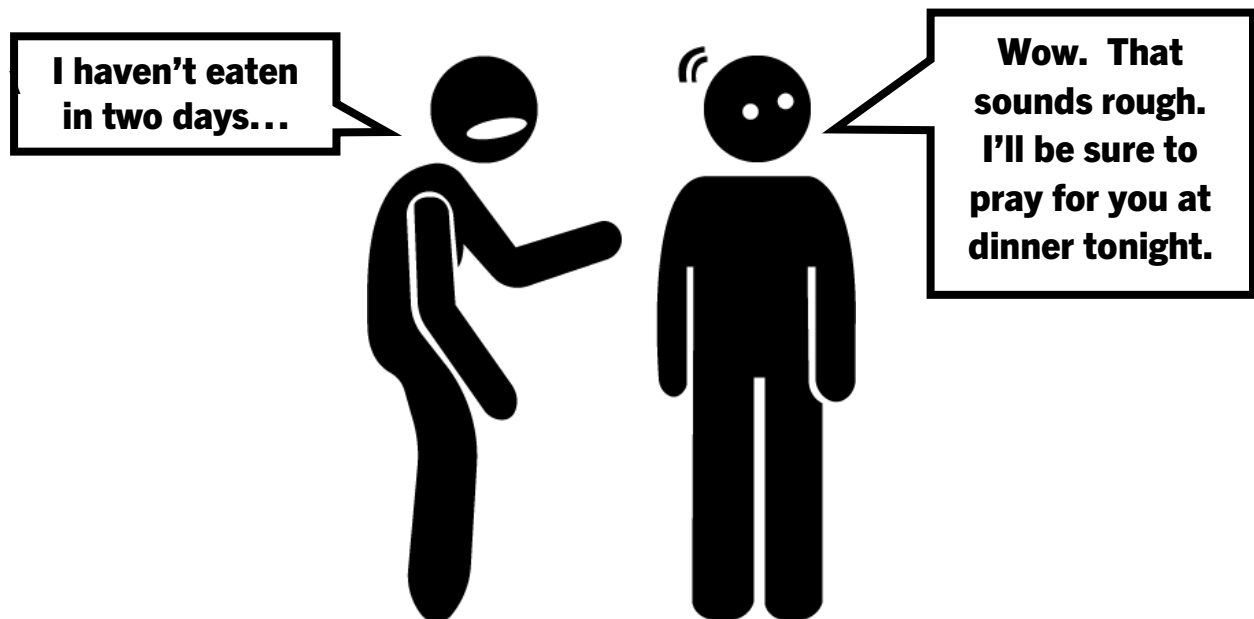
How many times have we said, “Oh! I’ll pray for you!” but then we neglect to follow through? Sometimes we witness heartache or suffering, and we know that we should pray about it, we just don’t. This might be because we see the “pray for you” response as our means of escaping the uncomfortable realities of relationships with others.

If things are going to be different, we must pray! Then again, we must never see prayer as a means of removing the responsibility of caring for others.

“If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed, and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?”

James 2:15-16 (NASB)

The “Go in peace, be warmed, and be filled,” response in this passage is the equivalent of what many of us really mean when we say, “I’ll pray for you!” As James asks, “What use is that?”



Prayer must never be used as an escape from compassion but as a means of caring for others.

THREE COMMON HINDRANCES OF PRAYER

1) _____ will hinder our prayers.

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and [money].”

Matthew 6:24 (NASB)

God won't answer our prayers when we ask with selfish motives. Selfishness is indicative of a greater problem: we think we are the Lord of our lives. Jesus won't share Lordship with us! Either He is our master, or we are. If we are, we shouldn't ask Him for anything for we are responsible for providing for ourselves. If He is, then we should submit to praying for that which advances His kingdom, not ours.

2) _____ will hinder our prayers.

“If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear.”

Psalms 66:18 (NASB)

All the world's problems are brought on by sin. Sin entices, enslaves, and eliminates us. What sense does it make for God to grant our pleas for freedom from enslavement only to return to our sin as a dog returns to vomit? We must repent from our sins and not turn back if we want our prayers to carry weight in God's ears!

3) _____ will hinder our prayers.

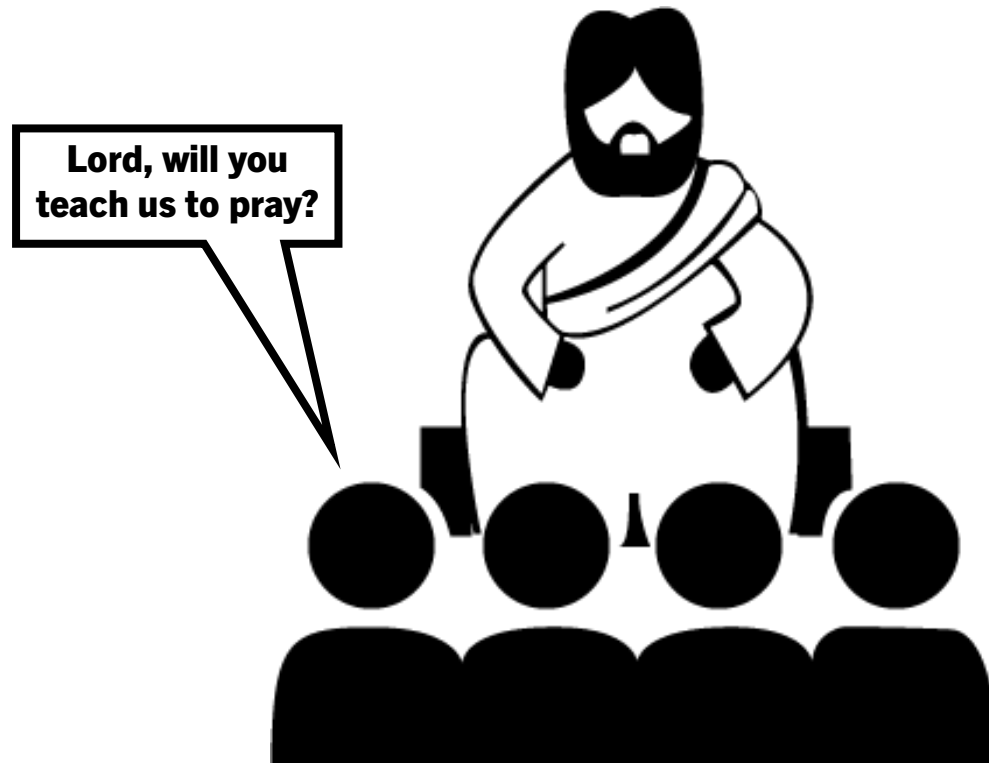
“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

Mark 11:25 (NIV)

When we are not in the right relationship with others, we're not in the right relationship with God! Before we pray, we must remember that we can only do so because of His forgiveness of us; thus we must follow His example and forgive others.

THE EXAMPLE OF PRAYER

No one modelled prayer like Jesus! His prayers were so powerful that his disciples noticed a difference between their prayer life and His. So much so, they asked:



Before we look at this teaching, it should be said that the Lord's Prayer is located in two places in the Gospels (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4) and, while similar, they are not identical. Where this might seem like a contradiction to some, it is intentional to teach us something important. In Matthew, Jesus says, "Pray, then, **in this way:**" but in Luke, He says, "When you pray, **say:**".

Should all our prayers be the exact same words of Jesus? Or is He teaching us the basic principles of prayer? While sometimes it's beneficial to pray the actual words of Jesus so that we might identify with Him in prayer, the purpose of this teaching is to show us the principles of prayer. In other words, the Lord's Prayer shows us the components every prayer should have.

What are these components of prayer? Let's look at them together.

THE COMPONENTS OF POWERFUL PRAYER

1) _____

“Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.”

Matthew 6:9b (NASB)

We must remember who we’re addressing in our prayers! It is because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus that we can lift our petitions before the Holy God of the universe! Not only have we been blessed with the privilege to take our petitions before the Lord, we do so as His children!

“For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’”

Romans 8:15 (NASB)

We have the right to come before our Heavenly father as a son or daughter. However, this should never lead us to believe that dishonor or disrespect will be tolerated by God. He is deserving of all our worship, adoration, praise, honor, and respect. Before we ever make a request before God, we must keep this in our minds.

