



# FOUR LEVELS OF THE SCHOOL OF DISCIPLESHIP

## LEVEL 2



### GROW

THREE MONTHS

DISCIPLESHIP MANUAL

STRATEGY OF JESUS SIMPLIFIED

**strategy**



**APOSTOLIC ASSEMBLY  
OF THE FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS**

**STRATEGY OF JESUS  
SCHOOL OF DISCIPLESHIP  
LEVEL 2 - GROW**

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# GROW

## DISCIPLESHIP MANUAL

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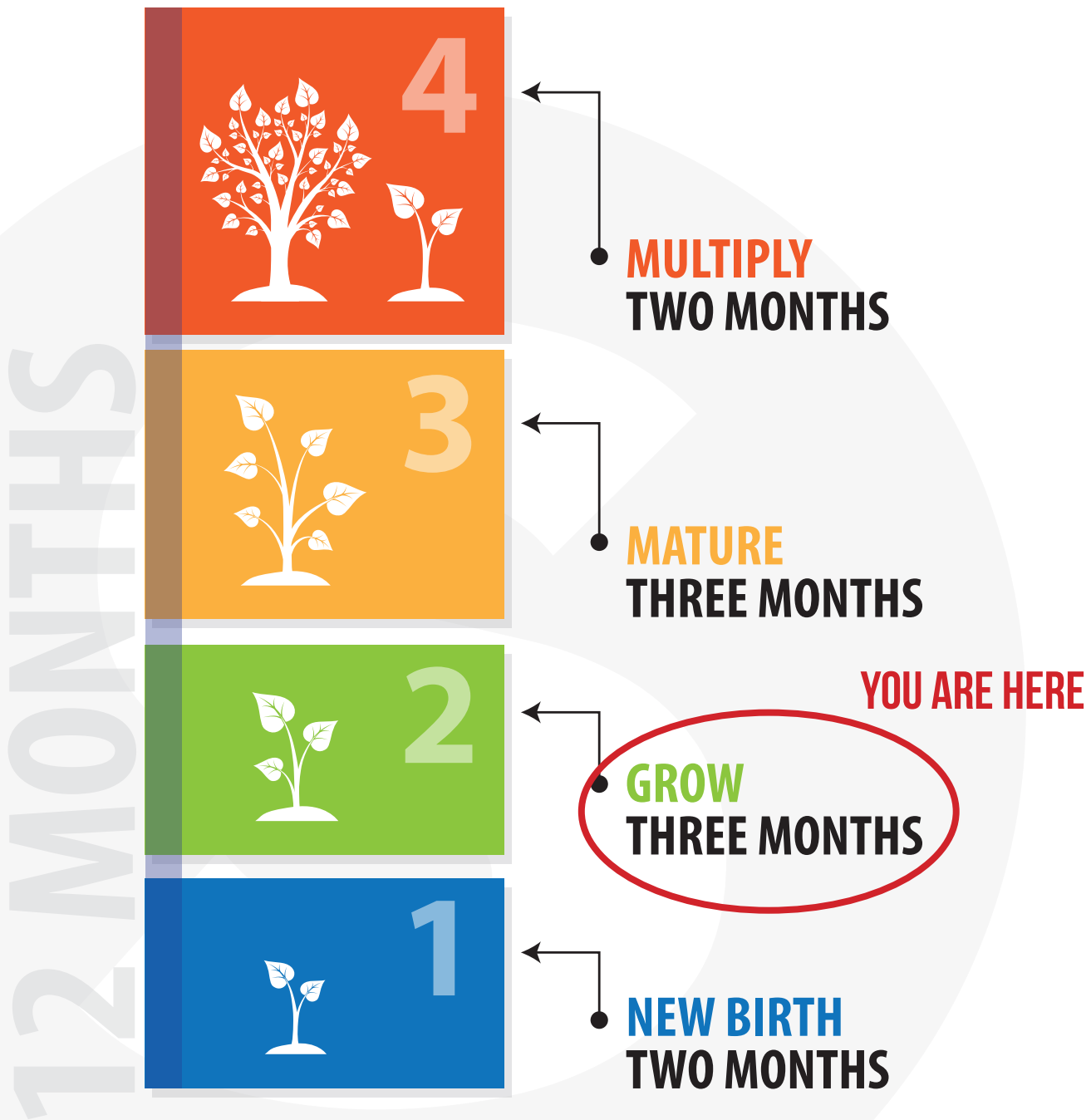
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# GROW

DISCIPLESHIP MANUAL

## FOUR LEVELS OF THE SCHOOL OF DISCIPLESHIP



# LESSON 1

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLESHIP

*What is Discipleship? Why is it important? What purposes does it serve?*

Memory verse: *“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”* Ephesians 4:13-15

### 1. INTRODUCTION

From an early age, we are educated to reach our full potential in the various facets of our lives. Generally, we understand the importance of educating ourselves because we know that education will make the difference between a decent living and an impoverished life. The same is true of the spiritual life. Now let us examine the spiritual.

### 2. WHAT IS CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP?

When we speak of Christian discipleship, we are referring to being taught how to live the kind of life Jesus lived. When we received Christ as our Savior, we become responsible for displaying a new life; we were made new creatures. It is from that moment on that Discipleship should effect essential changes in the believer.

Discipleship is frequently associated with nothing more than a series of themes taught in a classroom, by an experienced teacher, using a well-organized workbook. That is true in part; however, Discipleship cannot be limited to the classroom. Discipleship can take place anywhere or in any circumstance. Discipleship is accomplished with the guidance of a mature believer through the Holy Spirit’s working and the Word of God. Throughout their life, every believer has the opportunity to learn to imitate the Lord Jesus in every area of their life.

People have different ideas regarding Discipleship that are not complete in themselves. For example, the notion that Discipleship means transmitting a body of knowledge from the teacher’s mind to the mind of the student. The other idea is “training,” which implies that Discipleship only involves training the student to follow certain rites, rules, or habits; or develop certain character traits. Discipleship is also thought of as a process to prepare a student for the future.

All these contain some aspects of truth; however, Christian discipleship is more than transformation and development. A good definition would be the following: ***Christian Discipleship is the effective communication of the salvation experience, which is in Jesus Christ, in such a way that through a personal relationship with God, the disciple is transformed, matures, and is perfected.*** This definition includes the ideas of effectively communicating to the believer godly character traits and customs and a readiness to serve Him. Total transformation is the principal goal. That is what makes everything else possible.



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### 3. THE CHARGE OF CHRIST

***“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen”*** Matthew 28:19-20.

The charge of Jesus is direct and simple; it refers to teaching, it includes making disciples, and that revolves around the commandments. The educational goal is that the apprentice will learn to “to observe all things” Christ commanded. It conveys the idea of obedience and putting into practice what has been learned. It is more than merely listening. It requires more than only learning certain truths. The Christian teacher must teach while looking for fruit in the lives of his disciples. Christ did more than just transmit knowledge. His teaching transformed the lives of those who followed Him.

According to Matthew 28:19-20, Discipleship has four foundations. They are:

Expansion: ***“Go ye therefore...”*** The teacher must seek the student, convey the message of salvation, and teach them biblical truths. Before reaching them, it is necessary to go search for them.

Evangelization: ***“and teach all nations, baptizing them ...”*** The teacher brings the student to surrender his life to Christ, accepting him as his personal Savior so that he may become a member of the body of Christ which is the Church.

Teaching: ***“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...”*** Winning new disciples is only the first step unto an abundant and fruitful life in Christ. The student must now learn the commandments of Christ; they must become established in the faith and the Christian life, and affirm themselves on doctrinal biblical truths and conduct.

Edification: ***“and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world...”*** The emergent, well-established disciple, will develop a testimony of faithfulness to God in every area of his life as he reflects Christ

### 4. THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLESHIP

Growing in the faith is fundamental and vital. Learning how to live the Christian life will help us avoid many problems that could impoverish our life. An impoverished Christian life would require counsel from leaders and more mature brethren in the Lord to correct. Anything that distances us from the plan God has for our having and abundant life must be avoided.

Jesus said: ***“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”*** John 10:10 He has promised to help us know the truth and that the truth would make us free. Free from what? Free from the bondage of sin, free from condemnation, free from ignorance, free to live in victory every day.

To grow in Christ is to open ourselves more and more to beautiful experiences. Our joys will then completely cover our temporary afflictions, persecutions, and difficulties during a lifetime of walking with Christ. The Apostle Paul puts it this way:





*“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.*

The Christian is not promised a life free from problems and difficulties, but he is guaranteed a permanent peace that no affliction can take away. Jesus said: *“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”* John 16:33.

For us, there is nothing more significant than the gift of salvation and the joy of fellowship with Jesus that we enjoy during our life here on Earth. Jesus has not left us, orphans. He has come to us through the Holy Spirit. He abides in us, and He guides us through the Holy Spirit and His Word every day. Therefore, the more familiar we become with His Word, the better chance we have of living a victorious Christian life that is pleasing to Him. A life that resembles the life of Jesus is the most exceptional testimony of the new birth that any Christian can have.

In the Level 2 Grow course, we will explore questions like: What does the Word of God teach us concerning our walk with Christ and our personal development as His disciples? How does He want us to walk? And within these questions; What does His Word say concerning our obligations to our family, our Church, and other areas of our lives. All of these points are vital because, as humans, we do not live for ourselves, but our influence on those around us is a fundamental part of our Christian testimony.

## 5. THE PURPOSE OF DISCIPLESHIP

The purpose of Discipleship is to **guide us in the practical application of Christian life principles**, which have been established in the Word of God. We see in the following a relatively complete list of such principles:

**Biblical knowledge:** Teach the Word of God, helping every disciple understand it, believe it, and obey it.

**Salvation:** guide the believer until they receive Christ.  
Such is our objective in Lesson 1  
Birth.

**New life:** help the born-again person be filled with the Spirit and continue walking in the Spirit every day, cultivating Christian habits.

**Christian life:** help every disciple apply Christian principles in every relationship and event of their life.

**Personal commitment:** lead the believer to a complete surrender to the will of God, in obedience, consecration, and holiness.



## LESSON 2

# GROWING IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

*How does the Child of God grow? What are the steps of spiritual development? How can we have the "mind of Christ," His way of thinking?*

Memory verse: *"...beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen."* 2 Peter 3:17-18. NKJV

### 1. INTRODUCTION

When we became new creatures in Christ, we began the greatest adventure that a human being can experience. We have been supernaturally born again of water and Spirit into the Kingdom of God. This was accomplished by water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. Through baptism, we received the name of the Father. By receiving the baptism of his Holy Spirit, we have received of his divine nature. Because of Him, we are now...

### 2. CHILDREN OF GOD

Let's look at some scriptures that tell us about this new reality:

John 3:3-7: *"Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.*

Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" NKJV

Acts 2:38-39: *"Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."* NKJV

John 1:12-13: *"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* NKJV

1 John 3:1-2: *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."* NKJV

Romans 8:14-16: *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the Spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our Spirit that we are children of God,"* NKJV



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Ephesians 2:19-22: ***“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”*** NKJV

According to the biblical texts, we are made children of God through Faith. Now we belong to the family of God. According to 1 Peter 2:5, we are also ***“living stones”*** a dwelling place where God Himself dwells. We have become ***“God’s building”*** 1 Corinthians 3:9 and ***“The Church of the Living God”*** which is the ***“Column and bulwark of truth”*** 1 Timothy 3:15.

What a privilege we have to belong to the Lord and to be able to dwell in His house! (Psalm 84:4.) In it, we can feel as if we were in our own home. That’s true! In this new home, we have found. Currently, we enjoy invaluable and precious privileges such as fellowship, encouragement, support, a sense of belonging, food, teaching, preaching, strength, wisdom, and spiritual power to live the Christian life victoriously.

No matter our natural age, when we come to Christ, we all need these things to grow in the Spirit and gain a deeper understanding of God’s thoughts. This growth is not determined by the number of years in the church, but rather by our search for God’s knowledge and his will for us. He will always reward that search with abundant grace, understanding, faith, trust, and security, essential elements in every good home.

### 3. A NEW HOME, A NEW WAY OF THINKING

According to the good pleasure of His will, the Word of God tells us that we were ***“adopted as sons by Jesus Christ,”*** Ephesians 1:5. This spiritual adoption can be likened to the adoption of a child. In both cases, there are changes in the environment, development of new habits, ideas, and new experiences that must be managed. The insecurities of an adopted child can be compared to those that each of us brought with us when we first came to God’s family.

This is true because, as children of God, we will have many adjustments and changes we will have to make in this new and unfamiliar lifestyle. We have brought to us a collection of memories, bad experiences, bad habits, and wrong ideas. The carnal mind, accustomed to the debauchery of sinful pleasures, is opposed to and fights hard against the new standards and disciplines that our new spiritual nature demands.

Paul sent the Corinthian brethren a strong claim: ***“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal...”*** 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. He stated in Romans 8:7 that ***“The carnal mind [the way of thinking we brought with us into our new home] is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”*** NKJV

We see then that our way of thinking is naturally hostile to God. Our mind is ***“always ready”*** to give in to carnal passions. It feels no desire for this new relationship with God because it means dying to the old life of self-gratification. The debauchery of the carnal mind is incredibly harmful to our spiritual understanding and advance. It moves in the opposite direction of the spiritual mind that feeds on a deep love of God and complete confidence in God.



The things are revealed to us by His Spirit and not by the natural machinations of a corrupt mind. This is why we must take and use the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God daily (Ephesians 6:17b). This will ensure that we end with the lies and suggestions of the natural man. ***“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 Word of God will silence any human idea, our own or those of others, and any diabolical impression about our Lord Jesus Christ and his care for us. That is why each one of us must grow and develop through ***“the unadulterated spiritual milk that is the Word of God”*** 1 Peter 2:2. This pure and unique milk contains all the nutrients that we need to grow spiritually healthy.

#### 4. GROWING STEP BY STEP

It is essential that we also understand that to grow, we don’t need to eat a lot of food. This could lead to a state of “spiritual malnutrition”, which could lead us to anxiety, frustration, depression, and even pride. Spiritual nourishment is given to us by God to be enjoyed. It is given to us so that we can accept it and make full use of it. If we learn to nourish ourselves correctly, we will grow “in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” 2 Peter 3:18.

Growth is a slow process. There has never been a newborn child that can stand on his fragile feet and walk immediately after birth. An infant will first learn to crawl and then learn to stand. It is not until after stumbling and failing that the child will manage to walk.

A child’s experience is very similar in the spiritual walk of a believer. If you become too confident and try to walk faster than “your legs” will permit, you are sure to fall. On the other hand, fear or the lack of trust in God could unnecessarily paralyze you. Don’t expect your spiritual legs to develop overnight, nor be discouraged by the mistakes you make.

No parent loses hope that their child will walk if he doesn’t walk by the third or fourth month from birth. You must be patient with yourself and allow Jesus to guide you step by step. “One day at a time”, as the old hymn goes. As a new believer, you must understand that your maturity in Christ will take time; many years. Although the process takes time, it is still filled with exciting experiences and filled with beautiful blessings.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

God’s will is that ***“Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*** Ephesians 3:17-19. Amen.



## LESSON 3

# A TRANSFORMED LIFE

*Can we experience a real transformation in every area of our lives? How can we get our minds, words, and actions to reflect Jesus Christ?*

Memory verse: *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."* 2 Corinthians 3:18. NKJV

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The memory verse expresses perfectly the kind of person we can become by the Holy Spirit's transformative work. When we are born again, by the water and Spirit, everything that we think, say, and do reflects our Lord Jesus Christ. We become a living image of Him and a living testimony of his grace and love for others. Let's look at the most important aspects of this transformation, starting with the area of our mind

### 2. OUR THOUGHT LIFE

Luke 6:45: *"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil..."* Like the fruit of a tree helps us to identify the type of tree that it is, our words and actions are a clear manifestation of our thoughts. We can try to hide what we think, but King David said that God knows and examines our thoughts: *"O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off."* Psalm 139:1-2.

Indeed, we cannot entirely control the environment in which we live most of the time, but we should avoid those things which can contaminate our thought life. Some things we are exposed to are our choice. The other things we cannot control, God always offers us a way to escape: *"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."* 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Our hearts will become pure if we consciously exercise control over our thoughts. Philippians 4:8: *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things."*

To achieve this, we need to pray each day the way King David prayed: *"Let the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer."* Psalm 19:14. Anyone who manages to control something as important as their mind will undoubtedly control the other areas of their life.



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### 3. OUR TALK

What we talk about is closely linked to what is going on in our minds and hearts. As we speak, we express what we feel or think. In Matthew 12:34, Jesus put it this way **“of the abundance of the heart speak the mouth”** and Matthew 15:11 states that **“what comes out of the mouth contaminates man.”**

In chapter 3 of the book of James, we are told that good and evil come from the tongue. The scripture says that we often offend with our tongue. James compares the tongue to a rudder, and as the rudder directs a ship, so our tongue directs our life. The tongue is the member that pollutes our whole body and **“inflames the wheel of creation”** while it **“is inflamed by hell”** (V.6). We are also told that the tongue is **“an evil that cannot be restrained”** (V. 8). Finally, believers cannot use the tongue both to bless God and at the same time to curse others (v. 9-11).

The following is a shortlist of sins of the tongue. Those who desire to live a transformed life must avoid the following:

Vulgar words: **“But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.”** Colossians 3:8.

Curses and Blasphemies: **“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.”** Ephesians 4:31. **“but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions.”** 1 Timothy 6:4.

Gossip: **“A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends.”** Proverbs 16:28. **“The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, And they go down into the inmost body.”** Proverbs 18:8. **“... idle [...] and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not”** 1 Timothy 5:13.

Murmuring or Complaints: **“nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.”** 1 Corinthians 10:10. **“Do all things without complaining and disputing”** Philippians 2:14.

Lies: **“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”** Exodus 20:16. **“Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, But those who deal truthfully are His delight.”** Proverbs 12:22. **“Therefore, putting away lying, “Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,”** Ephesians 4:25. **“all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone”** Revelation 21:8. **“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”** John 14:6.

### 4. OUR ACTIONS

Now, Let's focus on our actions. How should we behave with others? In principle, God asks us to **“Seek the good before all men.”** Romans 12:17b. Of course, we understand that no one goes to heaven because they are “good,” but by God's grace and favor. However, if we truly consider ourselves Children of the Highest, we are commanded to be gentle with everyone, including the ungodly. **“But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.”** Luke 6:35.

We must be humble and obedient, **“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But**





**gives grace to the humble.” Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”** 1 Peter 5:5-6. **“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”** John 14:15. By obeying God, we demonstrate our love for God and testify our faith in Him. The most powerful means of evangelism is our testimony.

Honesty is a crucial part of our Christian testimony. Believers must always be honest in their public and private lives. In their familial relationships, they must be honest in their dealings with friends, business, and all other matters. Honesty is not negotiable. **“You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.”** Leviticus 19:11. Honesty is an expression of kindness, which is a characteristic of the **“Fruit of the Spirit”** Galatians 5:21-22. Dishonesty is evil. The Holy Spirit will never dwell in the heart of those who are dishonest. Just as great actions are the result of smaller measures, small acts of dishonesty will inevitably grow. Let us practice purity in our dealings with others. Whatever we sow, we shall reap. We can only be honored and blessed by God if we are honest with our neighbors. Study Leviticus 19:35-36, Proverbs 11:1, and Galatians 6:7.

God also commands us to bring anger under our control. The Holy Bible says, **“A quick-tempered man acts foolishly,”** Proverbs 14:17. Anger is a weapon of the flesh and a precursor to many painful experiences. It can lead to bad decisions, hatred, bitterness, murder, and war. The devil will use anger whenever he can to destroy marriages, homes, churches, and nations. Anger against sin is the only type of anger that is constructive.

The best example is the one given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ, who is meek and of a humble heart. He is slow to anger and great in mercy (Psalm 103:8-9). Punishment is not a delight for the Lord when he has to administer it. Study Mark 3:1-6, John 2:13-16, and Ephesians 4:26. How can we get our “bad temper under control? The most potent factor is self-control, and it comes from God. When God baptized you with His Holy Spirit, He endowed you with power, love, and self-control (2 Timothy 1:7).

## 5. DISCIPLINE AND TRANSFORMATION

A transformed life demands discipline. Without discipline, we cannot develop the God-like character that we need to face adversity. The undisciplined individuals are inconsistent and double-minded (James 1:8) and are easy prey to the deceiver. Discipline is the key to power and the mark of every true son of God. The words Discipline and Disciple share an etymological root; that is, they are inseparable concepts. **“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”** Matthew 16:24. Can someone who does not possess the discipline to deny themselves, follow Christ, and carry his cross? The answer is no.

### The disciplined believer:

- (1) develops the ability to control his conduct;
- (2) does things, not by impulse, desire, pressure or custom, but rather guided by principles and good judgment;
- (3) develops the ability to subordinate his appetites, emotions, moods, and words;
- (4) Defeats temptation and lives subject to his authorities. Read 1 Corinthians 9:25; Hebrews 12:11; 13:17; James 1:26; 3:2.



# GROW

## DISCIPLESHIP MANUAL

### We need discipline to:

- (1) to keep the desires of our human nature under control,
- (2) to protect our devotional life, and
- (3) to achieve our maximum potential and effectiveness in our service to the Lord.

However, Discipline can become a means of human pride. We must avoid the trap of thinking that discipline is of the most significant value in life. We can become prideful because of our strict personal discipline. Discipline is a servant; it is not a savior. A good relationship with God is the greatest of treasures. Pagan asceticism that seeks to draw attention to the person is nothing but false piety. Christian discipline does not despise meticulous human exertions; rather, it sanctifies them and utilizes them for spiritual purposes. You have to cultivate temperance, but never confuse the self-restraint required to develop temperance with true holiness. It is only when discipline is linked to heavenly motivations that it will produce holiness.

### To achieve a disciplined life, a person must:

- (1) Start with the simple things. Keep your home clean and tidy; everything in its place.
- (2) Tackle difficult tasks promptly and vigorously while doing what you prefer to do last.
- (3) Train your body. Avoid being restless, unnecessary movements of hands, scratching, etc.  
Learn to be calm and relaxed.
- (4) Be punctual.
- (5) Set priorities: organize your mind and thoughts
- (6) Learn how to take advantage of unexpected changes that throw your  
"well-charted" plans into confusion.
- (7) Cultivate an attitude of sincere gratitude,
- (8) control gluttony.
- (9) Develop a sense of responsibility in everything.
- (10) Practice a systematic model for prayer.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this lesson, we have summarized extensively some matters that are a challenge in the Christian life. You may be concerned about not knowing how you will dominate each one. You should understand that defeating them will require all your attention, but in the end, being like Christ is only truly possible through the power of the Spirit of God (Zachariah 4:6, Philippians 2:13). Remember that your life is transformed into His image **"by the action of the Spirit of the Lord."** 2 Corinthians 3:18. In the next lesson, we will study an essential factor for this transformation to take place: prayer.

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## LESSON 4

# DEVELOPING A PRAYER LIFE

***What does the Bible teach us about prayer? How can you pray for at least one hour? What are the fundamental principles for prayer?***

Text to memorize: ***“Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Matthew 26:40-41***

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Prayer is for the Christian Life as blood is for the human body; without it, there is no spiritual life. Prayer is a direct line to speak to God, a free passageway to climb to God’s throne. The reality is that many believers are cold in their search for God. They pray very little, which is why they have little passion. Prayer is secondary to them. Because the times are more dangerous than ever before, Christians should place great importance on prayer, as did the ancient Christians.

### 2. PRAYER IN THE BIBLE

According to the Word of God, Prayer is vital. We live and die by prayer. The Bible teaches us to pray:

- (a) ***“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance”*** Ephesians 6:18.
- (b) ***“incessantly.”*** 1st Thessalonians 5.17.
- (c) ***“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*** Mark 14:38.
- (d) And faithfully: ***“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*** James 5:16.

The Bible also contains a long list of experiences where prayers were answered. Abraham prayed, and God granted him his request, Moses prayed, and the sea was opened. Joshua prayed, and the sun stood still. David prayed, and God destroyed his enemies. Elisha prayed, and God ordered fire from heaven, and Paul prayed, and the prison walls shuddered. Let’s examine what happened when Daniel Prayed.

Darius, the king of the Persian empire, signed an edict forbidding prayer, throughout his kingdom, for thirty days (Daniel 6,7,9). This prohibition attempted to take from God the tribute he is to receive from men and to steal from men the comfort they receive from God. What king of the earth, however powerful, has the right to do something like that? This reckless decree attempted to deprive the prophet, Daniel, from ninety opportunities to pray.



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## DISCIPLESHIP MANUAL

***“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.”*** Daniel 6:10-11.

How wonderful it is to have predetermined hours to pray! Daniel could not live a single day without communion with God. How could he abide by the royal decree and go thirty days without prayer? Today, no such regulation against prayer exists, yet many Christians abandon prayer for almost any reason. Christians who do not pray don't humble their hearts in God's presence and hold back the expressions of gratitude he deserves.

Even though Daniel was a man with many occupations, he always prayed. He never used his many responsibilities as an excuse to keep him from exercising his daily devotions. When Daniel prayed, he bent his knees and expressed his thanksgiving to God. Prayer kept Daniel ready to confront any affliction God could allow in his life. When distress did come, God honored him by closing the mouths of the lions. Let's read Daniel (6:22-23).

Business is never an excuse for finding time alone in the presence of the faithful Creator! Those who live without prayer disregard their souls and, in the end, will be found wanting. When lions come into their lives, nothing will be done to close the mouths of their lions. Let's read Daniel 6:24.

### 3. COULD YOU NOT PRAY WITH ME FOR ONE HOUR?

The Lord expects us to spend time with Him. His reprimand to the disciples (Matthew 26:40) is also for us. The following are THE TWELVE STEPS OF PRAYER. These twelve steps will help us raise the quality of our prayers and the amount of time we spend in prayer. These twelve steps are:

**Praise:** This is a sacrifice. It is a vocal celebration of the nature and virtues of God. Let's read Psalm 63:3, 141:2, and Hebrews 13:5.

**Forgiveness:** We must forgive our debtors. ***“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”*** Mark 11:25.

**Confess:** Never pray without confessing. A person who does not confess his sins to God will never experience real joy of prayer (Psalm 139:23-24)

**Ask:** Jesus wants us to ask (Matthew 7:8). His heart responds to our needs. James says: ***“You do not have because you do not ask.”***

**Intercede:** All around us are many people that are in desperate need. Interceding for the brethren and the lost is a very intense dimension of prayer ***“with all perseverance and supplication.”*** (Ephesians 6:18b).

**Read the Word:** New possibilities are revealed when we read the Bible. However, our time to pray should not become a time to study. A brief moment of biblical reading is excellent and enriching the prayer.



**Meditate:** Our minds become very active when they meditate on God. When we meditate on Him, we focus our minds on spiritual matters, particularly His Word (Psalm 119:97).

**Pray the Word:** First, we spent a brief period of time reading the Bible. Now, we “pray the Bible,” which means we pray the scriptures applying them directly into our lives.

**Give Thanks:** Although thanksgiving should be sprinkled throughout the entire prayer time, we must assign a particular time to thank God aloud for all the things He has done in our lives.

(1) **Sing:** An important aspect of prayer is to sing “new songs” to the Lord. Singing renews and comforts the soul. New songs are exciting and uplifting in the Holy Spirit during prayer (Psalm 96, 149).

(2) **Listen:** We must establish good habits of listening during our prayers. When we listen, we receive direct orders from the Holy Spirit. May our prayers always include listening to God’s voice.

(3) **Praise:** We enter and exit prayer through the doors of praise by exalting with joy the nature of God *“...yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for all ages. Amen.”* Matthew 6:13.

Do not feel restricted by the proposed method of prayer. Use the twelve steps of prayer as no more than a sketch. Don’t rush, and don’t think that you have to spend five minutes at every step strictly. You can spend more time on some things and less for others. For example, interceding can rarely be done in just five minutes. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead. Let us now study the five key elements of prayer: faith, humility, delivery, the Word, and desire.

#### 4. FAITH

Before you begin your prayer time, before you present your petitions, express your faith in God. *“For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.”* Mark 11:23-24.

God longs for your trust. Without faith, it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6a). Disbelief is the foundation of all impoverished prayers. On the other hand, your faith proclaims your certainty about the existence of God and declares the truth that He is *“a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* Hebrews 11:6b. He rewards your faith! The Bible tells us that we can pray in faith, be saved by faith, be protected by faith, walk in faith, live by faith, inherit God’s promises by faith, be rich in faith, overcome the world by faith, and praise God by faith. For the one who prays, faith opens the door to the throne of God. Faith is the ingredient that every disciple needs!

#### 5. HUMILITY

Humility is an indispensable prerequisite for obtaining true power. Neither the fool nor the vain person can pray effectively. Humility springs from proper esteem of ourselves and of the things we feel we deserve. Humility is a recognition of our total incapacity and powerlessness outside of God’s presence in our lives.



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## DISCIPLESHIP MANUAL

There is no self-praise in humility. Christ said: ***“Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”*** Matthew 18:4. ***“For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”*** Isaiah 57:15.

Intellectualism is not what the Church needs. Neither are men of wealth or social influence what our time requires. This lost generation desperately needs men and women with fervent prayer lives like those simple Christians of the first century who ***“attained good testimony by faith”*** Hebrews 11:39. That was a period of time filled with glorious achievements for the Church. How great it would be if only we would imitate our brothers and sisters of time past!

### 6. SURRENDER

- Proverbs 23:26: ***“My son, give me your heart, And let your eyes observe my ways.”*** Prayer changes the heart, character, and the conduct of the believer. Believers who fully give themselves to God become vessels He uses to reach the world with the gospel. John 1:6-7: ***“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.”*** John the Baptist, a simple man that was surrendered to God, a man that God had declared centuries before, became the divine instrument that marked the end of a dispensation.

- The Lord declares: ***“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.”*** 2 Chronicles 16:9. God wants us to glorify His name on the earth and manifest His power through men and women willing to give themselves to Him. The glory and efficiency of the Gospel is placed upon men and women who pray. God does nothing if it is not in answer to the prayers of his children.

- This is why the Apostles gave themselves to prayer (Acts 6:4). His priority and that of the Church was prayer (Romans 15:30). This was the key to the tremendous success they enjoyed. In the days of his ministry, Jesus Christ did the same thing. He prayed for long hours, and as a result, He was moved with immense compassion for the ripened fields of the earth that were perishing, and continue to do so because of the lack of workers. Pausing his prayer, Jesus tried to awaken the indolent sensitivities of his disciples as He commissioned them. ***“Then He said to them, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”*** Luke 10:2.

### 7. THE WORD

***“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.”*** John 15:7. Many that call themselves disciples of Jesus have an attitude of: ***“I don’t need to learn from the Bible.”*** But how can they remain in Christ if the words of Christ do not remain in them? It’s impossible. All of the saints must feed daily on God’s Word, not only the leaders of the church. ***“Not only of bread will man live...”***

In Psalm 119, King David beautifully recounts how the Word of God brought prosperity to his life. The Word of God raised him to magnificent heights in the presence of the Lord. ***“I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, As much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.”*** (v. 14-16).







## LESSON 5

### REMOVING OBSTACLES IN PRAYER

*Are there things that can hinder our prayer life? What are they, and how can we overcome them?*

Text to Memorize: *"Give ear to my words, O Lord, Consider my meditation. Give heed to the voice of my cry, My King and my God, For to You I will pray. My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; In the morning I will direct it to You, And I will look up."* Psalm 5:1-3

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Word of God offers us principles and counsel concerning prayer, *"...that your prayers be not hindered."* 1 Peter 3:7. If we genuinely want to have a fruitful prayer life, we need to identify the obstacles that hinder it and learn how to overcome them. Only then can we avoid losing out on the many blessings God has prepared for us. Let us consider then some of the most frequent hindrances of prayer.