2) _____

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Matthew 6:10 (NASB)

In our prayers there must also be humility. Sometimes we can wonder why our prayer requests aren’t being granted. Perhaps the reason for this is that we shouldn’t be making that request in the first place! If we’re asking for things to build our kingdom and to do our will instead of God’s, we’re not submitting to His Lordship.

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but to do the will of Him who sent Me.”

John 6:38 (NASB)

3) _____

"Give us this day our daily bread."

Matthew 6:11 (NASB)

Submission to God's will does not mean that we can't ask for something we don't have. Health, wealth, and happiness are blessings from the Lord, and we are free to ask for them. However, we must not worship these things! If we are hungry, we can ask for bread, but we must not miss the greater blessing found in Jesus and His Holy Spirit. We must remember what Jesus said the day *after* He fed the 5,000 as they came looking for their next portion of daily bread.

"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in me will never thirst.'"

John 6:35 (NASB)

4) _____

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

Matthew 6:12 (NASB)

Sometimes we miss the audacity of this verse because we can take the forgiveness from God for granted. Forgive us our debts! Who are we to ask something like this? We must know that we can never work off our debt. Our good deeds will never outweigh or negate our bad ones. We are law breakers who need mercy! This mercy, however, is not without effect in our lives. We must, therefore, forgive!

"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

Matthew 6:14 (NASB)

Isn't this a works-based salvation? Jesus is not advocating that you earn your forgiveness by forgiving others. He's explaining that it is impossible to have the forgiveness of God, and not forgive others. If we refuse to forgive the sins of others, it can only be because we have not recognized our outstanding debt before the Father and have not personally experienced our debt being wiped clean. The principle is simple: we forgive because He forgave us!

5) _____

“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Matthew 6:13a (NASB)

We must recognize the reality of our situation and acknowledge the Spiritual warfare taking place all around us. We are constantly bombarded by things to deter us from doing the will of God. This includes temptation.

Have you ever noticed how we can't seem to be content in our service to God for very long until something extremely sinful is presented to us? This is because of Spiritual warfare! Satan will do anything and everything in his power to keep us from serving God. Thankfully, there is an answer for temptation.

“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NASB)

It is foolishly believed that God will never give us more than we are able to handle. If we never had more than we could handle, we would never cry out for Jesus in prayer! We are promised in Scripture that we will never be tempted more than we are able to handle! Which, in a way, is another nail in the coffin for us as to why we need a savior. Every time we gave into sin, there was always a way out! When temptation comes, we must look to God for an escape.

If temptation fails, Satan will change his methods and attack us personally. In the story of Job, we see that God gave permission to Satan to destroy Job's life. Sometimes this meant physical suffering and other times it was heartache. Regardless of what comes our way, prayer is the means for deliverance from God!

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Luke 22:31-32 (NASB)

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT PRAYER

1) If God is Sovereign, why pray?

If God is all-knowing, all-powerful, in all places, and all-loving, why should we have to ask for anything at all? Why doesn't He just give us what we need? Jesus said, "For your Father knows of what things you need before you ask Him," in Matthew 6:8!

The simple answer to this question is that we pray because we're commanded to. However, going deeper we see that God not only ordains the ends, He also ordains the means. In other words, if we are in fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit, God will lead us to pray because what breaks His heart will also break ours. We pray because, in doing so, we are brought into a closer relationship with God.

2) Does prayer change God's mind?

Remember when God told Moses He was about to destroy the nation of Israel because, while Moses was up on the mountain, the people were down on the ground worshiping a golden calf they created? Moses begged for God not to do that and Scripture says,

"So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people."

Exodus 32:14 (NASB)

Does this promote that prayer changes God's mind? Absolutely not!

"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change His mind. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not fulfill it?"

Numbers 23:19 (ESV)

Well, then what happened with Moses? God was not telling Moses what He had decided, but what He was about to do if nothing else was done. The purpose of God telling Moses was so that this information would cause Moses would take responsibility for God's people. Our prayers are not convincing God to change His mind. He does not lack information that He needs to be corrected. He is all-knowing!

3) Does prayer change things?

Absolutely! Note the change in this question from the last one. Prayer does not change God's mind. However, prayer absolutely changes things!

"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit."

James 5:13-18 (NASB)

The book of James is unique from all the other New Testament books because it is what is referred to as "Wisdom Literature". Proverbs is an example of Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament. James is full of wisdom and practical advice. However, it does not promote a teaching that suggest that every time we pray, it will or will not rain.

4) I prayed for the mountain to move, and nothing happened! Does this mean I lack faith?

Perhaps, but it could indicate a deeper problem. Mountains need to move when they are in God's way, not just ours. When we're commissioned by God to move forward but can't because there is a mountain in our way, that's when we should speak to the mountain. We don't speak to mountains because we want to exercise power.

Remember, God reserves the right to say no! He is God, after all. Paul said,

"So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'"

2 Corinthians 12:7-8 (ESV)

God's refusal to remove Paul's thorn from the flesh was for his own good. He would have become conceited otherwise. May our response in times of refusal mimic Job:

"Though He slay me, yet I will trust in Him."

Job 13:15 (KJV)

5) Is praying, “if it be your will...” sinful?

Is it an indicator of a weak/sinful prayer to say, “if it be your will...” in our prayers? Shouldn't we boldly and ask for what we want/need in Jesus name without undermining the prayer by saying, “if it be in accordance with your will”?

Not at all! Remember, if anyone should be imitated, it was Jesus. Before Jesus went to the cross, He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. This prayer was so intense that Scripture says His sweat was falling like drops of blood (Luke 22:44).

“And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.’”

Matthew 26:39 (NASB)

If praying, “if it be your will...” is sinful, then Jesus wasn't without sin. If Jesus was a sinner, then He couldn't have made atonement for us on the cross and we're still in our sins!

It's not sinful to pray according to God's will. Furthermore, prayer is one of the means by which we come to discover God's will because the Holy Spirit reveals things to us in prayer.

6) Is there a specific time I should pray?

The answer to this question is dependent upon the person. Daniel reportedly prayed three times a day, once in the morning, once at noon, and once at night. Setting aside time each day to spend time with the Lord in prayer is not only wise, it's healthy. While our prayer lives should exhibit consistency, they must not become ritualistic. Our prayers aren't answered in at specific times of the day like a call center for a major corporation. As Paul tells us,

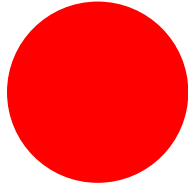
“Pray without ceasing.”

1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NASB)

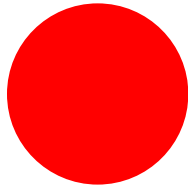
We must not think of prayer in terms of throwing a message in a bottle out in the ocean hoping somebody finds it soon. Nor should we think of prayer as a once-a-day phone call. Instead, we should see that prayer is a continual conversation with the Lord because He is always with us!

CONCLUSION

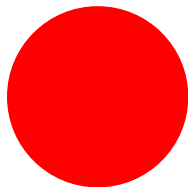
Prayer in its simplest form is being in communication with God. However, because it is not something that just naturally happens, let us reconsider these main points from this study:



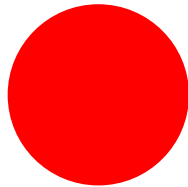
If we are to stay in close relationship with God, we must pray! Prayer not only allows us to connect with the Father, it also helps us to be in touch with what others are struggling with and how God would have us help them.



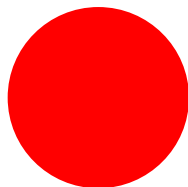
We must root out any reason why our prayers might be hindered. This includes repenting from selfish motives, sin, and rebellion against forgiving others.



Jesus not only taught His disciples how to pray, He also left a model for us to follow. This model includes Reverence, Submission, Supplication, Intercession, and prayers for Protection.



God is Sovereign and is all-knowing. Our prayers do not change God's mind. However, our prayers do change things.



If we are in submission to and fellowship with God, what we ask for in Jesus' name will be granted to us. We should strive for a consistent prayer life that is not empty and ritualistic.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

This section is to help you reflect on the information presented in this lesson. It is to your benefit to answer honestly and whole heartedly.

1. How can we keep from using prayer as an escape from compassion?

2. Is there anyone in your life you've had great difficulty forgiving? Explain your answer.

3. What are some ways to balance a consistent prayer life without it becoming ritualistic?

HOW TO KNOW GOD'S WILL



A FORK IN THE ROAD

"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."

Proverbs 19:21 (NIV)

Alice came to a fork in the road and pondered to herself which way she should go. Looking for guidance, she found only a Cheshire cat grinning back at her.



"Which way should I go?" Alice asked the cat.

"That depends on your destination. Where are you going?" the cat asked back.

"I don't know," admitted Alice.

"Then," said the cat, with his grin getting wider, "it doesn't matter which way you go."

The classic story of *Alice in Wonderland* represents every single person at a certain stage in their life. Sooner or later, each of us will want to know which way we should go. As the Cheshire cat points out for Alice, unless we have spent some time contemplating our final destination, we cannot figure out which pathway we should take.

Christians have a promise from Scripture that our destination is fixed. We believe God when He tells us in His word that there is a new Jerusalem waiting for us at the end of the road. However, because His kingdom is not of this world, we become just as perplexed as Alice whenever we meet a fork in the road. We know where God has promised we will end up, but what should we be doing in the meantime?

A MESSAGE FROM GOD

Sometimes we will do just about anything to receive clarity and direction from the Lord. No story in Scripture exemplifies just how desperate we can become than the story of King Saul in 1 Samuel chapter 28. Because of Saul's disobedience, God removed His blessing from Him and had anointed a young shepherd boy, named David, to be the next King. For most of King Saul's reign, he enjoyed the luxury of having an easy answer from the Lord. All he had to do was ask Samuel, God's anointed prophet, and he would be told all he needed to know to do God's will. However, when Samuel died, Philistines invaded Israel and threatened to topple Saul's dynasty.

"When Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly. When Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets."

1 Samuel 28:5-6 (NASB)

Scripture tells us that Saul became so desperate that he did something he knew to be a great sin before the Lord! He disguised himself, went to a witch of in the land of Endor, and had her summon the prophet Samuel back from the dead so he could ask for an easy answer. King Saul's disobedience did not go without punishment. Not only would he be removed as King, but he was also told that he and all his sons would die in battle the following day.

The irony is that Samuel was repeatedly told God's will, but because he didn't like what he heard, he kept looking for a new word from the Lord and His refusal to accept the Lord's message brought on total disaster for him and all his house.

Can you give an example of a time when God told/showed you something you didn't like? How did you respond?

SIGN SEEKING

We can often make the very same mistake as King Saul in that God has already told us what we should be doing, but like Saul, we don't like the message we've received. So, we sin against God and ask for a new message. We might even start looking for a sign from heaven instead of simply being obedient to that which God has already given us. Jesus puts this into perspective for us.

"But he answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation craves a sign; and so no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet.'"

Matthew 12:39 (NASB)

What do you think the difference is between seeking a sign from heaven and seeking confirmation?

Often the things God tells us are so unusual to us that we have no concept on how God is going to accomplish it; thus, we need confirmation. However, there is a difference between wanting clarification and wanting a new message because we didn't like what we heard.

What do you think are some ways that we can find confirmation for what God has told/shown us?

BREAKING THE MOLD

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Romans 12:2 (NIV)

The pattern of this world was established in the Garden of Eden when the first man and woman went against what God told them. Ever since then, the pattern of this world has been to sin by seeking knowledge, enjoyment, and purpose away from God. Notice that Paul says in Romans 12:2 that the only way we can truly know the will of God is if we have been transformed by the renewing of our minds.

In other words, we must not think like the world. Where those in the world are out to get ahead and promote their own name, Christians are called to put others first and promote the name of Jesus Christ.

“For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”

Romans 8:29 (NASB)



Like the potter with the clay, God has in mind who He wants us to become before He begins with us. God the Father is actively molding and transforming us into the person of God the Son. This is His predestined purpose for us! According to the Bible, whatever message/direction God sends us, it will always be to help mold us into the image of Jesus, not to be more like the world!

**God will NEVER lead us
away from becoming
more and more like Jesus!**

GOD TOLD ME SO!

Ancient Israelites were extremely cautious about presuming they had a word from the Lord. They were so careful; they wouldn't even use the vowels when writing God's name (Yahweh) for fear that they might misuse or misrepresent the name of God in some way. Today, however, it's becoming increasingly difficult to find a movie or book that's not using God's name as a cussword.

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain."

Exodus 20:7 (NASB)

Blaspheming the name of the Lord is a terrible sin that our culture continually commits. However, there is a greater sin regarding God's name that happens inside the church more often than outside. This happens whenever we say, "God told me so!" when He didn't!

In the Hebrew, the word for "take" is "tissa" which means, "to lift" or "to carry". We take/carry the Lord's name in vain when we promote our agenda as if it came from God. Many great sins have been committed throughout history in the Lord's name for this very reason! This is a greater sin than using God's name as a cuss word because it not only elevates us above God, but it also destroys the credibility of God's name in the world. When God's reputation is ruined, why would anyone turn to Him? God will not stand for it!



This raises a serious issue. Sometimes we pass our ideas off as if they were God's. How then can we know that something really is the will of God, and isn't just an exaggeration of a pushy person? Should we listen to others when they say, "God told me!"?

OH, YEAH? WELL GOD TOLD ME...

In 1 Kings 13, an unnamed prophet was given direct instruction from the Lord to carry a message to the King and then depart a different way than he came. He was instructed not to eat or drink anything while in the land. This was God's way of telling him that he needed to be quick. He was not to mingle with the people or compromise the message.

However, after delivering the message, the man seemed to take his time leaving. Another unnamed prophet came to him and asked if he would come to his house and eat with him. When the first prophet refuses because of what God told him the second prophet claims to have his own word from the Lord.

"I am also a prophet like you, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.' But he lied to him."

1 Kings 13:18 (NASB)

Why would the second prophet lie? The answer is not given in Scripture, we can only assume. We can say that it would have likely been to the second prophet's financial and political benefit if he returned to the king with the prophet in question. In short, the second prophet had selfish motives.

Scripture tells us that the first prophet returns with the second and disobeys the Lord by eating and drinking. Because of his disobedience, God tells him he will be killed and later sends a lion to kill him. This deception also brings destruction on the house of the King and the lying prophet. There are two very important lessons for us to learn from this passage:

1) Fabricating a "word from the Lord" when truly, we have selfish motives has serious, often deadly,

2) No matter what we're told by others, we need to follow our _____

HOW GOD SPOKE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,"

Hebrews 1:1 (NIV)

How God spoke to people in the past is important. In the Old Testament, God spoke to human beings in many ways. Sometimes He pulled back the clouds and spoke directly from heaven. Other times, He spoke through dreams or through prophets. Occasionally, He sent angels with messages. Once He even spoke from a burning bush. Henry and Richard Blackaby make several important points to these occurrences in their book *Experiencing God*.

WHEN GOD SPOKE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

1) When God spoke, _____.

When God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, that experience was unique to him. No other person in all of history has ever had God speak to them in this way.

2) When God spoke, _____.

How do you know it's God speaking to you? You just do. Where this isn't the most detailed answer, it rings true. No where in the Old Testament do we see God speaking to someone and they weren't sure if it was God or not.

3) When God spoke, _____.

In every case when God spoke to those in the Old Testament, there was absolutely no confusion. Each person not only knew it was God speaking, but they also knew what God said! God is quite capable of delivering messages to us and ensuring that the message is received loud and clear.

HOW GOD SPEAKS TODAY

"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He also made the universe."

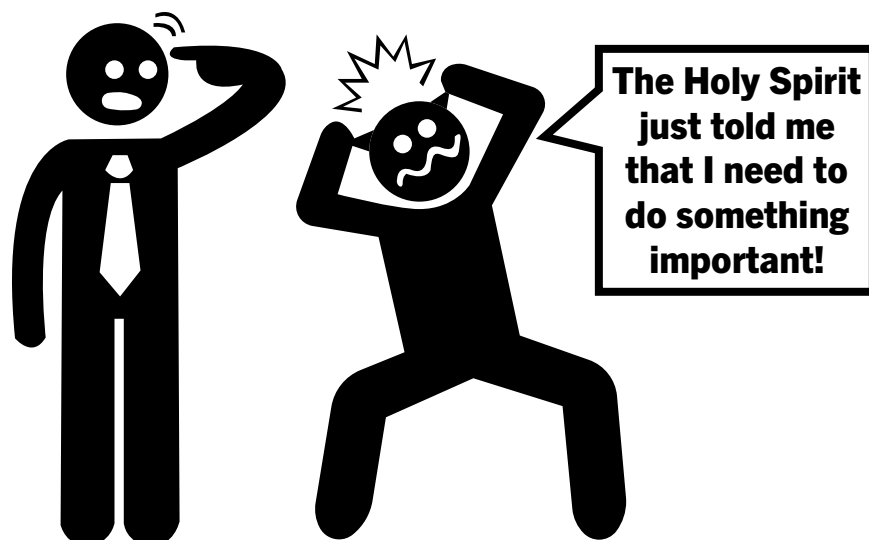
Hebrews 1:1-2 (NIV)

Before Jesus was born, the Bible tells us there was 400 years of silence from God. God broke His silence when He took on the form of human flesh and dwelt with us. According to Hebrews, every time Jesus spoke, the people who were listening were having an encounter with God. However, when Jesus walked the earth, the Son of God was limited to being in one place at a time. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He promises His disciples that He will send the Holy Spirit to lead and guide them.