#### 2. DOUBTING THE VALUE OF PRAYER

You will never fully understand how prayers work, but do not let that stop you from praying. Prayer is not a human concept but a divine one. It is not based on a set of earthly laws, but divine principles. So, it is not essential that you fully understand prayer. Although, it is enough that you know and believe that prayer is sufficient and that it makes a difference in life.

As children of God, He has invited us to pray, and we have been promised answers. Never let Satan deceive you into making you believe that you have no right to pray. Never doubt the validity of prayer. Often, when a spiritual leader says, "Let's pray about this matter," the needy person will think, "This is just one of my options." If you believe that human solutions are as important or more important than praying, you are mistaken. We need to see prayer as the most valuable solution and often the only real solution.

#### 3. NOT ASKING

The problem with most people simply is that they do not pray. Hindrances to prayer are only overcome by praying! *"Ask, and it shall be given you;"* the Lord tells us (Mathew 7:7). Therefore pray. Pray positively. Pray asking. Pray specifically. Pray to overcome. Pray for the salvation of souls. Never say: "Lord, maybe you can hear me" or "Lord, maybe you want to bless me." These statements will do you no good. God has invited you to pray, and if He has done so then, He hears you and wants to bless you. So, therefore, never pray doubtfully or timidly. Pray with confidence in God and ask with clarity.

#### 4. LAZINESS

Most people would do better in life if they worked harder. We don't like to hear it, but the truth is that many people are simply lazy. Being lazy hinders us from praying. You can be sure that laziness, more than anything, will prevent you from praying. Resist the temptation to set prayer aside because you are tired or discouraged. *"My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up."* Psalms 5:3. Often, after just a couple of minutes of prayer, you will feel rested and refreshed.





## 5. SUPERFICIALITY IN PRAYER

There are people whose that are “Nobody cares about me” or “nobody loves me.” It may seem that no one cares, but remember that God is not like us human beings. **“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.**” Isaiah 55:8. God cares about us. So, when you pray, pray in good faith, earnestly believing. If you pray superficially, as if prayer does not matter, you will not obtain any benefit, no matter how much time you spend praying. Pray sincerely, from the bottom of your heart, because God always hears serious and sincere prayers.

## 6. TRUSTING IN FEELINGS

You must pray even when you don’t feel it. One of the problems that many people face is that they wait until they “feel the desire” to pray. Sometimes, a person can go a long time without “feeling” the desire to pray. That is why you must be consistent in prayer and never base your prayer plan on your feelings or circumstances. Prayer is a lifestyle based exclusively on faith in God.

## 7. ONLY SILENT PRAYERS

We pray aloud because, in the Bible, we read: **“I cried out to God with my voice; And He gave ear to me.”** Psalm 77:1. **“So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,”** Acts 4:24. You may be timid and shy, but you should not be afraid or ashamed to raise your voice in prayer. God looks forward to hearing from you. Praying aloud is one of the most important ways of praying. Expressing yourself clearly, speaking with your voice raised, is a vital way of communicating with God what you are feeling in your heart **“So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”** Exodus 33:11.

## 8. NOT ACTING ON OUR PRAYERS

Another problem in prayer is failing to act on our prayers. When you fail to act on the Holy Spirit’s direction, your relationship with God gets complicated. The Lord said to Moses, **“Why are you crying to me? Tell the children of Israel to march”** Exodus 14:15. If you do not respond to an answer that God gives you in prayer, why should you expect him to continue speaking? In prayer, if you fail to act, you’ve failed.. **“...the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.”** Daniel 11:32..

## 9. THE FEAR OF TRUTH

At some point or another in our lives, we all fear confronting reality. To be sure, many people neglect to pray simply because they fear the response they may receive from God. God’s response, however, is always the best. It may be contrary to what you feel, or it may seem negative, but when God answers, He always does it as a father responds to his son. He answers, looking for our benefit. Never be afraid to seek God’s guidance and help in your life.

## 10. WRONG MOTIVES

James 4:3: **“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”** Asking for the wrong reasons or negative things is a sure way to fail in prayer. We must pray within the sphere of God’s will. Remember that God never answers prayers outside of His divine will or outside the truth of His Word. When you pray, your motives must be pure. **“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”** 1st John 5:14-15.



# GROW

## DISCIPLESHIP MANUAL

### 11. SIN IN OUR HEART

Psalm 66:18: ***“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.”*** Sin separates man from God and hinders prayer. One should be careful to search their heart every time they kneel to pray. Make sure that all sin has been confessed and placed under the forgiving grace of Jesus Christ, or the sin in your heart will impede your prayer

### 12. IDOLS IN OUR LIVES

Ezekiel 14:3: ***“Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?”*** There is only one God. And He must be the only God in your life. Whatever you put before God, be it people, possessions, projects, activities, etc., these, in a sense, become a god to you. Idols are a formidable obstacle to prayer. Put God first in your life, and keep him there.

### 13. UNFORGIVENESS

Mark 11:25–26: ***“And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.”*** One of the essential requirements of prayer is forgiveness. We must forgive others before God can forgive us. An unforgiving spirit is a significant impediment to prayer. Never entertain the slightest bitterness.

### 14. LACK OF GENEROSITY

Proverbs 21:13: ***“Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be heard.”*** A person who gives generously exhibits in every aspect of their life a willingness to accept the inconveniences of helping others and the work of the Lord. This attitude is what God loves. He honors the prayer of generous people with abundant blessings. However, when that generosity is lacking, the prayer life is obstructed.

### 15. MISTREATMENT OF FAMILY MEMBERS

1 Peter 3:7: ***“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”*** The guilt associated with family abuse is overwhelming. If you mistreat your family, you will never be able to pray effectively because of the guilt that comes upon you. Kindness and love must first be expressed in your own family because God watches how you treat them. His blessing depends, to a great degree, on your attitude towards your family. Perhaps nothing hinders prayer more than trying to pray immediately after having a serious quarrel with your wife, husband, or children. You probably realize that doing so is impossible. Work continuously to improve relationships with your family. Treat your own with justice and love, and God will honor you.

### 16. NOT BEING ABLE TO BELIEVE

Mark 9:23: ***“Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.”*** When one calls the name of the Lord, it is because he believes. Praying to a God, you don’t believe in is simply a waste of time. Believing is one of the essential things in life. If you don’t believe it, then you won’t receive anything. Not believing brings death; not believing obfuscates things and hinders progress. When you believe everything is possible. So, when you pray, believe, and God will answer every prayer you pray.







## LESSON 6

# HOW TO KNOW THE WILL OF GOD

*Is there a way to know if we are living in the will of God?  
How can we find the right course for our lives?*

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

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since we surrendered to Christ, we began to see every aspect of our lives from a new perspective. We now have a desire to order our way according to God's will and to discover His plans for our lives. It is not difficult to harmonize our life with the Spirit of God. The purpose of the coming of Christ was to show man that the knowledge of God's will is not a mystery. If we are genuinely interested in learning, He will guide us, and we will never stray.

### 2. KNOW GOD

To understand God's will, we must first know His nature, understand his purposes; and always keep in mind that God's thoughts are distinct from ours. Never try to gauge God from your little human perspective: **"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?"** Romans 11.33-34. We need to accommodate **"the spiritual to the spiritual"** (1 Corinthians 2.13). We need to think as he thinks. Several biblical verses enlighten us about the Creator's nature, but through **"the face of Jesus Christ"** (2 Corinthians 4.6), we can receive the most excellent light. In the Gospel, we find Jesus bowing to children, speaking softly to the poor, crying with his friends in tragedies, responding judiciously to the critic, and reaching a city with a tender heart. Don't you want to be like Him? Study Matthew or Luke and allow your heart to be renewed, because Jesus is:

- A. **Fair:** He does not "lose his mind" in a difficult situation. It stays firm under pressure. He never makes judgments lightly or with a vengeful spirit. There is not a single flash of human rationalization or partiality in Him.
- B. **Merciful:** There are no "blind spots" in His vision. When He examines us, He considers every aspect of our life; and his loving gaze is full of compassion and forgiveness.
- C. **True:** Jesus does not hide struggles for identity, fame, or personal growth. He never uses scapegoats or blames others.
- D. **Powerful:** Jesus can always do something about the situation that comes to your attention. There is nothing that He cannot fix. Just by saying the word, the blessing comes.



E. **Realistic:** Jesus never prescribes an impossible course of action. There will be things that seem impossible to us, but for Him, nothing is. He always gives the ability to do what he asks of us.

F. **Accessible:** The Lord, our God, is not of bronze or plaster. He sympathizes with our weaknesses; and always has time to attend to us.

G. **Constant:** We can always depend on Him because He is always the same.

### 3. THE GREATEST PURPOSE OF GOD

God's loving purpose is to bless us and pour Himself out upon the people of this world. He wants everyone to be saved (2 Peter 3:9). To achieve this, He seeks people like you and me who dare to believe in Him and rejoice in doing His will. God's plan is simple: **"to seek and to save that which was lost."** Luke 19:10; and it is by His grace that you and I were included as collaborators in this plan.

Luke 4:18–19: ***"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord."*** After leaving the temptation of the desert, Jesus dedicated himself to preaching the Kingdom message. Then the Apostles and finally, the Church went into action:

***"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"*** Romans 10:13–15. The primary purpose of that preaching was — and continues to be — to save people from sin (Matthew 1:21); to free them from the enslaving power of the evil one, as seen in chapters 9 and 10 of Matthew heal the sick (1 Peter 2:24).

### 4. THE WILL OF GOD

God's will is for you and me to be His **"ministry of reconciliation"** on Earth (2 Corinthians 5:17–6.1). We have often cast aside this crucial mission to care for a career, home, friends, entertainment, etc. How easily we turn our backs on our vocation, limiting ourselves to seeking the divine will in the professional, the sentimental, and the financial realms. We are satisfied when God directs us and allows us to progress in the different natural areas of life; But do we ever stop to think about what will happen when the end comes? Because there is an end coming and a place where we will go after this fleeting life. And maybe there we will find out that God never agreed with what we were or did here. Let's read John 17.9–26.

Going back to the beginning, Romans 12:1–2 teaches us that God's will for our life is good, pleasant, and perfect, for everything He does or plans is perfect. It is clear, if we dedicate our lives to obeying Him, we will discover His perfect plan — a plan that is available to every Spirit-filled believer. Of course, God will not always respond as soon as we want, but He will not "play hide and seek" with us.

God is our loving Father and truly cares about us, as seen in Matthew 7:7–11: ***"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth;***



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*and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"*

What is the key to knowing God's will? The key is in the word disposition, and it works like this: we make ourselves available to God through the **"living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God,"** mentioned in Romans 12:1. This is a choice of our own, a personal sacrifice that we must make, but that we often do not make, perhaps by assuming - very wrongly - that we are incapable of doing what God will ask of us. Let's think! Are we afraid of obeying God?

*"Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit. But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing." 1 Thessalonians 4.1-12.*

In the previous text, the apostle Paul affirms that our sanctification is God's will; that His total purpose is that we live prepared to meet Him and that we help others until they can be **"presented before Him perfect"** according to Colossians 1:27-28. Our salvation is the most important thing to God!

## 5. THE SPECIFIC DIMENSION OF THE DIVINE WILL

Our natural inclination generally rejects the responses "from the Lord" when they are contrary to our wishes. For this not to happen to us, Jesus must become both our Savior and our Lord. This is why it is so important that we have a proper relationship with Him. Discovering the will of God individually is the privilege of every believer. God wants to pour out his gifts of wisdom, intelligence, and insight into us. Understanding what God wants is to bring a sense of guidance or direction imbued or grafted onto the heart. It is not something we strive for, but a Presence that we live with! Only then can we know His specific will.

Here is an excellent three-step guide to learn the correct course for our life. We call it the "Proof of Sense." We can be sure of God's guidance or direction if these three questions can be answered affirmatively:

- Does it make biblical sense?
- Does it make spiritual sense?
- Does it make circumstantial sense?

If these three areas align, we can rest on the fact that God is guiding us. He shows us the way because He loves us. He knows how much we need His help and direction. He is our Shepherd leading us in the paths of







## LESSON 7

### GRATITUDE AS A WAY OF LIFE

*Is it of any use to complain or worry about the difficulties of life? Why does God expect us to give Him thanks in everything?*

Text to Memorize: *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”* 1st Thessalonians 5:16-18.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

A definition of the word praise in the Bible is “a confession of gratitude.” Praise and giving thanks are very closely related. Hebrews 13:15 adds to this perspective, *“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”* We are exhorted by the Word of God to offer praise continually. Let’s examine how we can turn gratitude into a lifestyle.

#### 2. GRATITUDE IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

According to the previously mentioned scriptures, our whole life must be an expression of gratitude to God who saved us. Our knowledge of Him and what He has done for us causes us to be continuously thanking Him in our hearts and with our lips. The priests of the Old Testament had to sacrifice animals continuously. We, the true priests of this age, must continually offer spiritual sacrifices to God who has brought us out of the darkness and into His marvelous light.

We are also encouraged by the Word to show gratitude in prayer. *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;”* Philippians 4:6. *“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;”* Colossians 4:2.

Our lives must express a continuous stream of praise and appreciation regardless of the circumstances. At times situations arise, and sometimes unpleasant happens that may tempt us to doubt God’s providence. We must continually remember His and trust that He knows what is best for us. His Word affirms, *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”* Romans 8:28.

Look at that scripture again. It does not say that all things are good, but that all things help us or work together for our good. It is easy to be grateful when “all is well,” according to our limited perception of “wellness.” The question is when difficulties arise, can we still obey these commandments? *“in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”* 1 Thessalonians 5:18. *“Be filled with the Spirit, giving thanks always for all things...”* Ephesians 5:18,20).

#### 3. PRAISE GOD IN THE BATTLE

Grateful in everything and for everything, how is this possible? Humanly speaking, it may not be, but with God, everything is possible. We must be careful not to question God’s will, mainly when tragedy occurs. Our intellect can cause us trouble when we try to discern why God allows certain things to happen in our lives. Complicated situations can get even more complicated when we try to understand how difficult circumstances will result in our good.





There are situations when it takes a lot of confidence in God to accept His will. However, when we earnestly thank God amid difficult situations, believing that He knows what is best and that He is capable of resolving things for our benefit, we can worship him regardless of the evil that has happened to us. Believing and thanking God releases supernatural power in our lives. That divine force brings changes that are nothing but miraculous.

Jehoshaphat's story gives us an extraordinarily clear example of how God works when we praise Him. Study chapter 20 of 2 Chronicles. The scriptures say that King Jehoshaphat woke up to find powerful enemies had surrounded Judah. Desperate, he cried out to God: ***"O our God, wilt thou not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee."*** V. 12. Notice that Jehoshaphat took his eyes off the problem and put them on God; this does not mean that he was attempting to escape from reality. Instead, he recognized his helplessness and turned to God for help.

Never be preoccupied with evil threats or with the adversity in your life. God is aware of every situation and will speak to you as he did with Jehoshaphat: ***"And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you."*** V. 15,17.

Jehoshaphat and his people were then given orders, ***"And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth for ever."*** V.21 ***"And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten."*** V.22.

#### 4. THE LANGUAGE OF FAITH

Worrying doesn't help and complaining even less. Complaints are the language of disbelief. At the bottom of all grumbling and tantrums is disbelief. This is why God is angry when his children murmur: ***"Now when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp."*** Numbers 11:1. For this very reason God destroyed the children of Israel whom He had rescued from the slavery of Egypt. They complained and questioned how they were being directed: ***"nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."*** 1st Corinthians 10:10-11.

The words that caused the Hebrews not to enter the promised land were seemingly insignificant. They could have received many blessings in a land that flowed milk and honey if they had only stopped their murmuring! But, instead of expressing gratitude, they complained. When a person complains, what they are doing is accusing God of mishandling their lives. When believers complain, they become vessels of clay, questioning the works of the potter!



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*"The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the Lord. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!" Jeremiah 18:1-6.*

*"But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Romans 9:20. When we murmur, we demonstrate our lack of trust in God and a reluctance to accept difficulty as an instrument God uses for our growth. Complaining will always be the easiest and quickest "relief" but also the opposite of thanksgiving. Never forget that the way out of any dilemma is through faith and its language, which is praise. From now on, think before you grumble when things don't go your way. Exercise your faith rather, praising and thanking God in the midst of difficulty.*

### 5. A NEW AND BETTER LIFESTYLE

Hebrews 3:12 & 4:1-3: *"Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;" "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest..."*

The Apostle Paul, who we believe was the writer of this book, practiced the counsel he wrote to the Christian Hebrews. He would have been right to complain about his circumstance when he was beaten and placed in jail in Philippi for preaching Christ. In like manner, what did Paul and Silas do as they waited for their execution on the cell's cold and humid floor? Did they complain to God? They *"...were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."* Acts 16:25.

Paul and Silas trusted that their praise would release the power of God in their favor. The Bible described what happened: *"Suddenly there was a great earthquake so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed."* Verse 26. God can shake the roots of our problems, open doors, and loosen the chains of our tension and nervousness if we only learn to praise him.

### 6. CONCLUSION

Let us live-giving glory to God, always rejoicing and giving thanks to the Lord in all things (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Let's cultivate gratitude as a way of life!

*" And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." Colossians 3:15-17.*



## LESSON 8

# THE PERSEVERANCE OF A CHRISTIAN

*What is perseverance, and what does the Bible say about it? What are the benefits of perseverance? How do we become persevering Christians?*

Text to Memorize: *"...[The Lord said to Moses] lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east; behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan. But command Joshua, and encourage him and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you will see."* Deuteronomy 3:27-28.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Moses and his brother Aaron walked with Israel through the wilderness of the Sinai heading for a land that God, for forty years, had prepared for them. Though they came very close to entering, Moses and Aaron were not able to enter: ***"Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."*** Numbers 20:12. They were buried in the desert. It was Joshua, the successor of Moses, who managed to enter Canaan along with Caleb. Of the many thousands of people that left Egypt, only two entered. ***"There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men"*** (Ecclesiastes 6:1). Inconsistency is a universal, human, ancient, and modern evil. In our culture, the disease of leaving things half done is an epidemic. People leave school, work, salvation halfway. Where has perseverance gone?

### 2. PERSEVERANCE

Perseverance is an attitude, virtue, and character quality. It is an inner strength that allows someone to stand firm until they reach the goal. The Italian writer Arturo Graf defined perseverance as "the virtue by which all other virtues bear their fruit." Napoleon Bonaparte, the emperor of France, said that "Victory belongs to the most persevering." The English writer Samuel Johnson said that "Great works are done not with strength, but with perseverance." An ancient Chinese proverb teaches that if you fall seven times, you must get up eight.

Spiritually speaking, perseverance is vital for a stable life in Christ and salvation. ***"And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved."*** Mark 13:13. Perseverance means persisting, insisting, continuing, following even when you are experiencing difficulties. Courage is often required to start something, but perseverance is the ability to continue the task until it is finished, regardless of the obstacles. To persevere is not to give up but to keep fighting. It is to continue to do the right thing even though the world does the opposite. It is to continue to do good regardless of the circumstances because we love God and His Word. Individuals that persevere are highly motivated and have a deep sense of commitment that prevents them from abandoning the task they began. It motivates them to work until it is finished.

Before we continue talking about perseverance, let's share some ideas about its opposite, which is inconsistency. What does the Bible say about someone inconsistent? It says that they are impatient: ***"traitors, headstrong (impatient), haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God"*** 2 Timothy 3:4. Indecisive: ***"They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, And are at their wits' end."*** Psalm 107:27. Ignorant:



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*“as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their destruction, as they also do the rest of the Scriptures.”*  
2 Peter 3:16. Mediocre: *“So then, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.”* Revelation 3:16.

### 3. PERSEVERANCE IN THE BIBLE

According to the Word of God, the persevering individual is:

**Patient:** *“I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps.”*  
Psalm 40:1-2.

**Disciplined:** *“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”* Hebrews 12:11.

**Responsible:** *“But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”* 2 Timothy 4:5.

**Brave:** *“Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”* Joshua 1:9.

#### Some additional Scriptures on Perseverance.

James 1:2-4: *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”*

Romans 5:3-5: *“we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”*

Galatians 6:9: *“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”*

Philippians 3:13-14: *“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

James 5:7-8: *“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”*

1 Corinthians 10:12-13: *“let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”*



2 Thessalonians 2:16-17: ***“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.”***

Hebrews 12:1-2: ***“let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”***

2 Corinthians 4:16-17: ***“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”***

Hebrews 10:35-39: ***“Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: “For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”***

#### **4. A DECISION OF THE HEART**

Returning to Joshua’s story, strength and good courage allowed him to persevere until entering the promised land. You also can continue. Perseverance is only achieved when it is founded on an earnest decision: ***“If you will not hear, And if you will not take it to heart, To give glory to My name,” Says the Lord of hosts, “I will send a curse upon you, And I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already Because you do not take it to heart.”*** Malachi 2:2. Not everyone wants to do good. It all depends on the heart. For example, some want to reach heaven, but choose not to commit to the Lord or his church. Others don’t spend time with God; rather, they decided to spend their time in other things like travel or social media. Many want the benefits of being members of the Church without assuming the obligations to live in holiness and obedience to God’s Word.

Some believers want to do good but fail to stand firm when adverse situations arise. Many things, such as; persecution, affliction, scarcity, pain, disappointment, indifference, and temptation, can cause many to abandon the race before reaching the finish line. Many, like Moses, have failed with a momentary outburst. This is an unfortunate possibility that God does not desire for his children. We must persevere in prayer, ***“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints”*** Ephesians 6:18. The Bible says: ***“Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.”*** 2 Thessalonians 2:15. In good works: ***“[Jesus] will render to each one according to his deeds”: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality.”*** Romans 2:6-7.

#### **5. THE VICTORY OF THOSE WHO REMAIN FIRM**

In the early church, our first brothers were victorious despite the harsh persecution they suffered: ***“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.”*** Acts 2:46. Paul, an exhausted elder, writes: ***“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight,***



## LESSON 9

# FACING STRUGGLES AND TRIALS

*What do struggles and trials consist of, and what should we do when we face them?  
How can we confront them and obtain victory?*

Text to Memorize: *“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.”* 1 Peter 5:6-9.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Christian life is a beautiful thing, but it is not without its difficulties and problems. In walking with God, believers will often face situations that will test their patience and faith. We have to prepare for these situations. In this lesson, we will learn how to effectively face struggles and trials to overcome them in the glorious name of Jesus.

### 2. THE STRUGGLE

Every Christian who wishes to serve God will have struggles and will suffer opposition of some kind. There are struggles against the flesh and its desires, the devil, family, and friends who do not want us to serve God.

**The Devil:** *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”* Ephesians 6:12. The devil and his demons are our main adversaries. They try to destroy us by targeting our weaknesses.

**The World:** *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”* 1 John 2:15-17. Under the dominion of the evil one, the world offers many temporary attractive alternatives to faith in Christ. He intends to cause us to deviate from God’s purpose; so that we will live slavishly after this world’s delights.

**Our Flesh:** *“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”* Galatians 5:19-21. The flesh is one of the strongest enemies we have to overcome. Our flesh, sinful nature, pleasures, and other things that act against God’s Word call for our attention. Often the believer wants to attend church and serve God, but his flesh does not. The fight against the flesh is difficult.



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**Relatives, friends, and others:** *“And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.”* Matthew 10:22. *“and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.”* Matthew 10:36. In this text we see that because of Christ and His Gospel, we will be loathed by some people even those of our own homes and families.

### 3. A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE AND SOME ADVICE

The life of the Apostle Paul gives us an example of spiritual success. Drawing from the struggles Paul faced in his walk with God, we can get insight that will help us be victorious in the difficulties we will face in our Christian life. Let’s look at our four features of Paul’s life.

He lived for Christ: Paul said: *“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* Philippians 1:21. He was determined to give his life for Christ if necessary and he indeed did so. He died precisely because of the One who called him: *“Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”* Acts 21:12-13.

He faced great difficulties: Paul was a great Apostle. Part of his greatness was his willingness to suffer greatly for the work of the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-29, we find a list of things that happened to him for serving the Lord, including whippings, imprisonments, dangers, stoning, shipwrecks, false brothers, works, and thirst, hunger, fatigue, cold, nudity, and other similar things. However, Paul put these trials in their proper perspective. He placed the interest of the Gospel above his own: *“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel”* Philippians 1:12.

He lived a humble life: Paul saw great miracles, including going to the third heaven where he saw angels and the Lord! He said: *“I myself do not intend to have reached everything...”* Verse 13. These words of Christ were present in his mind in all his sufferings: *“So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.”* Luke 17:10.

On the other hand, Paul was a man who also knew how to receive good things from God and give Him glory in all that he possessed and, at times, lost. He learned to be content in any situation: *“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.”* Philippians 4:11-12.

He didn’t stop the race: A motto not written in Paul’s life, but evident in every step of his seems to tell us is ‘Don’t stop and keep going.’ In Philippians 3:14, he wrote: *“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* When he was about to leave with the Lord, he wrote to his disciple Timothy: *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”*

Like the Apostle Paul, you and I must never focus on obstacles given that our salvation is so close (Romans 13:11). As a Christian, you will face plenty of struggles in life, but use the Apostle Paul’s example always to be firm in the Lord. Let’s look at the four tips that will help you to win everyday struggles.

**Never Quit:** The Christian life is a race. In a race, you don’t stop because if you do, another will get the prize.





***“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.”*** 1 Corinthians 9:24. The beautiful thing about the Christian race is that everyone who runs will win the prize at the end without quitting along the way.

***Fight Clean:*** Paul said, ***“And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.”*** 1 Corinthians 9:25. The Christian who overcomes will get eternal rewards.

***Get rid of everything:*** The book of Hebrews advises us: ***“...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,”*** Hebrews 12:1. Whatever hinders us or is an unnecessary weight must be set aside to run the Christian race well.

***Forget the past:*** ***“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*** Philippians 3:13-14. Your past in under the blood of Jesus. As Christians, we do not let the past (sins or victories) hinder our walk with God. Victorious Christians always reach forward, doing all we can to know Him better while working hard to do as much as we can for the King.

#### 4. TRIALS

The second element that every believer must face is trials. Trials usually come from God. Sometimes the Lord does things in our lives for the sole purpose of teaching us life lessons for our faith to grow. This was the case with Abraham. God tested Abraham by asking him for his only son. Isaac was the son given to him in his old age, the one through whom God had promised to raise a great multitude. God asked Abraham to offer him as a sacrifice to Him (Genesis 22:1-2). That was a tremendous test. God also tried Israel (the entire nation) when He took them out of Egypt and through the wilderness for forty years; He could have led them on a much shorter path that would have taken two weeks or less. The Bible says that God did this to prove them: ***“There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them.”*** Exodus 15:25. Here we see then that God tests his children.

Trials are tests. They are processes through which God submits us to prove our faith, faithfulness, perseverance, love, etc. Sooner or later, God will test us to make us grow spiritually. Trials are part of the Christian life. In Matthew 14:22-33, we have an example of how Jesus tested his disciples. Jesus allowed the disciples to face a strong opposing wind in the Sea of Galilee.

The disciples had come from seeing a great miracle, which was the multiplication of loaves and fishes, resulting in the feeding of five thousand people (Matthew 14:13-21). When they crossed the sea, their boat was assaulted with waves that covered the ship. While the storm raged, the Bible says that Jesus was sleeping quietly in the stern of the boat (Matthew 8:23-27). Once awoken, Jesus rebuked the winds and the sea and then admonished the disciples: ***“Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?”***

In the next story, the disciples were traveling alone. Let’s look at some critical phases of the test they went through.

**Phase 1:** Jesus initiated the trial. After a long day’s work, Jesus sent his disciples, in a boat, to the other



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side of the Sea of Galilee as he dismissed himself from the multitudes. He then went to the mountain to pray.

**Phase 2:** The disciples face the trial. While the Lord is praying, the boat begins to be thrashed by high waves by the strong opposing wind. At about the same time, Jesus went to the mountain to pray; the disciples began to battle the wind.

**Phase 3:** The trial is extended. In this experience, let's notice several things. First, the disciples struggled to advance. At its widest point, the lake measures 12 km (7.5 miles). Since they'd left in the afternoon, the Disciples only managed to get about halfway through it. Second, Jesus was observing them. Mark 6:48 says that Jesus saw them from the mountain as they exhaustingly paddled because of the strong opposite wind. Third, Jesus came to help them at the start of the fourth vigil. At that time, the Jewish night was then divided into four watches. The first vigil was from 6 pm to 9 pm; the second from 9 pm to 12 am; the third from 12 am to 3 am, and the fourth from 3 am to 6 am. It wasn't until the last vigil that Jesus came to help them. That is to say that the Apostles were struggling for eight or more hours, starting from the time Jesus began to pray. Jesus knew they were struggling from the beginning of their struggle, but He didn't help them until 3 am or later.

**Phase 4:** The Resolution. In the final stage of the trial, we see the resolution or the very beneficial results for the disciples.

## 5. THE RESULTS OF TRIALS

The most extraordinary thing about being tested by God is the good results that occur in our lives when we overcome. Let's look at the positive outcome of the test:

Jesus walked on the sea: ***"Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea."*** Matthew 14:25, When the disciples couldn't do anything more, Jesus came to them walking on the sea.

The disciples were afraid, but Jesus encouraged them: ***"And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately, Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."*** (Matthew 14:26-27). This tells us that there are times when fear attacks us, but the Lord is there to reassure us: "Be encouraged, do not be afraid."

Peter walked on water: ***"And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water. "So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased."*** Matthew 14:28-31. This is one of the greatest miracles a mortal man has ever experienced. Walking on water is simply not possible. However, when Jesus gives the order, men can walk on water. Though the Apostle Peter's faith began to fade, and he began to sink, Christ ultimately came to his rescue.

The faith and admiration of the disciples for the Master grew that day. ***"...And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled."*** Mark 6:51.

What lessons can we learn? First, trials are necessary. The example of the boat in the storm teaches us how God will put us through trials. Sometimes, He intensely tests us; however, storms are how Christ forms his







## LESSON 10

# HOW TO ENDURE AND OVERCOME TEMPTATION

*What is temptation, and how does it operate?*

*How can we bear and overcome it with the strength of God?*

Text to Memorize: *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”* 1 Corinthians 10:13.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Temptation is an enemy that every child of God will often face in his Christian life. It is a silent enemy that visits those who want to serve God. This enemy can be so subtle that the believer often enters into temptation without realizing it, so he warned his disciples, *“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* Matthew 26:41. Temptation can ruin the life of any careless Christian that falls in its trap. In the Bible, we find several examples of great men of God, who succumbed to this mighty enemy in a moment of weakness. Let’s look at a known cause.

### 2. THE CASE OF DAVID

2 Samuel 11:1-4: *“It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king’s house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, “Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house.”* You may know the rest of the story. The woman, Bathsheba, became pregnant and David had her husband, Uriah, murdered to hide his sin. Do you think David consciously thought, “I know what’s going to happen today.” “I will spend the night with Uriah’s wife, and in exchange for a brief moment of pleasure I will ruin my life.” “That is exactly what I want to do today.”? Of course not, no one makes plans to destroy their own life; however, that is what happened to David.

Let us think clearly: If a King, a man of God, could fall so easily into temptation, what about us? As we learned in a previous lesson, the God who sees everything called David to account and, consequently, David had to suffer the terrible consequences of his sin, including the death of the baby he had conceived with that woman. As we can see in this sad story, temptation is one of the most powerful weapons the enemy has to make us fall, destroy our relationship with God and our testimony. That is why we have to pay careful attention to this subject matter. Occasionally, respectable and honorable people —like David— or people with great ministries, fall into sin and spiritually failure, and we ask ourselves, “What happened?” The answer is simple: they could not deal with temptation.