"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you."

John 14:16-17 (NASB)

Through faith in Jesus Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit who takes up residence in our hearts and guides us in the way that we should go. As Jesus said, this will not make sense to people in the world because they do not see, nor do they know, the Holy Spirit. To the world, Christians will seem crazy, but they cannot understand because they do not have the Holy Spirit!



WAYS GOD SPEAKS THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

1) God speaks to us through _____.

Not only has God given us a general instruction through the Great Commission to make disciples and share the Gospel, but He also speaks to us through the Bible. This is the primary means by which God speaks to His children through the Holy Spirit. When we read God's word, the Holy Spirit reveals truth to us which requires us to make the necessary adjustments to be in obedience to God. God will never lead us to do something that contradicts His written word.

2) God speaks to us through _____.

As we've discussed in the previous study, prayer is a two-way communication with God. Not only do we speak to Him, He speaks to us! Prayer does not just include speaking but listening as well. When we pray, the Holy Spirit can remind us of and reinforce Scripture in our minds.

3) God speaks to us through _____.

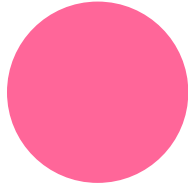
We must be careful with this teaching. Although it is true that God can/does/will speak to us through circumstance, it's also the easiest to misinterpret. For example, in Jesus' day, a man born blind was either, a sinner, or a son of sinners. However, Jesus corrected this false misreading of circumstance and pointed out God's ultimate purpose was to have His glory revealed through it. Whenever one door opens, it might mean that it's time to walk through it. However, before you do, it would be best to look for other confirmation through the other means.

4) God speaks to us through _____.

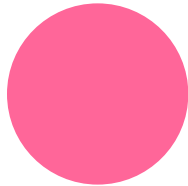
Christians were meant to be in community. God places every member in a church to accomplish His purpose. Apart from the body of Christ, we cannot fully know God's will because His will always involves His people. The best practice when seeking God's will is to have it confirmed through His word, prayer, circumstances, and His church.

CONCLUSION

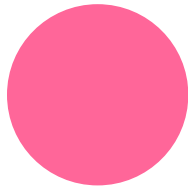
The best practice when considering God's will is not to jump at the first emotion you feel or message you hear. To fully understand and know God's will, let's reconsider what we've learned in this study:



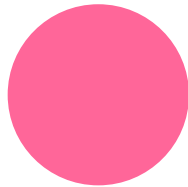
We must be extremely careful not to presume God's will. Speaking for God when He has not given us words is a recipe for destruction.



Where God spoke in the Old Testament through a variety of different means, He now speaks to us through His son, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sent.



The Holy Spirit will guide us to bring our thoughts and behavior into balance with God's written word and supreme will. We must not be deterred from the fact the world will not understand the direction of the Holy Spirit.



God's primary source of instruction and communication is going to be in His written word. We must not look for other ways to discern God's will while ignoring Scripture.



The best practice for discovering God's will is not by using one means, but many. We must seek for confirmation of God's will in His written word, prayer, circumstances, and the fellowship we enjoy with other believers.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

This section is to help you reflect on the information presented in this lesson. It is to your benefit to answer honestly and whole heartedly.

1. Have you ever heard God speak to you? If so, what did He say? If not, why not?

2. Why do you think people in the world look for "other" ways to discern God's will and yet stay far away from the Bible and the church?

3. Do you agree that Christians are promoted as being crazy for promoting/following the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?

4. What would you consider to be some atrocities in our culture today that are wrongly done in the name of God?

5. God desires a relationship with you that is unique and personal. How does your relationship with God reflect this truth?

6. Of the many ways God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit, how has God spoken to you the most often? Explain your answer.

HOW TO SERVE GOD



A MIDLIFE CRISIS

“Brothers and sisters, I do not regard myself as having taken hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:13-14 (NASB)

Many people between the years of 35 - 60 experience a midlife crisis. This is usually seen as a period when a person enters a depressed state and begins to reevaluate his or her direction and purpose in life. This can lead to a longing to regain our youth in which we might go on frivolous spending sprees or to seek adventure in some way. It might also lead to mixed feelings about unmet goals, emptiness of relationships, or a sense of uselessness.

This common experience should show us something important. Everyone wants their life to count for something! We know that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions and that money cannot buy happiness. We desire more! We long purpose; a sense that our life matters. This desire is so deep in us that whenever we first meet someone these three questions are asked: “What is your name?” “Where are you from?” and “What do you do?”

The mature Christian understands that he/she is supposed to contribute to the Kingdom of God. Thus, we are keenly interested in how to best serve God. We’ve looked at the ways in which God speaks to us in the previous study. Now it’s time to get down to the deeper question we have when we ask, “How can I know God’s will?”. That question is, “What should I be doing with my life?”

OUR GENERAL VOCATION

The word “vocation” comes from the Latin word meaning, “calling”. Although the word has lost its significance in our culture today, to ask someone, “What is your vocation?” is to ask them, “What calling has the Lord placed on your life?”

Of course, our culture would recognize that what we do for a living is not who we are. However, the mature believer understands that what we do for God is the purpose for which we have been created.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

Ephesians 2:10 (NASB)

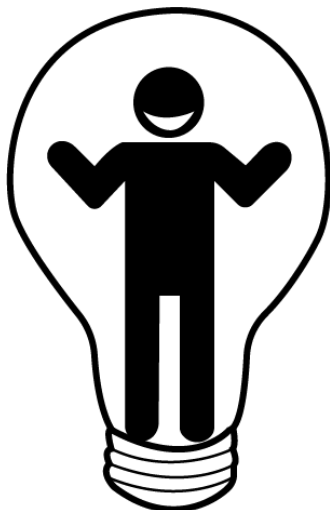
God has good work for us to do. We have been created on purpose for a purpose; to do the good works He has prepared for us to do. So how do we discover what these good works are? How can we know exactly what we should be doing for God?

Before we examine these questions, we must first understand the general vocation God has placed on every single believer in the world. Jesus explained it this way:

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 5:14-16 (NASB)

Sometimes the smallest light can make the greatest difference when it is in the darkest place!



What do you think “letting your light shine” means?

FINDING YOUR CALLING

Thousands of books have been written to help a person discover their calling. However, many of these writings are a complete waste of time because they start from the wrong place! These books put the emphasis on us by asking things like, "What do you enjoy doing?"

Our calling doesn't begin with us! It begins with the one who calls us! Please note, if it is our calling, we will find deep fulfillment in it, however, the focus must not be on us but on Him. So, the question is not, "What do you enjoy doing?" but, "What has God said to you?"