### 3. SOURCES OF TEMPTATION

In his excellent book on temptation, Alfred Kuen says that “Temptation is an attraction to the forbidden. An inner movement that incites man to evil.” He also points out that temptation “is an occasion that is presented to us to perform something that is evil, but that promises us pleasure,” and affirms that, “any legitimate pleasure can become an occasion of temptation when presented outside the framework devised by God.”

Where does temptation come from? Some believe that it is God who sends it. They even think that temptation becomes stronger as the believer draws closer to God. However, temptation does not come from God, nor does it have any relation with our search for Him: **“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.”** James 1:13. It is then clear that God is not the source of temptation. Temptation comes from our own flesh (Verse 14), from the world with its pleasures and delights, and from our adversary, the devil. Let us look at these three sources of temptation.

**The devil:** One of the external sources of temptation is Satan. He will always want us to fall and fail and use all possible means to achieve it. An example of this is in the well-known case of the temptation of Jesus. **“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’”** Matthew 4:1-3. Another example is when David, of whom we have already talked, conducted a census to contradict God’s will. There, the Bible says that **“Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.”** 1 Chronicles 21:1.

**The world:** The world is a continuous source of temptation for the Christian because it offers things that the flesh and eyes want and longs for. The Bible states, that **“For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.”** 1 John 2:16. The Apostle mentions elements that are well known to us. The definition he gives is more relevant now than ever before: technology dominates, electronic and social media promote terrible things, and sin and evil are the order of the day. Today, it is easier than ever to enter the hiding place and satisfy the lowest of passions through the Internet, which has made pornography and other elements available to everyone. This is an avenue for human beings to sin and precisely feed the flesh, eyes, and the pride of life.

**Our flesh:** However, the most powerful source of temptation is not the devil, nor the world he rules, but our own flesh. That is right. A mind leads the human being that plots every day, a heart where dark feelings and passions are stored, and as Solomon says, **“eyes that are never satisfied”** (Proverbs 27:20). That is why the Bible states, **“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.”** James 1:14. Our own flesh is that powerful to seduce and induce us to fall into temptation.

### 4. THE PROCESS OF TEMPTATION

What leads a person to fall into temptation? As we will see through the Word, people are tempted by their own evil desires —unmeasured and uncontrolled— so that anyone who fails to govern his passions ends up being governed by them. The believer is also tempted by what surrounds him —environment or ambient— which becomes more and more toxic and dangerous for him as the coming of the Lord approaches. Erwin Lutzer says: “Nowadays temptations come looking for us and chases us.” This statement refers to television with its



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programs and commercials. It also refers to the global networks of information designed to attract and please the most perverse passions and many other spiritually harmful elements. Kuen says that "Temptation always attacks us at our most vulnerable point." This is a reality. Let us read James 1:12-16:

***"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren."***

Here, the Apostle brings forward the process that leads a person to spiritual death. It consists of four stages:

(1) **Weakness:** When a Christian draws away from the Lord, he starts to weaken spiritually, the desires of his flesh begin to take control of his actions. Then he is attracted by uncontrollable urges. This happens because of a lack of participation in spiritual activities, such as prayer, fasting, attending services, and reading God's Word.

(2) **Seduction:** This is the most powerful weapon of the enemy to make a Christian fall. When a person is seduced, he falls into the trap without even realizing it. This is how Samson was seduced, deceived, and trapped by Delilah. He lost his eyes and later his life (Judges 16:15-20).

(3) **The fall:** This is when the desires of flesh out of control lead a person to sin. After a person has been seduced and drawn into the trap, evil desire does its job, and sin is conceived. Conceiving means giving birth. In other words, it is no longer a thought, but now an action in progress that will make the person fulfill the desires of the flesh and do precisely what he had in his heart.

(4) **Death:** The result of sin is death. No matter how insignificant the committed sin may be considered, this will cause spiritual death as time goes by. Adam and Eve were told that they would die the day they ate fruit from the forbidden tree (Genesis 2:17). When they ate the fruit, they did not die instantly but were cast out of God's presence, which meant spiritual death to them and, over time, physical death as well.

## 5. HOW TO OVERCOME TEMPTATION

Temptation is like a visitor disguised in a way that most attracts you, one that will always come without invitation. No one is exempt from him, nor can he avoid him. At times, God will allow us to go through situations of temptation as He did with Peter: ***"And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat."*** Luke 22:31. As we said at the beginning, with temptation, God will make the way of escape: ***"But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."*** Luke 22:32. This means victory is ours. You and I can overcome temptation, and here we will explain how to do it.

(1) **We must submit to God:** ***"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."*** James 4:7. We must submit to God's will; we must resist the devil and flee from us. A Christian submitted to God, submissive, humble, obedient— will not be easy prey for our souls' enemy. However, a weak Christian will fall into his trap.

(2) **Use the Word of God:** When tempted by the devil, Jesus responded with the Word of God, and so He overcame him. First, when the tempter incited Him to turn the stones into bread, Jesus said, ***"Man shall***







## LESSON 11

### LET'S PERFECT HOLINESS

*Why is holiness necessary? How can we be holy inside and out?*

Text to memorize: *"Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:17 -18. "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." 2 Corinthians 7:1.*

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

God is holy, but can we be? In this lesson, we will answer this crucial question and learn how to live a holy life before God. First, let's define holiness. The word holy comes from the Greek word *"agios,"* which means separated and dedicated to God's service. In Hebrew, the root of the word holy is *"qadosh,"* which has a strict religious meaning and applies to people, objects, places, and days (Exodus 19:6, Number 5:17, Psalms 50:5, Daniel 7:22, Acts 9:13). Study these scriptures at a later time.

The concept of holiness has a long relationship with God and speaks to us of His nature. God is holy, morally (Leviticus 11:44), and in power (1st Samuel 6:20). He is called *"The Holy One of Israel"* many times in Isaiah, including Isaiah 1:4. Believers are also called *"Holy"* in numerous scriptures, including Romans 8:27, 1st Corinthians 1:1 & 14:33, and Ephesians 1:1.

#### 2. WHY IS SANCTITY NECESSARY?

There are at least three reasons why we must be holy.

(1) *Holiness is necessary for salvation: "God is holy, and he wants anyone who has the hope of seeing him face to face, to be purified." 1st John 3:2-3. "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord." Hebrews 12:14.*

(2) *We must be holy in order to serve God:* God asks a holy life of all those who desire to serve Him. To the priests of Israel, He said, *"Otherwise he shall not defile himself, being a chief man among his people, to profane himself. They shall not make any bald place on their heads, nor shall they shave the edges of their beards nor make any cuttings in their flesh. They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for they offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire and the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy."* Leviticus 21:4-6. These priests were consecrated and needed to protect themselves from many things in holiness, but the people also needed to be holy. God ordered Moses: *"Go to the people, consecrate them today and tomorrow, and wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people."* Exodus 19:10-11. The church must also behave as "a royal priesthood and a holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9) and "without blame before Him" Ephesians 1:4 if they desire to serve God.





(3) **Holiness is necessary as a way of life.** True holiness is a lifestyle. It should be evident in our behavior always and at all times. Holiness is a reality inside and out. Holiness is living in harmony with God's will in every area and part of our being: **"as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."** 1st Peter 1:14-16. In a sinful world, God wants us to show that we are different. If we do not practice holiness, we are living a religious life that lacks substance. Let's consider how we can perfect holiness in our whole being.

### 3. TRUE HOLINESS

True holiness begins within the believer and is then reflected in the exterior. It begins in the area of thoughts, then moves to the level of attitudes and words, and finally manifests itself externally. This is the process of sanctification that God wishes to work in us if we allow it.

Jesus rebuked the religious leaders of His time because although externally they seemed to please God yet, internally, they displeased God: **"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also."** Matthew 23:25-26. First, let's talk about sanctifying the inside, which includes the heart and the mind. The mind is the force behind everything we think, say, and do. Holiness is to displace all the unclean and negative thoughts with pure and good ones. Any soiled, negative, or perverse expressions, must be replaced with edifying words and love (2nd Corinthians 10:5, Philippians 4:8).

The Heart is the seat of our emotions and desires. The heart is also called the soul in the Word. From the heart come sentiments that may be pure or unwholesome as the Lord said. Matthew 15:19: **"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."** An unsanctified heart that is not subject to God. It engenders hatred, grudges, bitterness, deceit, pride, envy, negative and indecent words, etc. Our words express what we feel, what we think, and who we are. We more fully developed this topic in lesson 3 of this course. Reread chapter 3 of James to remember the importance of holiness in our speech.

Galatians 5:19-21: **"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."** Paul presents us with a list of passions called the **"works of the flesh."** These are harmful desires that begin in the heart and materialize in our members. Paul says that those who practice all of this **"will not inherit the kingdom of God."** Holiness, on the other hand, is to practice what is mentioned in Galatians 5:22-25: **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such, there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."** If we want to have a victorious Christian life, it is vital that we take care of our inner being by maintaining it pure, holy, and clean for God and that it be free from all falsehood and hypocrisy.



*shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the Lord your God.*" A man must be masculine in appearance, and a woman must be feminine in their appearance. Christians should abstain from wearing clothing belonging to the other sex. Effeminate men are an abomination to God: **"...Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites will inherit the kingdom of God."** 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. (b) Our dress should be moderate: An excellent practice to follow is to ask, "Would I feel comfortable in this garment if I were in the presence of Jesus Christ? Do I reflect God with my appearance to those around me? (c) Our clothing should not be expensive or attention-seeking. God wants us to dress modestly. There are styles of clothing that conform to God's law in that they cover the body, but their style, price, or pricey appearance can communicate pride or a life that has not been fully surrendered to God's will. 1 Timothy 2:9: "in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing," 1 Peter 3:3: "Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel." These principles also apply to men.

(2) **Chastity and nudity:** Chastity means "having reserved feelings towards what is related to sexuality." In practice, modesty motivates men and women to dress decently. Modesty evades showing parts of our body, particularly those that cause sexual attraction. A predisposition towards nudity strongly influences many cultures in the twenty-first century, but God continues to be rigorous about this issue. God hates disordered nudity. He doesn't want his children to show their nakedness, except in the bond of marriage. Cam's sin was setting his eyes on his father's nakedness (Genesis 9:22-27). In Leviticus 18, God forbade his people from revealing their father's nakedness, mother, brothers, etc. The Bible says that our bodies are holy. Our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. **"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?"** 1 Corinthians 6:19. Therefore, we must be careful in the type of clothing we wear by ensuring that it is too short, too revealing, and does not exhibit nudity.

(3) **Hair:** There are specific instructions in the Bible regarding our hair. Much of it has to do with male and female distinctions. Hair can also be used in scriptures to communicate spiritual disorder, listen to Jeremiah, **"Cut off your hair and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on the desolate heights; for the Lord has rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath."** Jeremiah 7:29, In 1st Corinthians 11:3-16, we are told that a woman who cuts her hair dishonors her head. Verses 14-15 explains by stating that long hair on a man is a shame, but it becomes her glory in a woman.

(4) The passage speaks of the head covering, which many call a **"veil"**: **"Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is the same as if her head were shaved."** This chapter highlights the order established by God. This chain of authority is important to understand and respect.

The order is that God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the woman's head. The head provides direction, and those who are under authority submit to it. The question of order in no way means that a man is superior to a woman. Both sexes are created in God's image. Respect, however, for this order is important and must be minded. That is why the passage says that the woman must have **"a symbol of authority on her head"** Verse 10. A "Sign" is something visible, and that can be appreciated. When a man is standing before the Lord, he should not have his head covered while praying or prophesying. If a man does cover his head, it affronts or dishonors his head, which is Christ. That's why men remove their hats when they enter a home or a church. If they are Christians, they also remove their hats when they pray, preach, or teach the Bible. This is how men manifest that the headship of Christ. A Woman, on the other hand, acknowledges that man is her



## LESSON 12

# YOU SHALL KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUITS

*How do you know if someone is truly a disciple of Christ?  
What are the marks or signs that distinguish an authentic Christian?*

Text to memorize: *“You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”* Matthew 7:16-20.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Lord’s words in Matthew 7:16-20 are impacting. They reveal a way of determining the type of person an individual is, that is, by observing their “fruit.” In other words, we can know a person by asking specific questions. How does this person think, and how does he or she talk and act? How do they relate to others? Do they serve others or just live for themselves? Questions like this will help us determine whether a person is Christian or not. More importantly, they can help us discover whether we are or are not living the Christian life.

### 2. DIFFERENT TREES, DIFFERENT FRUITS

Let’s examine ourselves. Just as a tree can be recognized by its fruits, so can others know our relationship with God by looking at our lives. The total sum of who we are is reflected in what we say and do. Our words and deeds reveal our character. What kind of fruit are you producing today?

The works of the flesh and of the spirit spoken of by Paul in Galatians 5:19-23 are represented as fruit being produced by two different kinds of trees. One tree produces good fruit while the other produces bad. The fruit of each tree is according to its nature. Later in this study, we will examine some characteristics of the “old man” (our carnal nature) and then consider what the Spirit of God will produce in us as born-again Christians.

### 3. THE TREES THAT GIVE BAD FRUIT

We will see three passages where Paul asks the Galatian, Ephesian, the Colossian brethren to put off or undo the works of their old nature or worldly behavior.

Galatians 5:19-21: *“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*

Ephesians 4:22: *“that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,”*

Colossians 3:1-9: *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where*



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***Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,"***

Without Christ, our old nature was incapable of producing a good character, just as a bad tree is incapable of producing good fruit. We are only capable of producing the things mentioned above. Deeds which include: pride, selfish ambition, jealousy, resentment, rivalry, controversies, discord, rage, complaints, lack of forgiveness, bitterness, lies, greed, deceit, fraud, laziness, slackness, sexual immorality, unclean desires, lust, perversion, drunkenness, orgies, worship of false gods, spells, and enchantments, as well as other evil passions that God's law condemns.

The Bible says these and other flesh works must be discontinued if we wish to please God (Romans 6:1,2). We must rid ourselves of all of them, seeing that they belong to our old carnal nature and not to the new spiritual nature. They do not correspond, in any way, to the fruit of the Spirit, as we will soon see. If we want to have a new life, if we're going to embrace the grace available to us in Jesus Christ, and, most of all, if we have a home in Heaven with Jesus, we must get rid of everything carnal nature. As we have already read, ***"those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."***

Roman 1:28-32, shows us the terrible result of doing evil persistently despite our knowing how to do good: ***"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them."***

#### **4.THE TREE THAT GIVES GOOD FRUIT**

A study of Galatians 5, Ephesians 4, and Colossians 3 will reveal the fruit of a life transformed by Christ. The fruit of this transformed life is associated with very positive character traits such as honesty, control, trust, hard work, generosity, love, clean speech, positive attitudes, edifying words, kindness, forgiveness, sexual purity, etc. Let's look at some of these verses.

Galatians 5:22-25: ***"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such, there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."***

Ephesians 4:23-24: ***"and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man***



*which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”*

Colossians 3:10-15: *“and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.”*

In 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, we find another exhortation to produce good fruit: *“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself...comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.”* How can Christ establish our words and works?

(1) **Good Words:** Speaking frankly about our words, James instructs believers by saying, *“it is not possible [...] that the fig tree gives olives, or that the vine give figs.”* James 3:12. In this text, James explains that our tongues cannot speak both good and evil. Later in this chapter, the Apostle explains that divine wisdom is filled with good fruits and that sowing seeds of peace with our lips can reap the fruit of virtue. Colossians 4:6 says, *“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”* So we should always be careful to avoid speaking ill of others, which includes gossip, talking to others inappropriately, and being verbally abusive.

(2) **Good works:** Although good works cannot save us, Paul tells a preacher to constantly teach “those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.” Titus 3:8. He also tells the brethren of Galatia, *“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”* Galatians 6:9-10. Paul always prayed for the saints of Colossae so that they might *“walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”* Colossians 1:10.

## 5. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

In reality, there is no good reason for our lives not to be filled with the Holy Spirit’s virtues. God’s Word tells us that there is no law, in Heaven or on earth, that forbids them: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”* Galatians 5:22-23. We are also told that *“for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth”* and that *“if we live by the Spirit,”* we must *“walk by the Spirit.”* Galatians 5:25.

If we profess to have a relationship with God, we must demonstrate it daily by walking in the Spirit, acting in righteousness, and truth, as God’s real children. We must never forget or neglect the virtues we have just studied because the Lord expects them from each of us. We must also never forget the decisive reason behind such an injunction: *“that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”* Philippians 1:10-11.





## LESSON 13

# THE FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES

*What does “the fruit of the Spirit” mean for our life? What are the characteristics of the Spirit? How can we discover if we are producing the fruit or not?*

Text to memorize: *“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing.”* John 15.4–5.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, we will examine, one by one, the beautiful qualities of the fruit of the Spirit; but first, it is necessary to emphasize the following: the fruit is of the Spirit, not ours. That is, it is not we but the Holy Spirit that produces this harvest of virtues in our lives. It is the product of His power performing in us and not our efforts. In other words, the spiritual fruit will depend entirely on our union with God, for we could never produce it by living apart from Him.

### 2. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

*“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” Galatians 5.22–23.*

(1) **Love (Charity):** God is love. Love is an intense desire to please God and do good to others. God loved the world so much that the Bible says, “He gave.” Sincere love always includes sacrificial giving.

(2) **Joy (happiness):** Jesus wants our joy to be complete. Joy is the rejoicing of the soul that comes from recognizing that our sins have been forgiven and that we have hope of eternal life. Joy is the happiness that is seen in a resplendent face and a radiant smile.

(3) **Peace (Tranquility):** The Prince of peace, who calmed the stormy seas of Galilee, also speaks peace to a discouraged heart. Tranquility and a calm assurance that all is well is the state that divinely imparted peace brings to the soul. Our Lord gives us peace, “... not as the world gives it.”

(4) **Longsuffering (Patience):** When we consider God’s mercy and patience in dealing with us, we find it less difficult to bear others’ weaknesses and provocations. We also learn to accept the difficult circumstances and problems of life without becoming bitter.

(5) **Kindness (Benevolence):** This mild and temperate attitude expresses itself - as it did with the Master - as a tender and gentle disposition when dealing with people. It is the friendly and urban courtesy that makes one accessible and approachable, and easy for people to talk to.

(6) **Goodness:** Benevolence The desire to do good to others grows in a person whose heart is full of the Spirit. This is seen when Christians do more than is required of them to help other people or express words of encouragement, especially to their brothers and sisters in the Lord.



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(7) **Faithfulness (Fidelity):** As opposed to ‘saving faith’ and the ‘gift of supernatural faith,’ we are talking about being loyal, honest, and trustworthy. A faithful person will keep his promises; he will be responsible for his duties, punctual, and someone you can depend on.

(8) **Meekness (Humility, gentleness):** This word does not mean to be cowardly or straightforward. Instead, it refers to temperance, sweetness, and the balance of temperament and patience when suffering offenses. It is the opposite of anger or feelings of revenge or retaliation.

(9) **Temperance (Self-control):** This last virtue in Paul’s list refers to governing oneself and being moderate. It mainly refers to exercising control over sensual passions and natural appetites. It also refers to controlling negative emotions. Putting a stop to over-indulgence in eating, sleeping, and shopping are also included.

### 3. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEARING FRUIT

In his second letter, the apostle Peter offers us a list of elements that are like “spiritual fertilizer.” Each of us must progressively add them to the “soil” of our experience with God. If we apply them generously, these “spiritual fertilizers” will effectively keep us from falling and ensure we get to our heavenly home.

***“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control [d]perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither [e] barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.”*** 2 Peter 1.5-11.

What are the “things” that Peter is referring to in verse eight? The context is found in verses five through seven. The “things” are faith, which is security—virtue, which is moral excellence. Knowledge is understanding and self-control, which is personal control. Patience is firmness and consistency—goodness, which is devotion and consecration. And fraternal affection, which is love for the brothers. Oh, if only we would dedicate ourselves to cultivating these things in our character! Our lives would produce a harvest of good fruits.

There are consequences to not bearing fruit. We were united with Christ to ***“bear fruit for God.”*** Romans 7.4. Jesus demands good fruit. It is the just return that God expects of us. He is very patient and will go to great lengths to make us productive. However, if we do not bear fruit, after His continuous efforts to help us, He says, we will be “cut off” from the branch:

Jesus also spoke this parable: ***“A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground? But he answered and said to him, Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.”*** Luke 13.6–9. Christ also said: ***“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”*** Matthew 7.19.

In producing good fruit, however, there is a good result. If we bear fruit, the Heavenly keeper of the vineyard, will carefully prune us so that we produce more fruit: ***“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit***



***He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit... If anyone does not abide in me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.*** John 15.2,6.

Let's be mindful of the call of the Lord to lead a fruitful life! Jesus condemned a fig tree to perpetual barrenness for its lack of fruit: ***"And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response, Jesus said to it, let no one eat fruit from you ever again. Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots."*** Mark 11.13,14,20.

The fig tree appeared to be full of fruit - for its many leaves - but it did not produce fruit and thus fulfilled the purpose for which it was created. Metaphorically, we could say that this fig tree "professed" fruitfulness without "actions." Similarly, a fruitless Christian can be condemned by God if he confesses Christianity but does not possess the fruit of the Spirit-filled life. Christ demands fruit, not just leaves.

#### **4. EXAMINING THE FRUIT**

Sometimes, when walking with God, it becomes difficult for us to know if some decisions we are taking or things we are doing are good or bad, while at the same time finding it easy to determine if what someone else is doing is right or wrong. It can become easy for us to judge lying or stealing as sinful actions. Those and other works of the flesh that we have studied are certainly prohibited for us as Christians. However, there are situations we will face that are more complex or delicate.

How can we know God's will about our actions in areas that the Scriptures do not specifically mention? Some things that seem innocent and harmless can be very destructive. On the other hand, some things that seem to be sinful may be very appropriate for us as God's saints. What is the answer to this dilemma? Our Lord has not left us without answers on difficult issues to discern, or that can cause questions, such as those He had to suffer.

Even though situations may vary, the Word of God offers us some principles that will allow us to judge each case to know if we are acting correctly or incorrectly. In the natural kingdom, fruit specialists follow specific rules when examining fruit. Certain external indicators can determine decay is occurring on the inside. The fruit may seem good for the untrained eye, but the expert can, with a single glance, know whether the fruit is good or not. Sometimes, fruit inspectors can discover defects by checking the weight or examining the color or simply touching it. However, this skill comes only with training and experience.

In the spiritual realm, we are also asked to examine "fruit." That is, we are to discern between good and evil. As in nature, we must also develop this skill. But above all, we must follow divine principles that will guide us to gain the ability to discern between the good and the bad spiritual fruit. Let's look at six rules on how to inspect "spiritual fruit." These rules are in the form of questions.

(1) Is this good for me? ***"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."*** 1 Corinthians 6.12.



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- (2) Does this glorify God? **“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”** 1 Corinthians 10.31.
- (3) Is this helpful and edifying? **“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.”** 1 Corinthians 10.23.
- (4) Can this cause someone to stumble? **“...this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.”** 1 Corinthians 8.9.
- (5) Is this a weight? **“Let us put off all weight and the sin that beset us.”** Hebrews 12.1.
- (6) Is this what Jesus would do? **“He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”** 1 John 2.6.

### 5. CONCLUSION

The mature Christian is no longer limited to the simple question of whether or not something is a sin. He submits every one of his actions and even his character to careful scrutiny, as we have seen. A character like Christ's is the mark that distinguishes every true saint of God. Only **“through Jesus Christ”** can we be **“full of fruits of righteousness.”** Philippians 1.11. Good words and deeds that are evident to others are the sign that, indeed, we are disciples of the Lord. It was, after all, our Lord that said, “by their fruits you will know them.” He has chosen us. He has instructed us to bear fruit, and that our fruit should remain (John 15.16). The production of spiritual fruit can only be obtained when the power of the Word and the Spirit of God act in our lives. Therefore, live in Him. Remain in Him. Persevere in Him. Only then will you know the joy of always growing in fruitfulness, for the glory of our God.

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## LESSON 14

# HOW TO MANAGE TIME AND TALENTS

*How can we manage our time and our talents correctly?  
Why should we be faithful stewards of what God has given us?*

Text to memorize: *“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”* Ephesians 5.15–17.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

All Christians are told to be *“good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”* 1 Peter 4.10. In other words, we are held accountable before God to faithfully handle all that He has given us, recognizing that not even we belong to ourselves (1 Corinthians 6.19). God employs us to take care of what is His.

### 2. CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

Jesus presented the theme of stewardship in the well-known parable of the talents in Matthew chapter 25. He also taught the parable of the unfaithful steward in Luke chapter 16. These and other scriptures teach us that our time, talents, and material possessions are things that we borrow from God, to use in His service, for the benefit of His Kingdom: *“So then each of us shall give an account of himself to God.”* Romans 14.12.

A steward or administrator is defined in Webster’s Dictionary as “one whose concern is to devote himself to the management or administration of a house or family”; “One who acts as the supervisor of the finances and property of another.” From the Christian perspective, stewardship is defined as “giving our time, skills and possessions, systematically and proportionally.”

The following was extracted from the book ‘Saved to Served’ (R.W. Howell; Baker Books, Grand Rapids). This quote will help us expand the concept of stewardship a little further:

“Under the feudal system, a steward served as an officer in the property of the owner and had general control over his affairs. The eldest of the house or royal family was a noble of the kingdom. Later, he operated as a property manager, presided over the courts, intervened accounts, controlling agreements and arrangements in general. Over time, he became a general manager, employed to run domestic businesses, supervising servants, collect income, keep track of business transactions. In modern use, the officer aboard a ship that manages the provisions and arranges the accommodation of passengers in their rooms, is a manager. Another use related to this term is the function of flight attendants or stewardesses, known by those traveling by air.”

The word stewardship in the Greek New Testament is *oikonomia*, and the word steward is *oikonomists*, which are translated into Spanish as “economy” and “economist,” respectively. The Greek word *oikónomos* is a combination of *Oikos* (house) and *nomos* (law); therefore, it applies to the administration of a home, mainly in financial matters. The use of the term *oikonomists* is found in the New Testament, for example, in Luke 12.42: *“Who is the faithful and prudent steward whom your lord will place over his house, so that he may give them his ration in time?”*



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An essentially spiritual meaning is attached to the term when the Lord applies it to the believer's whole life and relates it to personal responsibility. A religious concept is connected with its use. Paul uses it in relation to his commission to preach the gospel: **"Let us have men as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Now, administrators are required, that each one be found faithful."** 1 Corinthians 4.1–2.

So, the idea of Christian stewardship is solidly connected with the Christian experience. Under the economy or administration of grace, God determined that his followers fulfill their duty by putting Christ before any material blessing.

### 3. EXERCISING OUR STEWARDSHIP

Our natural tendency is to organize life into two compartments, to place temporary interests in one and the spiritual in the other. However, this is not possible if we are seeking first the kingdom of God and the justice of God. The parable of the pounds in Luke 19.12–27 reminds us of our great responsibility to God in administering what He has placed under our care. Let's read.

We are responsible for, not owners of everything we have: **"The earth is the Lord's and his fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."** Psalm 24.1; We are responsible for judiciously managing and investing all our possessions in life well, especially considering that everything we are or expect to be, everything we administer or hope to administer, is due to Calvary.

A powerful reason for exercising good stewardship is that, since we were saved, we have become part of God's family: **"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."** 1 Corinthians 12.13. Now, the assembly of saints is also our family. As in our home, we serve each other, we speak well to each other, and we prefer and love each other. In the church, we work together, sing together, cry together, and rejoice together. There we worship God, take part in communion, serve Jesus Christ with the gifts of his love, build temples, and carry out the Great Commission to go to "all the world" and preach **"the gospel to every creature."** Mark 16.15.

We give because it is a privilege to be a member of God's family; because we have responsibilities as members of the Church and love the church that serves us spiritually. We gladly give our time and money to the work of God.

### 4. MANAGING OUR TALENTS

Let's read the parable of the talents in Matthew 25.14–30. Jesus left us the teaching that the Kingdom of God is like a man preparing to travel to a distant country who summoned his servants to deliver to them his goods. To one servant, he left five talents, to another, he left two, and to the last, he gave only one talent. He then departed on a trip. Each man received talent/s according to his capacity. These talents represent abilities given by God to men.

Each person is given the ability to offer some sort of service to God. No man is so poorly gifted that he cannot make a worthwhile contribution! From birth, we inherit certain aptitudes. Each of us is a unique individual with particular talents. We all have something to offer. We differ in the opportunities we are afforded to develop our natural gifts. Our environments and educational influences contribute to the development of these talents. Still, the responsibility is the same for the Christian, who has one talent or five talents.



We can draw a beautiful lesson from the servants' response who received five and two talents from their master. They resolved to do their best, to be counted worthy of their master's trust, doubling their amount. Notice that they were not praised for the amount they produced, but rather for their action: **"Thou, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful about little..."** Mathew 25.21. The master was impressed by their faithfulness. These two servants were not without faults, but they did their best. Their reward for this was to enter into the joy of their Lord.

The one talent servant may have been excited by the trust placed in him by his master, but he made the mistake of comparing his gift with that of others. Possibly, he became discouraged and buried his talent because he felt inferior to his fellow servants. Essentially, this servant was lazy. He did not even make an effort to deposit the talent in the bank to generate interest! Finally, he misconceived that his lord was "a tough man," who made unfair demands on his servants.

In God's eyes, success is not measured by who we are, but rather by what we are in contrast to what we could be! Success is not merely a measure of what we can do; rather, it is a measure of what we do, compared to what we could be doing! There is a specific place for us in life, as the will of God is revealed to us. Our supreme example, Jesus Christ, never escaped the sphere of the purpose for which he came. He knew who He was, his unique place in life, and where he was going. He was totally submissive to the will of his Heavenly Father. He did his best to minister within his abilities. Hopefully, this important lesson is recorded forever in our minds and heart.

There are many areas of service in God's work for which members of the body of Jesus are suitable. Make a list of skills you possess and of the things you could do to serve for the glory of God and to build his Kingdom. With humility, make yourself available to help in the areas where you feel capable. Your pastor will carefully consider your experience and dedication to God. Over time, as the opportunities present themselves, he will judiciously open doors of service for you to prove your commitment as a faithful steward. Expect to be used in small things at the beginning. This is the way of God, **"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much..."** Luke 16.10.

If you feel inadequate in some areas, and would like to improve your current skills, take advantage of every opportunity to better yourself. Invest wisely the talents God has given you! You will find great personal satisfaction and joy in being a blessing to others and in pleasing God.

## 5. ADMINISTRATION OF TIME

As good stewards of God, we are responsible for our time. The most precious resource that a Christian has is time. Like a rare coin, time should not be spent foolishly. Instead, it should be exchanged for experiences that enrich and pay dividends. Each person has been granted twenty-four hours each day. No more. No less. We cannot borrow a minute from tomorrow, nor can we recover a lost moment from yesterday. We certainly cannot save time because, in truth, time goes on until the day **"that time will be no more."** Revelation 10.6.

Our success or failure in life will depend on how we use our time. We have been told, by the Apostle Paul, to take advantage of our time (Ephesians 5.15–16). We can do this with proper time management. This includes



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what we do, when, and how we do what we're supposed to do. Time can be used loitering or sleeping. It can be budgeted, redeemed, harnessed, conserved, and judiciously used to improve yourself, grow spiritually for others' service, and salvation. Time schedules or plans do not restrict or limit us. On the contrary, they release us from worry, guilt, and frustration from neglecting vital activities.