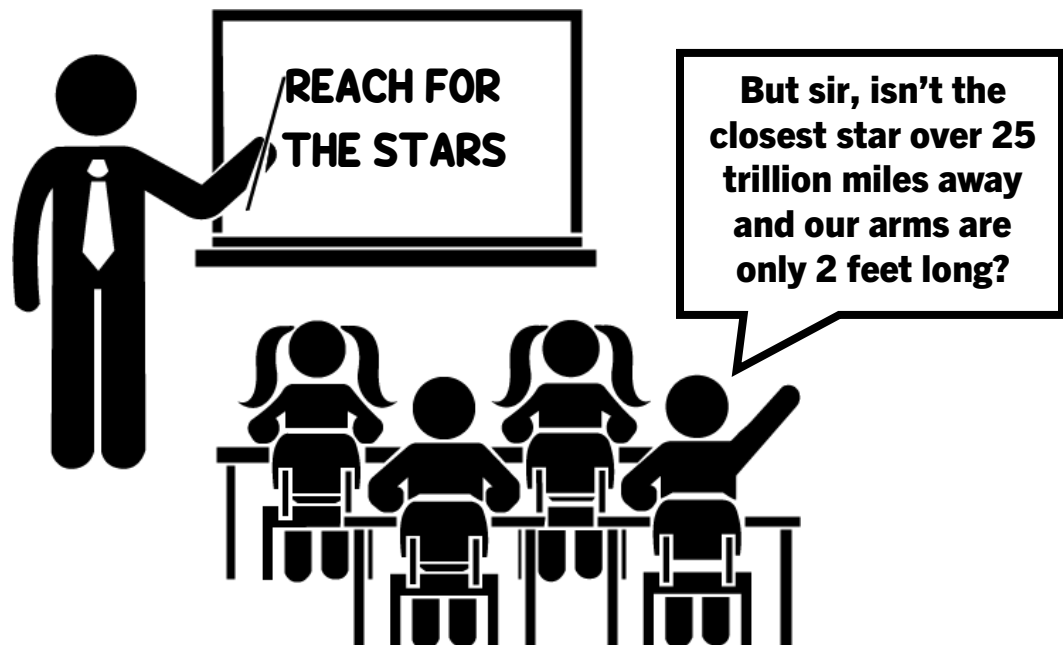
Who gets to determine our calling?

Circle the correct answer:

Us

God

Some of the things we've been taught need to be unlearned because they are foolish! We can't find our calling without surrendering our lives to God! The sooner we recognize this, the faster we will find and fulfill our calling.



FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK FOR YOUR CALLING

1) Have I _____?

The reason many people don't know their calling is because they haven't asked God. Instead, they feel around in the dark hoping they somehow discover their calling on their own. Many people are terrified to ask God because they think He is going to send them to Africa to be a full-time missionary. However, let's stop for a second and consider this question:

Which do you think would be worse?

Circle the correct answer:

Being a full-time
missionary in
Africa living a
fulfilled life in
Christ

-OR-

Doing what you
want to do for the
rest of your life
and feeling
unfulfilled

***"For what good will it do a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul?
Or what will a person give in exchange for his soul?"***

Matthew 16:26 (NASB)

Have we surrendered our lives to the Lord or not? If Jesus is our Lord, then He has the right do with us as He pleases! While that statement can scare us, hopefully this will help us resolve this issue: our Heavenly Father is good, and He loves us! He proved it by giving us His son. We can trust God with our lives. Does this mean that He won't send us to Africa when we submit to Him? Not necessarily. What it does mean is that if God sends us to Africa, we will be excited to go because we will be with Him on the mission! Don't believe it? Ask Him and find out!

2) Have I _____?

One of the greatest tragedies in life is to completely miss what God is doing all around us. Perhaps we're guilty of thinking that God used to work in Bible times, but today God is resting from all His work.

In 2 Kings 6, the King of Aram sends his army to capture the Prophet Elisha. One morning, when Elisha's servant wakes up, he sees an army with horses and chariots encircling the city. He begins to panic and asks Elisha what they are going to do.

"Then Elisha prayed, 'O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' And the LORD opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

2 Kings 6:16-17 (NASB)

If we can't see God working around us, the reason is because we're spiritually blind and we need to ask for eyes to see. God's work is not rare, He's working all around us!

"But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working.'"

John 5:17 (NASB)

"Therefore, Jesus answered and was saying to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees that Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.'"

John 5:19 (NASB)

Jesus did not ask the Father to stop His work and direct Him on what He should be doing. Jesus saw what the Father was doing and joined in. This should show us that God does not send us out in the world to do His work without Him. He calls us to take part in that which He is already doing. If we're struggling to discover our calling, perhaps we need to pray for Spiritual sight to see what God is doing around us and join in!

**Our calling is not what we do for God.
Our calling is joining God in what He's doing!**

3) Have I _____?

“But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and soul.”

Deuteronomy 4:29 (NASB)

Knowing God’s will as a mature believer is conditional. God has assured us in Scripture that as He’s drawing us to Himself, and we’re searching for Him with all our heart and soul, we can and will find Him. We must not be lazy when it comes to the things of God.

Sometimes we can make the mistake of expecting God to make it easy for us, or worse, we continue in our sin expecting God to speak to us. Perhaps this is because God has taken it easy on us in the past, but as we mature in our faith, things should change. As infants, we cry for our parents to come and feed us. However, there must be a point in a person’s life when crying for a meal is no longer an option. If we want to eat, we must get up and make ourselves something to eat. The same is true for God’s will. God won’t allow us to stay in the highchair our whole lives.



If we don’t know God’s will, are we willing to devote ourselves to repenting of sin, studying the Bible, praying, and being in fellowship with other believers? Have we brought our desire before the churches’ prayer team in a prayer meeting? If not, then we’ve not done all we can to discover God’s will and must correct this!

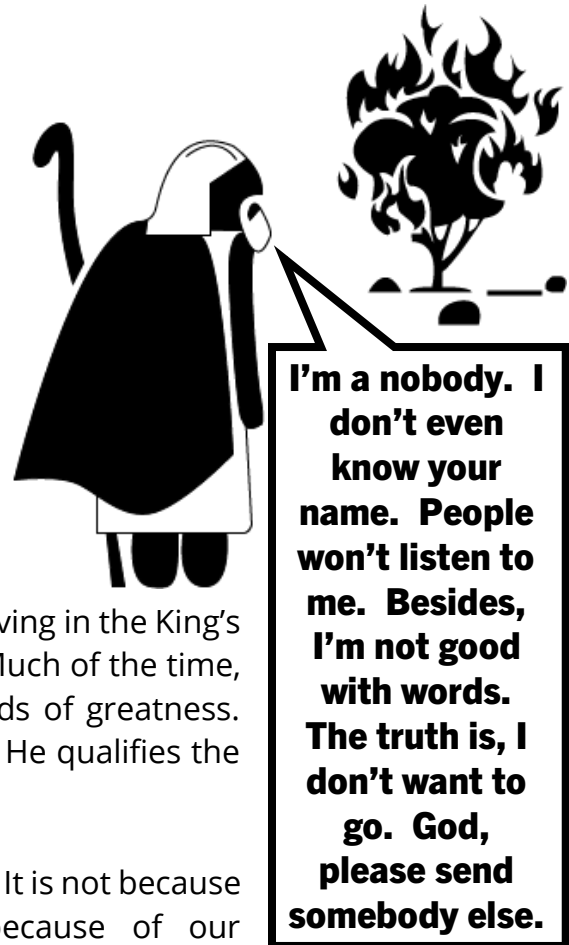
“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for the one who comes to God must believe that He exists, and that He proves to be One who rewards those who seek Him.”

Hebrews 11:6 (NASB)

4) Have I _____?

Perhaps it's not that we don't know God's will, it's that we don't think God's will should apply to us. We can be guilty of this when we make excuses as to why we're not the most capable person to accomplish this mission. This was the case for many people in Scripture. God told them what He wanted them to do and they made excuses.

For example, Moses knew that Israel needed someone to deliver them from the oppression of Egypt. He might have even prayed regularly for God to send someone. However, when God told Moses he was the man He had appointed to go and deliver His people from Pharaoh, Moses had a long list of excuses as to why He wasn't the most capable person.



It's understandable why Moses might have felt this way. When growing up in Pharaoh's house, he was likely reminded that he wasn't a legitimate heir and the only reason he was living in the King's palace was because of Pharaoh's kindness. Much of the time, we don't measure up to the world's standards of greatness. However, God does not choose the qualified, He qualifies the chosen.

We must keep this in mind when God calls us: It is not because of inadequacies that God calls us, but because of our inadequacies. God chooses the weak of this world to accomplish His will so that when the mission is complete, He gets all the glory.

"But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty."

1 Corinthians 1:27 (NASB)

When God calls us, He knows what He's doing!

5) Have I _____?

God takes great pleasure in revealing Himself to us. In other words, God is not a silent God! The only reason we know anything about God is because He has told us and/or shown us. Before we conclude that God hasn't personally told us anything, we must search our hearts to discover if this is really true. Is it possible that God has told us something and we just don't like what He said?