Since time is real in life, managing our time includes disciplining our lives. This, therefore, requires that we have short-term and long-term goals. If we don't know where we are going, whichever path we take will take us there. And, the faster we go, the sooner we get nowhere. If you don't aim at something, you'll never hit the target. Without knowing where we are going, we waste precious time wandering meaninglessly. Over time this can result in a lost life. Give yourself time to pray for the goals you have set for your life. Write them down in order of importance. This will help you set your priorities. Affirm them in your mind and set yourself goals to reach.

Careful management of our actions must include well-defined daily commitments. There must be a time to pray, a time to build us up in the Spirit and wait on God for necessary answers and direction. Time for Bible reading, study, and meditation should be set aside every day. We must set aside at least one day of the week to fast as part of our Christian discipline over the flesh and develop spiritual sensitivities.

Every week we must allocate a specific time to offer our service, in some way, in our local church. Our schedule and way of life should develop around the local church's services, always remaining faithful to the house of God. And we must undoubtedly remember our families! Organize your week to cover your particular needs.

We must manage our time because it is of great value, is a monthly calendar. Remember to check the calendar every day! This will let you know what you are going to do and when you will do it. This will save you confusion and frustration (not to mention the trouble you forget an appointment).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Important commitments for the whole year should also be marked in your calendar. Time becomes more valuable with each passing moment. The day of judgment is quickly approaching. As stewards aware that we will be personally accountable to God for the use of our time, we realize the unending fact that our lives will soon pass and that only what we have done for Christ will endure. Jesus is coming soon! A lost world falters in the darkness around us. It will take time to reach it with the truth. Together, thoughtful stewards from every land, faithful administrators, will redeem or take advantage of the time left and begin today to accomplish the call to evangelize the world.

In the next lesson, we will continue to develop this very important topic, emphasizing the stewardship of our material resources.

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## LESSON 15

# GIVING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

*How do we become good stewards of our finances and resources? Why should we give generously to the work of the Lord?*

Text to memorize: ***“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”*** 2nd Corinthians 9.6-7.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Bible says a lot about the use of possessions. Jesus dedicated a substantial amount of his teachings to money matters because, in the Christian life, money does matter. In fact, almost half of Jesus’ parables refer to money: giving, sharing, coveting, administering, and other related matters. In this lesson, we will talk about the importance of managing our finances according to God’s will.

### 2. CHRISTIAN GIVING

The truth is that money occupies a place of great importance in our lives, and the way we handle it speaks not only of our priorities but also of our relationship with God: ***“For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be.”*** Matthew 6.21. It has been well said that when God saves a man, he also saves his wallet. If Jesus is Lord of all, He must be the master of our pocket and our person. Jesus claims our whole person: time, talents, and treasures.

We are like God’s coins, minted by Him, to be spent by Him according to His sovereign will and good pleasure. If He really is our Lord, we are His servants, his slaves. He has become our master, our owner, and nothing we have is ours: ***“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body [a]and in your spirit, which are God’s.”*** 1 Corinthians 6.19-20.

Good stewardship is based on the principle of Christian giving. Jesus’ advice to his disciples was: ***“Freely you have received; freely give.”*** Matthew 10.8. When we respond to the incentive of seeking ***“first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”*** (Matthew 6.33), many things will be added to us. When we apply this wonderful principle to establish priorities and cultivate a passion for giving, we will discover that we will have much of what we want in life. The non-selfish person soon discovers that, as the Lord said: ***“...it is more blessed to give than to receive.”*** Acts 20.35. And He has left us some precepts or rules about giving. Let us examine why, how, when, and what we should give according to the principles in God’s Word.

### 3. WHY, HOW AND WHEN WE GIVE

Why do we give to the cause of God? We give because we love the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us first, and because we love His work on Earth. It’s told that a man had a dream, and in the dream, he asked an angel: “Do we have to keep giving over and over again?” No!” The angel responded with a penetrating gaze. “When he stops giving to you, you can stop giving to Him!” Jesus, who is our supreme example, demonstrated to men the joy of giving. His life was rich and full of joy. He radiated peace and confidence. Human beings still feel the fullness of God in Jesus Christ man, because it was through Him that God gave himself entirely: ***“For God so***



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*loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son...*" John 3:16.

Why do we give? Because our giving will reach precious souls that God wishes to redeem through His bloodshed on the Cross! Because we love our church family, and we want to do our part to sustain it as responsible members! Because it is ordained by God and results in blessings for us in proportion to what we give! **"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."** Luke 6.38. We do not give selfishly or with selfish interest, for God to provide us with, but in gratitude, because He has already given us His all. The fullness of life is in proportion to the fullness with which we give ourselves to others.

Some people give reluctantly and with resentment. They complain about the sacrifice that giving requires. They complain about where the money is spent. They complain about others, not giving as they should. They give, but they are uneasy. They simply don't feel like giving. Others give "out of necessity." They know that every enterprise costs money, including the Kingdom of God. They know that there are church expenses that have to be paid and that ministers must be supported, so they give, but their giving is forced. They are not happy with having to give.

Thankfully, some give gladly. They contribute joyfully to God's work out of a sense of gratitude, appreciation, and love. They consider giving a privilege as well as a duty, and God loves them for that: **"Each one give as he proposed in his heart: not with sadness, nor out of necessity, because God loves the cheerful giver."** 2 Corinthians 9.7. Cheerful givers give according to their ability. They do not give much attention to particular amounts but rather on giving sacrificially. They remember God's approval of the poor widow who offered two coins. God saw that she had given more than all the wealthy contributors because **"...from her poverty, she cast everything she had, her whole livelihood."** Mark 12.41-44.

Give what you can, and God will honor you: **"For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have."** 2 Corinthians 8.12. Again, we find that the Scriptures teach that a man is expected to give proportionately **"... as he has prospered."** 2 Corinthians 16.2. This verse also tells us that early Christians regularly gave: **"Every first day of the week..."**. We also must give systematically and not wait until we feel like giving or until the church has special or urgent needs, or until we are asked to give.

#### 4. TITHES AND OFFERINGS

**"Will man steal from God?"** This question deserves careful consideration since God himself asked it to his people (Malachi 3.8). People were surprised, and it seemed that they did not know what they were guilty of. **"What have we stolen from you?"** They asked. **"In tithes and offerings!"** came the response from the Throne, **"and because of this, you are cursed with calamity, because all of you have robbed me..."**. Here we can see that God requires tithes and offerings from his people. This is exactly what we owe him: a tenth of our income and offerings.

The word tithe is an Old English word that means tenth or ten percent. Paying tithes is returning 10% of your earnings or income to God. The first tenth of our income is not ours, but God's. This should be paid automatically, like any other of our financial obligations. The ninety percent we get to keep with God's blessing will undoubtedly bring us more benefits than a hundred percent without his blessing!



Consider this glorious promise: ***“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”*** Malachi 3:10. Many are tempted to say that they cannot give tithes and offerings, but the Bible clearly states that we should always tithe. In-depth, let us examine the doctrine of tithes in both the Old and New Testaments (before and after the Law of Moses).

(1) ***Tithing before the law of Moses.*** In the Bible, we find clear evidence that Abraham paid tithes 430 years before the Law to Melchizedek, a priest of God (Genesis 14.18–20). The Melchizedek priesthood is eternal and must be sustained by the children of Abraham (Hebrews 7.1–10, 17, 21). Abraham is the faithful’s father, and we are the children of Abraham through the faith of Jesus Christ (Galatians 3.7). Jacob also paid tithes, 313 years before the Law. After his heavenly vision at Bethel, he swore an oath saying: ***“...of all that you give me, I will surely give a tenth to you.”*** Genesis 28.22.

(2) ***Tithing under the law of Moses.*** The Tithe was ordained under the Mosaic Law: ***“...all the tithe ...of God is: holy before the Lord.”*** Leviticus 27.30. ***“You will give exactly the tithe of all gain.”*** Deuteronomy 14.22. ***“Bring all your tithes to the storehouse...”*** Malachi 3.10. The tithes were intended to support the Levites (Numbers 18.21–24) who worked full time in the tabernacle, and the priests (Numbers 18.16; Nehemiah 10.31) ministered in spiritual matters to God and the people. The priests received their tithes from the tithes of the Levites, which shows that the ministers who receive tithes must also pay their tithes. This tithe of the Levites also supported the temple’s singers and doorkeepers (Nehemiah 10.38–39).

God ordered tithes primarily to support ministers as a reward for their spiritual service. They were not to work in the field and had no other inheritance (Numbers 18.21–32; Nehemiah 13.10). The Tithe was to be received from the “first fruits” of the harvest. This was subject to a 20% interest if borrowed. The people brought the tithes to the house of God. A special contribution was taken every three years for charity, widows, and orphans (Deuteronomy 14.28–29).

(3) ***Tithing in the New Testament.*** Jesus said that people should pay tithes (Matthew 23.23). In a parable, He used the illustration of a Pharisee who paid tithes (Luke 18.11–12). There He also declared that if our righteousness does not exceed those of the Pharisees, we will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5.20). He told his disciples that ***“...the worker is worthy of his food.”*** Matthew 10.10. In other words, God commanded that the New Testament minister should be sustained in the same way as the Old Testament minister.

Let’s read 1 Corinthians 9.7–14. What Paul does here is a comparison with the priesthood. Pay close attention to verses 13 and 14, which read: ***“Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? 14 Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel..”*** Hebrews 7.4-10 clearly states that ***“... Here mortal men receive tithes.”*** Paul continues, ***“Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.”*** Galatians 6.6.



## LESSON 16

# THE PASTOR, SERVANT OF GOD

*How important is the Pastor's ministry to God? What are the responsibilities of God's servant to you? What responsibilities do you have to him?*

Text to memorize: *"And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves."* 1 Thessalonians 5.12-13.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

At least three central agencies that our Lord Jesus Christ has provided to form us into His image. First, we have His Word, as a rule of faith; then we have the Holy Spirit, as a teacher and constant guide; and finally, we have our Pastor, the man of God.

### 2. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PASTORAL MINISTRY

The word "shepherd" basically means "the one who takes care of a flock." In the Old Testament, Moses is a perfect example of the office of Pastor. God appointed him to be the leader over His people. God arranged for Moses to be honored and respected. Much in the same way, God has given His church a ministry that directs and cares for the people: the pastoral ministry (Ephesians 4.7–11). Pastors are a special gift from God to the Church.

Any business, organization, or family must have a head to progress. There may be several assistants, partners, helpers, but not many bosses. There can only be one person who occupies the position of authority, only one whose word is final in any matter of importance; otherwise, there will be confusion. Nowhere else is this arrangement more important than in the Church of Jesus. God has ordained that pastors be the primary supervisors of local churches. Our Lord, Jesus Christ, is the sole owner of the Church. He is the one who founded it (Matthew 16.18). He alone reserved the right to establish the kind of government he thinks best because He knows it best.

Returning to Moses, whatever God wanted to make known to Israel, he always conveyed through His servant. At least sixteen times, God said to Moses: **"Speak to the children of Israel."** Not once did he speak to the Israelites through another individual. God communicated this way, even though there were many others in positions of responsibility among the Israelites. This same model is found in the New Testament. Even though His Holy Spirit dwells in the church, God has chosen to organize his church in such a way that His will and spiritual direction are also given to the saints through the Pastor.

The importance of pastors in God's plan is vividly illustrated in the messages to the seven churches of Asia, Revelation 2 and 3. Each message is addressed to the "angel" of a church. In the scriptures, the Greek word "aggelos," translated angel, is used to speak both spiritual beings and men. Angel means: "messenger, one who is sent." Strong's informs us that in the chapters as mentioned earlier, the word angel means pastor.

Your pastor is a messenger of God, an angel sent to your life to bless you. Your pastor communicates God's will for your life. He teaches and preaches what he knows is right for you in the fear of God. The message that



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the Pastor delivers from the pulpit carries instructions and rules of conduct that God considers necessary for your well-being. It may be that there are some differences in the norms of your church practices and those that other congregations practice within your denomination; however, members of a local church have the responsibility of following the teaching of their local church Pastor.

It is wise to listen and follow the instructions of someone who has walked the Christian path for many more years than you. The guiding hand of a good pastor is essential in your walk with God. So, cultivate the desire to be guided by the man of God.

### 3. PASTORIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Here are four solemn burdens that have been placed by God on each pastor: feed, teach, equip, and protect.

(1) **Feed.** The apostle Peter urged Christian pastors to feed the people of God. Read 1 Peter 5.2–5. Scripture teaches that the preaching of the Word keeps you healthy. Your soul is fed when the Pastor, with devotion, ministers the Word of God to you. We are told in Romans 10.17 that **“faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”** Never lose the desire to hear the Word of God. Your Pastor preaches and teaches the Word of God that nourishes, feeds, and saves your soul.

(2) **Teach.** The messages your pastor preaches from God’s Word will encourage you, inspire you, strengthen you, and move your heart; So you don’t get lost. You need to receive the teaching that comes from God’s Word through the pastoral ministry to grow. Many have failed God and turned to the world because they lacked knowledge (Hosea 4.6). The apostle Peter said that there we must progress in our walk with God (2 Peter 3.18), and that progress requires learning. The more knowledge you acquire from God and His Word, the less likely you will walk away by following false teachings.

(3) **Equip.** Hebrews 6.1 speaks of leaving behind the rudiments of the doctrine and moving onto perfection. 2 Corinthians 7.1 says that we must perfect holiness in the fear of God. Your pastor plays a fundamental role in your spiritual growth and development. Through divine inspiration, he is the one who will guide you to a proper place in the Kingdom of God, so that your life will be a blessing to others. Paul explains in Ephesians 4.12 that God’s purpose in giving us different ministerial gifts is **“to perfect the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edification of the body of Christ.”** That is what equips us for service. We saints must become **“qualified to serve and give instruction to believers.”** Ephesians 4.12.

(4) **Protect.** We see in Acts 20.28–29 that the Pastor is also a watchman. He is a person who oversees your spiritual development and is responsible to God for the care of your soul. The duty of the Pastor as a watchman is solemn. Hebrews 13.17 says that the shepherds **“...watch over your souls, as those who have to give account...”** If the Pastor does not warn you to withdraw from the wrong path when he sees you go astray, God will hold him responsible for your misfortunes (Ezekiel 3.17–18). Shepherds keep wolves away, that is, “wolves” are false teachers who try to introduce false doctrines into the Church. Pastors are vigilant to make sure the sheep are not dispersed. Let’s read John 10.4.5. In antiquity, the shepherd was like the door of the flock. The sheep knew his voice and only moved when they heard the voice of the shepherd. Like sheep, you also will need to learn to recognize your Pastor’s voice, even in the midst of many other voices.

Let us now study four responsibilities that church members have towards their Pastor. These responsibilities are to esteem, support, obey, and respect them.



## 4. YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE PASTOR

(1) **Esteem.** 1 Peter 2.17 tells us to honor all men. Romans 13.17 instructs us to give honor to whom honor is due. If these directives are given regarding natural authorities, how much more then should we honor our spiritual leaders! In 1 Thessalonians 5.12–13, Paul encourages us to hold our preachers in high esteem: **“And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.”** In another of his letters, Paul said that the Pastors who lead well are **“worthy of double honor, mostly those who work in preaching and teaching.”** 1 Timothy 5.17.

(2) **Support.** There are several ways we can support our pastors. Two stand out in importance: finances and loyalty. Regarding the former, your support for the man of God will come to you naturally. Your appreciation for him will make you want to be a blessing to him financially as he has blessed you spiritually. In 1 Corinthians 9.11,13,14, the apostle Paul asked the church about the offerings for the ministry. God has commanded that the Pastor be supported with tithes and offerings. Tithes, in God’s plan, are ten percent of our earnings or income, which we must give to the ministry of preaching (this topic has already been covered extensively in a previous lesson). As for loyalty, you should always be loyal to your pastor. Never allow yourself to become openly critical of his ways or methods. While others openly criticize him, always place yourself in his defense and pray for him. God’s Word commands us never to touch God’s anointed servants (1 Samuel 24.6–10). He will deal with them. Loyalty also includes attending regular worship services. Read Hebrews 10.25. Be diligent also in giving your support to the Pastor during the days of fasting and prayer. If he feels that it is time to meet for revival or some particular spiritual need, do not fail to give him your full support. There is nothing as pleasant to a pastor’s heart as knowing that he can count on you to always keeps his place.