Suppose the last thing God said to us was, "Stop drinking!" and, for whatever reason we haven't obeyed His command. God will not move on to further instruction until we have been obedient to that which He has already told us to do! We could then



I sure wish I knew what God wanted me to do...

live under the delusion that God hasn't told us anything to do for Him because we didn't hear what we wanted to hear. Should God give us the next message when we've not been obedient to the last thing He said to us? What if God was waiting for us to quit drinking before He told us go into full-time ministry leading others to be free from the slavery of alcohol? Can we do this while drinking?

What was the last thing you remember God saying (in the Bible, in prayer, in your circumstances, in the church)?

Why do you think God refuses to move forward until we have been obedient to that which He has already told us?

I've done all of that that and I'm still waiting!

What if we've been obedient to the task God last gave us and we're waiting for new instruction? The two most renown men of the Old Testament were Moses and Elijah. When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, these two men came and stood with Him. While, both men had God use them in mighty ways, we must keep in mind that God had to first develop them to be the men He needed them to be before they were ready for the next calling He placed on their lives.



Maybe we've been waiting for a long time to discover what we're born to do. How long must we wait? Moses was taking care of sheep for 40 years before God called him to a position of leadership over Israel. Elijah sat by a river for 3 1/2 years being fed by birds while he waited for further instruction. If we're in a season of waiting, it's quite possible that God is in the process of developing us to be most effective to do His will. Perhaps it's not us that needs to be developed, but the circumstances around us. Whatever the reason we're waiting, we must accept that God always has a reason for what He does. His timing is always perfect!

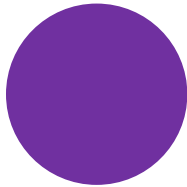
OUR SPECIFIC VOCATION

One of the struggles in our current cultural climate is that while there is unlimited vocational opportunity, the training for these vocations is extremely limited. For example, if we need more engineers, most of the schools put a focus on giving training in engineering. Then in a few years we have many people who trained to be engineers, but the jobs are all filled.

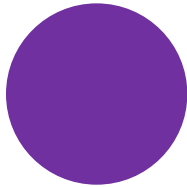
The same dynamic can be applied to the church. When we ask for guidance in considering what our calling is, only a few fields might be presented to us. For example, we might only be told that we can be a pastor, missionary, or Sunday School teacher. However, while these vocations are important in the body of Christ, that is not all there is. Solomon was responsible for building the temple, but without a man named, Hiram, who was skilled in working with bronze, this process could not have been completed. Don't compromise your calling because of ignorance. Instead, seek God for an answer and He will lead you!

CONCLUSION

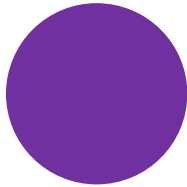
There truly is unlimited potential in how we might best serve God. To discover our calling, we must keep the following in mind:



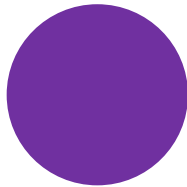
A vocation is not just a job we do, it is a calling that begins and ends with God. He is the one who determines our calling, not us.



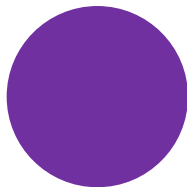
God has a general vocation for every single believer. We're called to be the light of the world!



We must not avoid asking God what He wants us to do because we fear where He might send us or what He might ask us to do. Instead, we must look for what God is doing around us, and join in until we have a direct word from the Lord.



Discovering God's will and doing it should not be an arbitrary task for us. We should do everything in our power to seek Him. When we do, we will not only enjoy fellowship with God, but we will also know what He wants us to do.



We must not excuse ourselves from the work of God as if someone else more qualified will come along. If God calls us, that is the only qualification that matters. We must be obedient to God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION


This section is to help you reflect on the information presented in this lesson. It is to your benefit to answer honestly and whole heartedly.

1. What advice would you give to someone who is experiencing a midlife crisis?

2. Do you think it's foolish to seek after a vocation that has nothing to do with God? Why or why not?

3. Which would you consider to be worse, to wear out or rust out? Explain your answer.

4. What are some other ways a person can serve God besides the typical answers of Pastor, Missionary, and Sunday School Teacher?

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for the student to write their answer to the question above.

HOW TO BE A PART OF THE BODY



COUNTRY CLUB MEMBERSHIP

Are you a member of a country club? Perhaps you've watched a lot of movies featuring characters who belong to a country club, but you've never actually been to one yourself. In that case, you may feel that you have a good idea what clubs are all about, but you're a little fuzzy on all the details. Country clubs are exclusive organizations that require clients to pay dues to become members. These fees cover the cost of maintenance, upgrades and staffing for the facilities that allow the club to offer activities and amenities to the members. These clubs typically enforce dress codes where members must conform before they can belong. With all the costs involved what are the benefits of joining a country club? Great question!

Joining a country club not only gives you access to the amenities, such as golf courses, swimming pools, dining facilities, clubhouse usage, and customer service, you also have access to personalized instruction from golf pros who can teach you all they know about the game. Not to mention it's exclusive! This means you won't have to be around the general public! Membership of a country club means you enjoy perks, privileges, and personalized service! Just pay your dues and you can have others taking care of you while you enjoy a lifetime of leisure.

Hey! We don't want you non-member types around our establishment!

As great as country clubs can be, many seem to confuse country club membership with church membership. Rest assured, Satan wants to destroy the church! One of the best ways to accomplish this task is to distort how the church sees herself.



SIGNS OF CONFUSION

We can know we've turned the church into a country club whenever we say:

- "If you don't do what I want, I'll withhold my offerings!"
- "I'm not being fed here..."
- "Pastor, you seem to have forgotten who pays your salary!"
- "Did you see what that person was wearing? Somebody needs to tell them how they should dress when they walk into God's house..."
- "Why won't they play the music that I enjoy?"
- "The pastor doesn't care about my family. He didn't visit my sister who had minor outpatient surgery. She only lives 100 miles away!"

Sound familiar? If so, then change must begin with you! Jesus put it this way:

"It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Matthew 20:26-28 (NASB)

Whenever our churches begin to resemble a country club, we must change our attitudes and follow Christ's example. If anyone could have been served it was Jesus. Yet, He came to serve, not be served.

What do you think the difference is between a church and a country club?

IS MEMBERSHIP EVEN BIBLICAL?

Where in the Bible does it say that we should join a local church and become a member? Last time I checked, no such command is given. Isn't church membership divisive? Doesn't it separate believers from those who have joined and membership and those who have not? What about when Paul said,

"Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

1 Corinthians 1:13 (ESV)

Keep in mind that there are many things that we practice in church that are not commanded in Scripture. For example, where are we commanded to sing in corporate worship? Sure, we should not give up meeting together as shown in Hebrews 10:25, but singing songs in corporate worship was not practiced until after the reformation in the 16th century when men like Martin Luther saw its intrinsic value. When the reformed church did sing songs, there wasn't a hymn book! These believers sang the psalms.

Although there is not a command to practice church membership in Scripture, we can still find Biblical roots for belonging to a church body.

"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."

Hebrews 13:17 (NASB)

Two questions we must consider about this passage:

- 1) Which leaders should we obey and submit to?**
- 2) Who must the pastor give an account for?**

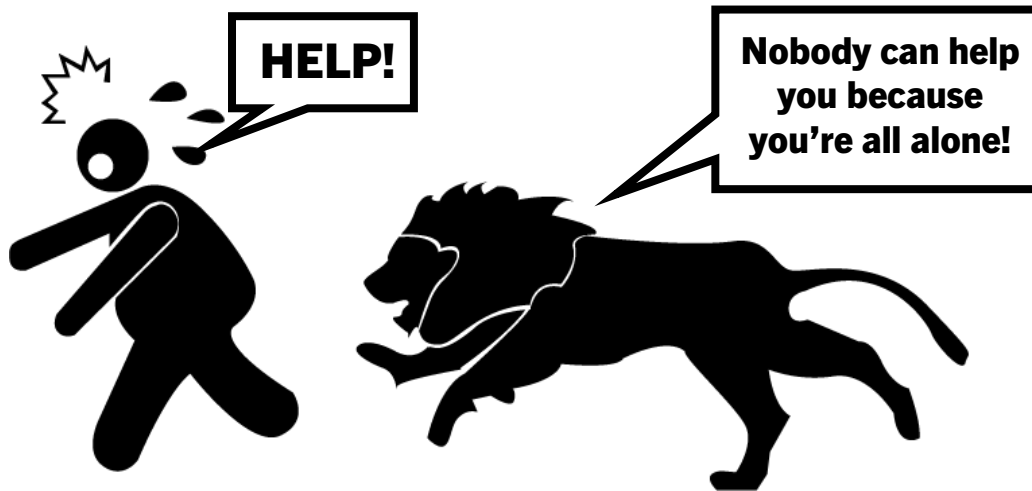
When Scripture was written, churches weren't abundant. In our small town of 1,000 people there are at least 8 Christian churches! How many churches reside in a metroplex? Should we submit to every leader, or should we submit to one? Must a pastor be responsible for everyone that claims to be a Christian, or only those who have submitted themselves under his care? Without a believer committing to a local church body, how can this command from Scripture be accomplished?

WHY SHOULD I BE A MEMBER?

Why commit to a local body? Does going to church save us? That depends on what we mean when we say “save”. Does it justify us before God, of course not! However, have you ever watched an episode of animal planet where a lion chases down a gazelle? Did the lion chase down the fit gazelle that’s surrounded by others that is difficult to catch, or did it chase down the out of shape, sickly gazelle that’s isolated and alone?

“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

1 Peter 5:8 (NASB)



Ask any faithful member of the church if going to church saves them. They will likely testify that committing to a local church body has saved them more times than they can count! Committing to a local body helps to keep us from falling into Satan’s traps!

Does this mean that we must be a member on paper? Not necessarily. There have been many faithful followers of Jesus Christ who refused to be a church member on paper yet still submitted to the leadership of the local church while serving to the best of their ability. While they disagree with the practice of having their name recorded on a church roll, they still understand the importance of committing and belonging to a local congregation.

Being a church member has more to do with our attitudes than it does having our names written down!

FIVE COMMITMENTS OF BELONGING TO THE BODY

1) I will _____.

Do you know how needed you are in the church? Perhaps you think that if you didn't go then no one would notice. It's not like you're preaching, right? If we're going to belong to a body of believers, we must recognize that we are each a necessary part of a whole.

"For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ."

1 Corinthians 12:12 (NASB)

For a body to function correctly, all its parts need to be healthy and functioning. For years, the function of the appendix has been a mystery. Many believed it served no purpose and was simply a left-over remnant from our evolutionary past. Patients don't notice a difference when this organ is removed, so why keep it? Our bodies have trillions of bacterial microorganisms which help break down foods and stave off the growth of bad bacteria which makes us sick. When violently ill, our bodies empty everything out of our guts, including good bacteria. Modern research suggests that the appendix serves as a safe house for good bacteria. After intense diarrhea, the appendix repopulates and reboots the intestine with good bacteria before harmful bacteria finds a home there.²

Many Christians believe they aren't necessary parts of the body. Just because we might not know our role, that doesn't mean we don't have one. The best way to discover our function in the body is to commit to be active and work with the other parts. We must not cut ourselves off from the body as if we're not important! The body needs all its parts to function as God intended. Whenever we think about leaving, we should ask ourselves, "Would I be willing to lose one of my body parts?" Perhaps Jesus doesn't want his body separated either.



² What Does the Appendix Do? Shining New Light on an Age-Old Question
<https://www.dignityhealth.org/articles/what-does-the-appendix-do-shining-new-light-on-an-age-old-question>

2) I will _____.

“There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.”

Proverbs 6:16-19(ESV)

Did you notice that creating division between brothers is right up there with murder in God’s eyes? As social creatures, we’re hard-wired for connection. Gossip can be a temptation because it deceptively makes us feel like we’re part of a group. It can even give a sense of power because it can buy us attention.

Many people might feel that a little gossip is normal, but it’s one of the worst things that can come out of a believer’s mouth. Ironically, one of the most common places for gossip to be spread in church is in a “prayer meeting”. This is because gossip can masquerade as something noble: a prayer request. “Did you hear about Brother Barry and Sister Suzie? I heard they are having an affair; we should pray for them.”

“Prayer requests” like these have the potential to destroy people’s lives, much less cause them to leave the church forever. Gossip doesn’t even have to be true to destroy someone’s reputation!

“And knowing their thoughts, Jesus said to them, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and no city or house divided itself will stand.’”

Matthew 12:25 (NASB)

Satan wants to create division in a church because he knows we’re stronger when we work together and when divided, we fall apart. Much of the time a divisive spirit can come when we don’t get our way and a little gossip helps to recruit others to “our side”. If we’re going to have unity in the body, we must each commit to be a source of unity instead of division.

We can ensure that we’re a source of unity when we do these two things:

- 1) Take our concerns to the one we have issues with**
- 2) Gently direct others to do the same**

3) I will _____.

God created us to be diverse from one another. Each of us have our own thoughts, opinions, and preferences. Under no circumstances should we believe that our thoughts, opinions, and preferences don't matter, because they do. However, when we elevate our preferences above other people, we lose an opportunity for a greater blessing.

We will never find joy in the church body when we are fighting to get our way. Paradoxically, we will find the greatest joy when we practice what Paul lays out in Philippians:

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

Philippians 2:3 (ESV)

We are commanded in Scripture to put others before ourselves. Why is this the path to joy? Because this is the path that Jesus took, and when we walk with Him we will find joy everlasting!

“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

Matthew 20:28 (NASB)



Consider how painful this experience must have been for Jesus' disciples. Immediately after they argued about who was the greatest among them, Jesus dressed himself as a servant and washed their feet. This was too much for Peter to stomach. After all, Jesus is the Lord; he should not be washing our feet!

“Peter said to Him, ‘Never shall You wash my feet!’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no place with Me.’”

John 13:8 (NASB)

The painful reminder that our Lord serves us helps us to remember that we are called to the same for others.

4) I will _____.

No pastor goes into pastoral ministry to become a tyrant who fights for his own agenda. Pastors only become pastors because they love the Lord and want to make Him known. Unfortunately, sometimes pastors forget their calling and need to be gently reminded that they cannot accomplish anything lasting in the kingdom while maltreating the people. In short, the church needs to be led, not pushed, pulled along, or run over. Would you like to know why your pastor sometimes gets things twisted? It's because of this verse:

“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”

James 3:1 (NASB)

In other words, a pastor feels the constant pressure that most people don't live under. He knows that everything he does is under a microscope. Not only must he give an account for every person in the local church body, but he must also lead the church to stay on mission, while keeping himself above reproach.

**Four Ways You
Can Pray for
Your Pastor**

- 1) For his family
- 2) For his preaching
- 3) For his protection
- 4) For his physical,
mental, and
emotional health

Not only does your pastor feel pressure and the weight of expectations, but his family does also. Pray that his family is not neglected because of the demands of the ministry.

Your pastor has an incredible responsibility every Sunday morning: he delivers a message on behalf of God. Pray that God would give him wisdom, insight, and the right words to say.

The devil lays traps to deceive and discredit your pastor. Pray for your pastor's protection from the devil's schemes.

The ministry can also take a mental, physical, and emotional toll on your pastor. Pray that he might experience the peace only God can give.

5) I will _____.

Many people have a lot of questions before they go to a service at local church body. What is the music like? How is the preaching? Will I and my family be spiritually fed? Are there several programs and ministries that will address my family's needs? What about the quality of their online presence? Will the people treat us well? Will I feel like I belong?

It's not wrong to evaluate what we're looking for in a church body before we commit to one. However, we should consider what the greatest value in a local church body is. In other words, what should we treasure most? How much would you say a biblical church is worth?

It's important to note that, while amenities are a nice plus in a local church, a church can be staying within the parameters of Scripture and not have any of the typical things that attract people to attend. So, the question comes down to this:

What do you value?

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

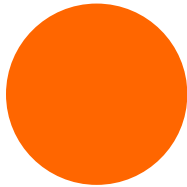
Matthew 13:44 (NASB)



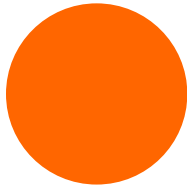
We can spend our whole lives chasing after things that have no eternal value. All the adoration, appreciation, and affluence of the world doesn't last. The kingdom of God, on the other hand, lasts forever. The man in Jesus' parable found value that was hidden from others and committed to possessing it with everything he had. The value of a local church body cannot be explained, it must be discovered. However, to possess it, we must forsake everything else and chase after it. The local church is not a burden, nor is it a tedious pastime we must attend. The local church is God's gift to you! Have you discovered the treasure of a church family?

CONCLUSION

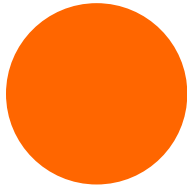
If you are a believer in Christ, you are a part of the church. However, it's important that you belong to and attend a local church! Let us not forget:



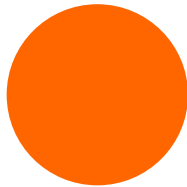
The church is not a country club. The church is not a place to be served but to serve.



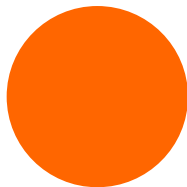
Being a church member is not only a good idea, it's a command from Scripture! This should not discourage us but should encourage us and keep us from falling for Satan's schemes!



Being a member has more to do with our attitudes than it does having our name written down on a roll.



Being a part of a local body of believers requires us to make several commitments. We must commit to be an active, unifying, sacrificial member.



Our church leaders need our prayers and support. When we commit to a local body and surrender to the leadership, we can find a deep value that the world cannot replicate.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

This section is to help you reflect on the information presented in this lesson. It is to your benefit to answer honestly and whole heartedly.

1. What can we do to love those who act like the church is their country club?

2. How has the local church "saved" you?

3. Do you think believers should be allowed to vent about their frustrations in the church? Would you consider this to be divisive? Why or why not?

HOW TO BE A PART OF THE BODY

4. Do you think we can we put others first and still retain our preferences? Why or why not?

5. What do you value most about the local church?

6. Is a church that prioritizes Scripture valuable to you? Why or why not?

FINAL THOUGHTS

Before You Finish

This course has been designed to help you develop a proper foundation on which your faith can be laid if you didn't already have one. However, this is not the end, it's just the beginning! You will spend the rest of your life learning more about God, His Son, His Spirit, His church, His world, and His plans for you. You will spend the rest of eternity unfolding that which God has to show you. In the meantime, keep this in mind:

"You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

1 Peter 2:5 (NASB)

That which we learn in studies like these is not just for our edification (building up), it's so that we can better make sacrifices which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ! In other words, don't just let this be another information station where you gather up knowledge and ignore application. James put it this way:

"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not just hearers who deceive themselves."

James 1:22 (NASB)

May you weather the storms of life because a foundation of truth has been laid that you have built your life upon! May you continue forward in faith by being built up in a spiritual house in which the Lord resides! May you not just be a hearer of the word, but a doer of the word! May you understand your place in the Kingdom of God! May others be able to identify you as one of His! May you have a deep love for and commitment to God's word! May you know and do God's will in the world! May you find deep joy in the body of Christ!

And most importantly:

May your life bring God the glory He deserves!

Additional Resources

How to Use this Section

This section provides resources used for this study and suggested material that can assist you in being built up in a spiritual house.

1) HOW TO BE A CHRISTIAN

“How to Succeed in the Christian Life” by Reuben A. Torrey

“A Life for Christ” by Dwight L. Moody

“Following Christ” by Charles H. Spurgeon

“How Should I Live in This World?” by R.C. Sproul

2) HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

“Can I Trust the Bible?” by R.C. Sproul

“How to Study the Bible Intentionally” by Reuben A. Torrey

“The Importance and Value of Proper Bible Study” by Reuben A. Torrey

“How to Study the Bible” by Dwight. L. Moody

How To Choose the Best Study Bible:

<https://www.thenivbible.com/how-to-choose-the-best-study-bible/>

Great Bible Study Podcasts:

Renewing Your Mind with R.C. Sproul

The Bible Study with Steve Lawson

The History of the Christian Church

Grace Covenant Church

Daily Devotionals:

Table Talk Magazine

<https://tabletalkmagazine.com/>

Open Windows

<https://www.lifeway.com/en/product-family/open-windows-magazine>

3) HOW TO PRAY

“Lord, Teach Us to Pray” by Jon J. Cardwell

“Prevailing Prayer” by Dwight L. Moody

“How to Pray” by Reuben A. Torrey

“Does Prayer Change Things” by R.C. Sproul

4) HOW TO KNOW GOD’S WILL

“Experiencing God” by Richard and Henry Blackaby

“Can I Know God’s Will?” by R.C. Sproul

5) HOW TO SERVE GOD

“A Heart to Serve” by Reginald Ezell

“It is a Great Thing to Serve the Lord” by Dag Heward-Mills

“Can I Have Joy in My Life?” by R.C. Sproul

6) HOW TO BE A PART OF THE BODY

“Why Should I Join a Church?” by R.C. Sproul

“What is the Church?” by R.C. Sproul

“Church Membership” by Jonathan Leeman

“I Am A Church Member” by Thom S. Rainer

Answer Key

How To Be A Christian

WHY DO MANY PROFESSING CHRISTIANS LOOK MORE LIKE THE WORLD THAN LIKE CHRIST?

- 1) They are not a GENUINE Believer.
- 2) They are not a MATURE Believer.

WHAT DOES A MATURE CHRISTIAN LOOK LIKE?

- 1) A Mature Christian surrenders his/her life to the Lord DAILY.

THREE ASPECTS OF SALVATION IN A BELIEVER'S LIFE

- 1) JUSTIFICATION
- 2) SANCTIFICATION
- 3) GLORIFICATION

- 2) A Mature Christian openly CONFESSES Christ.
- 3) A Mature Christian has the ASSURANCE of his/her Salvation.
- 4) A Mature Christian lives by the SPIRIT.
- 5) A Mature Christian is COUNTED among the body.
- 6) A Mature Christian has a HUNGER for and COMMITMENT to God's Word.
- 7) A Mature Christian is DEVOTED to prayer.
- 8) A Mature Christian consistently SERVES God.
- 9) A Mature Christian is PERSECUTED for his/her faith.
- 10) A Mature Christian has a HEART for the Lost.

How To Study The Bible

THREE ERRORS MOST PEOPLE MAKE

- 1) We TREAT THE BIBLE LIKE IT'S ANY OTHER BOOK.
- 2) We GIVE UP TOO EASILY.
- 3) We FAIL TO COMMIT TO STUDY.

METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

- 1) The TELESCOPE Approach
- 2) The MICROSCOPE Approach
- 3) The TOPICAL Approach
- 4) The CHAPTER OUTLINE Approach
- 5) The MEMORIZATION Approach
- 6) The WORD STUDY Approach
- 7) The MARKING SYSTEM Approach

How To Pray

THREE COMMON HINDRANCES TO PRAYER

- 1) SELFISH MOTIVES Can Hinder Our Prayers.
- 2) SIN Can Hinder Our Prayers.
- 3) UNFORGIVENESS Can Hinder Our Prayers.

THE COMPONENTS OF PRAYER

- 1) REVERENCE
- 2) SUBMISSION
- 3) SUPPLICATION
- 4) INTERCESSION
- 5) PROTECTION

How To Know God's Will

OH YEAH? WELL GOD TOLD ME...

- 1) Fabricating a "word from the Lord" when truly, we have selfish motives has serious, often deadly CONSEQUENCES
- 2) No matter what we're told by others, we need to follow our CONVICTIONS

WHEN GOD SPOKE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- 1) When God Spoke IT WAS UNIQUE TO THE INDIVIDUAL
- 2) When God Spoke THEY KNEW IT WAS GOD
- 3) When God Spoke THEY KNEW WHAT GOD SAID

WAYS GOD SPEAKS THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

- 1) God Speaks Through THE BIBLE
- 2) God Speaks Through PRAYER
- 3) God Speaks Through CIRCUMSTANCE
- 4) God Speaks Through THE CHURCH

How To Serve God

FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK FOR YOUR CALLING

- 1) Have I ASKED GOD?
- 2) Have I LOOKED AROUND?
- 3) Have I DONE ALL I CAN?
- 4) Have I EXCUSED MYSELF?
- 5) Have I BEEN OBEDIENT?

How To Be A Part Of The Body

FIVE COMMITMENTS OF BELONGING TO THE BODY

- 1) I will BE AN ACTIVE PART OF THE BODY
- 2) I will BE A SOURCE OF UNITY, NOT DIVISION
- 3) I will NOT ELEVATE MY PREFERENCES ABOVE OTHERS
- 4) I will PRAY FOR AND SUBMIT TO THE LEADERSHIP
- 5) I will TREASURE THE LOCAL CHURCH