(3) **Obey.** Submission and obedience to authority are responsibilities given by God to his children; we must provide them to our spiritual leaders. Let’s review Hebrews 13.17. Your Pastor is someone willing to help and see that your spiritual needs are met. This is only possible if you are willing to follow his teachings, advice, and warnings. Throughout the Bible, special importance is given to our obedience to the servants’ God has called. When you feel tempted to disobey or criticize the Pastor because of the church’s conditions, or because you cannot relate well to him because of his personality or leadership style. It is time to fast and pray until God produces a change, either in him or in you, or in the conditions that are troubling you. **“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”** Hebrews 13.17

## 5. RESPECT YOUR SHEPHERD

Let us now examine the consequences of not showing the necessary respect to the man of God. Numbers 12 and 16 contain three examples of inappropriate attitudes toward God’s man over the congregation. Remember that **“...the things that were written before, for our teaching were written...”** Romans 15.4, and serve **“...to warn us...”** 1 Corinthians 10.11.

First, we have the case of Moses, his sister, and brother, who not only disrespected Moses but went further, daring to judge him for allegedly assuming too much authority. **“Are we not also anointed by God?”** Such was the thought of Mariam and Aaron (Numbers 12.1–2). God heard them and answered immediately (Vv. 4–8); with a terrible sentence. Mariam became a leper (V. 10). She suffered the punishment and the disrespect of being thrown out of the camp. Humiliated before the congregation, she was only healed seven days later, when the



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man against whom she had raised her voice prayed for her (V. 13). “Raising your hand” or speaking against a man of God is simply looking for problems. Headaches loom in the future of the person who does not master this spirit.

The second incident is recorded in Numbers 16. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram accused Moses and Aaron of embracing too much for themselves, rising above the others. According to them, the entire congregation was holy (V. 3). These three princes blamed Moses for having failed to reach Canaan (V. 13). They refused to recognize any difference between the leader appointed by God and the rest of the congregation. For that, they suffered a horrible death under God’s judgment (Vv. 31–35). This spirit still operates today and is always trying to make its way into the Church. Any time you see this spirit at work, flee from it.

The third instance of contempt for a spiritual leader is found in Numbers 16.41. Although Israel had witnessed what happened with Korah and his followers, they still dared to attack Moses the next day, accusing him of killing the “people of God.” With this, they took sides with the rebels who had died the day before by God’s hand. Not only did they not respect Moses, but they accused him of being a tyrant for having killed them – of course - those who opposed Moses were wrong in every respect. Those who had died the previous day were not “people of God.” and Moses had not killed them. God had taken their lives, and neither was Moses, a dictator. He was only obeying God. That rebellion against Israel’s Pastor was the end of 14,700 Israeli’s lives (V. 49). This clearly shows how abhorrent that sin was in the sight of God.

Many of the church’s difficulties arise from this unclean spirit that refuses to respect the servants of the Lord. When a church accommodates this spirit or attitude, something dies within it. In saying this, we do not intend to convey the idea that the Pastor is always right. However, he will be the Pastor — until God wants it — and if the man of God is in error, you can be sure that God will take care of dealing with that situation in due time. Let us never forget to honor, obey, support, and respect our pastors as leaders ordained by God and not by man. For in so doing, we will help ourselves, strengthening our church, and be a blessing to the Kingdom of God in general.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The Word of God encourages us to be **“...imitators of God, as beloved children”** (Ephesians 5.1) and to follow our Shepherds. Doing this amounts to following Christ Himself (Philippians 3.17; 1 Corinthians 11.1). The scriptures also teach us to respect, trust, and work with God’s man because he is a representative of our Heavenly Pastor (1 Peter 2.21). In 1 Thessalonians 1.6, the apostle Paul presents us with the Pastor’s ideal situation and the congregation in his charge when he wrote: **“...you came to be imitators of us and of the Lord...”** What an excellent relationship! That is precisely the kind of relationship God wants you to have with your Pastor. **“Remember your shepherds, who spoke to you the word of God; Consider what has been the result of his conduct, and imitate his faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.”** Hebrews 13.7–8. Amen.

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## LESSON 17

# FASTING THAT PLEASURES GOD

*What is biblical fasting, and how can it increase our spiritual sensitivity? What additional benefits does it produce?*

Text to memorize: ***“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”*** Matthew 6.16–18.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Spiritual fasting consists of abstinence from food in order to seek God. It is not a hunger strike, whose purpose is to achieve a specific goal by creating social pressure. Fasting is not for dietary or health goals like the improvement of our physical health. Biblical fasting always focuses on spiritual purposes. We could never force God to do something through our fast, nor move him to respond by pity. Instead, fasting helps us to discipline ourselves spiritually.

### 2. DOES GOD WANT US TO FAST?

Since ancient times in biblical history, fasting has been regularly practiced once or twice a week. This was a practice both in the Old Testament (Zechariah 8.19) and in the New Testament (Luke 18.12). It was also a practice during the first centuries of the Church and the Protestant Reformation era. Although very beneficial, it must be recognized that regular fasting is not a biblical mandate. Instead, the norm is that God is the initiator of our fasts, and He himself is the one who establishes their duration.

A people in communion with God, who are sensitive to the Holy Spirit, will know when to fast individually and when to fast collectively. The practice of regular fasting aims to gain spiritual benefits. We should be prepared for the times when God calls his people to fast. There are no established biblical norms for regular fasting; However, our freedom in the Gospel does not mean we seek freedom from fasting; rather, we seek opportunities to fast. Seeing that there are no laws that obligate us to fast, we are free to fast whatever day we desire. Paul used this freedom to devote himself to ***“many fasts.”*** 2 Corinthians 11.27.

Presently, some people doubt the need to fast. Our conviction is that fasting is a spiritual discipline that is in full force, as well as very beneficial to the Christian life. When Jesus spoke on the subject, he intended to restore the proper fast, not to reject it, nor to abolish it: ***“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”*** Matthew 6.16. In Christ’s earthly ministry days, his disciples did not fast, but He justified that fact by saying that while he was here, they did not need to fast. However, the days would come when they would fast (Matthew 9.15).



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After the day of Pentecost, the apostles practiced fasting (Acts 10.30, 2 Corinthians 6.5; 11.27), as did the disciples after them (Acts 13.2–3). In the same way, church history testifies of the church fasting through the centuries. Therefore, we do not doubt that fasting is part of God's will for his people today. Now questions arise, what is the purpose of fasting? And how are we to fast in the difficulties of our time?

### 3. WHY FAST?

Fasting is not for forcing God or other people to do what we want. Sometimes there is so much emphasis on the blessings and benefits of fasting that we are tempted to believe that we can have the world at our feet with a little fasting. That's not true. Fasting focuses on God and not on us. True fasting is not a "practice" of the Church, but a time that God initiates and ends. We serve or minister to God through fasting: "Ministering these to the Lord, and fasting, said the Holy Spirit: separate me to Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Acts 13.2. When fasting, every purpose must be subordinate to God. Consequently, the Lord's presence becomes closer to our senses, and our hearts are closer than ever to God's glory.

Therefore, the first question we must answer is what God asked Israel in the days of Zechariah: "When you fasted [...] have you fasted for me?" Zechariah 7.5. Physical benefits, increased intimacy, and power in prayer and greater spiritual discernment should never replace God as the center of our fasting. In other words, through fasting, we draw closer to Him; we seek His face more so than His hands. We seek to be with Him and to love Him much more than the things He gives us.

Once we are firmly standing on the fundamental purpose of fasting, we can pay attention to the secondary objectives. More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that dominate us. We cover the things that bind us with food and other pleasant things. Still, in fasting, the things that bind us to come to the surface and, although it is unpleasant to acknowledge their presence, recognizing them is of great help to those who want to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

First, we can understand those things that dominate us like pride, anger, bitterness, lewdness, etc. We may be tempted to think that these things (anger, bitterness) arise because we are hungry, but in reality, it is the Spirit working in us to produce holiness by Christ's power. Such was David's experience: "When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, that became my reproach." Psalm 69.10.

Secondly, while fasting, things will appear that have enslaved us, things that we don't need in our lives (1 Corinthians 6.12; 9.27; Psalms 35.13). Our human appetites and desires are like a river that tends to overflow from time to time. Fasting helps keep them in the canal. The practice of fasting, both individual and collective, will produce greater depth and efficiency in intercessory prayer, as well as divine revelation when making decisions and when ministering to the Lord's people.

### 4. DIFFERENT TYPES OF FASTS

In the book *Fasting Chosen by God*, Arthur Wallis presents three types of fasting:

(1) **The natural fast.** It consists of abstaining from all forms of food but not from water. The first mention of this type of fasting is found in Luke 4.2: "... **and he did not eat anything in those days, after which he was hungry.**" This means that he abstained from all kinds of food, whether solid or liquid. This type of fasting does include drinking water. Through the scriptures, it is clear that this was the kind of fast Jesus practiced. The



scriptures tell us that **“he did not eat anything.”** That, however, does not mean that he did not drink anything. The story continues, **“he was hungry,”** but it does not mention that he was thirsty. Although thirst pains are more intense than those caused by hunger, Satan did not tempt him to drink but to eat. Our organism could not survive forty days without ingesting liquids unless sustained supernaturally.

(2) **The total fast.** This fast is to refrain from both food and drink. In general, this fasting type does not last more than three days because extending it more than that might be harmful to a person’s health. We can see this fast in Ezra 10.6: **“Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity.”** Another example is Esther: **“Go and gather all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me, and do not eat or drink in three days, night and day; I will also fast with my maids, and then I will go in to see the king, even if it is not according to the law; and if I perish, let it perish.”** Esther 4.6.

(3) **The partial fast.** In this type of fasting, certain foods and beverages are eliminated from a person’s diet. This kind of fasting is recorded in Daniel 10.3: **“I did not eat delicate delicacy, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I anoint myself with ointment until the three weeks were fulfilled.”** Partial fasting is when we skip one or more meals a day or when we limit our meals to only fruits and vegetables.

## 5. TIPS WHEN FASTING

Let’s look at some tips to carry out this spiritual discipline.

(1) **Partial fast.** Start with a 24-hour partial fast, suspending two meals. Take advantage of the time you used to eat to pray and meditate on God’s word, especially in worship and thanksgiving. Finish the fast with a light meal of fruits and vegetables and much internal rejoicing. Practice this partial fast once a week, for three or four weeks.

(2) **Normal fast.** After practicing partial fasting, you will be ready for a regular 24-hour fast to only drink water in necessary quantities. The emphasis on prayer and how to end the fast are the same as in partial fasting. During a complete fast, you will probably feel some minor abdominal discomfort. That should not concern you. You will feel this simply because your stomach is conditioned to receiving food at certain times. In a way, the stomach is like a spoiled child. You don’t always have to give him what he wants because what he needs is discipline. If you get a headache during the fast, it’s most likely because you are used to drinking coffee, tea, or other stimulants. Fasting will help you discover how dependent you are on those kinds of things. It will lead you to leave them or at least minimize their use. The craving felt by the stomach should be alleviated by drinking water. We have to be the lord’s not slaves of our stomachs. Remember to dedicate the time you would use in eating to prayer and meditation. Also, remember to follow Jesus’ advice and not call attention to what you are doing: **“When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not show the men you fast, but your Father who is in secret. For your Father who sees in secret will reward you publicly.”** Matthew 6.17–18.

(3) **Extensive fast.** After realizing several fasts successfully, the believer will experience a greater sense of intimacy with God and service to Him. He can then fasts of a more significant duration (36 hours, 48 hours, and



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72 hours). When you have learned to fast in those periods with joy and fruitfulness, it will be time to ask God if you should begin more extensive fasts, for more specific reasons. The believer should ask the Lord how long the fast should be. Let God be God. Many times, the Lord will speak to us in unexpected ways. Stay tuned. When God leads a person to periods of extensive collective fasting, participate with joy and commitment, keeping in mind the necessary details to be in unity of purpose with the rest of God's people.

(4) **Physical Effects of Fasting.** It is important to know how the body does – under normal conditions – during a prolonged fast. The first few days are usually the most difficult because of the physical discomfort you feel. That is the time when the body begins to free itself of toxic substances accumulated by bad eating habits, and that's not a pleasant experience. Bad breath results from bacteria forming on the tongue. Do not be disturbed by these symptoms. Instead, thank God for the health benefits. To avoid bad breath, wash your teeth with greater frequency, and use mouthwash. Do not chew gum, as salivation will make you hungry, making fasting even more difficult. The hunger pains will begin to subside by the fourth day, although you may feel some weakness and occasional dizziness. These are temporary symptoms that can be avoided by moving slower, especially when you get up or bend down. By the sixth or seventh day, you will begin to feel stronger and more awake. The pain of hunger will continue to diminish to a slight irritation towards the ninth or tenth day. The body will have eliminated toxic substances and will feel much healthier. J. H. Blackmore said: "There are a lot of diseases that have their origin in abundance and that could end with fasting." In this phase, your ability to concentrate intensifies, and you feel that you can continue fasting indefinitely. From the physical point of view, this is the stage of fasting that is most enjoyable. From the spiritual point of view, concentration and depth in prayer increase significantly. Sometime between days 21 and 40 of fasting, the hunger pains will return depending on the individual. This is the first stage of the clinical hunger syndrome and indicates that the body has depleted all the reserves it had in excess and is beginning to resort to consuming muscle mass. It is time to finish the fast!

## 6. SOME FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Weight loss during fasting varies from person to person. It is normal to lose one to two pounds per day at the beginning of a fast. Some may even lose more weight at first, but daily weight loss decreases invariably as fasting progresses. You may feel cold during fasting because the body's metabolism does not produce the usual amount of heat. If you are careful to stay warm, this will not be a problem. Before beginning a prolonged fast, some are tempted to eat a fair amount of food to "store up reserves." That makes fasting harder during the first few days. It is better to eat less than usual two or three days before beginning the extended fast. It is also advisable to stop drinking tea or coffee about three or four days before starting a prolonged fast.

The first meal after a prolonged fast should be fruit or vegetable juice in small quantities. During the fast, the stomach contracted and should start up again slowly. Nutrition Specialist Paul Braga explains the following in his book *The Miracle of Fasting*: "When you have been fasting, your stomach and ten meters of your intestines have contracted. When you are ready to break the fast, you must do so with special care. The second day after having lifted the fast, you should eat fruits and then milk or yogurt. After that, salads and cooked vegetables. Be careful not to overeat."

For physical reasons, some people should not fast for prolonged periods. Those with diabetes or heart disease, as well as pregnant women, should not enter long fasts. It is recommended to end the fast at a convenient time. If you have any concerns or questions about your physical condition or need guidance regarding fasting, consult a doctor. Spiritual warfare is common during periods of fasting. We need to learn to wear all of God's armor







## LESSON 18

### WORSHIPING GOD TOGETHER

***What is the purpose of congregational praise? How many ways exist to praise God? What do the psalms teach us about this important subject?***

Text to memorize: ***What is the purpose of congregational praise? How many ways exist to praise God? What do the psalms teach us about this important subject?*** Romans 15.5–6.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Spontaneous expressions of praise among Christian groups and in individuals results in sincere worship. Some of the most exciting and significant times in your experience with God will occur when you worship God with all your heart with His people. The Lord manifests his presence as we praise him: “You are holy; You who dwell among the praises of Israel.” Psalm 22.3.

#### 2. THE PURPOSE OF OUR PRAISE

Ephesians 5.18–19: ***“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”***

As God breathes life into a congregation, sometimes there will be a sacred, solemn silence. There will be times when the Holy Spirit moves in the sense of quiet peace, like a dove. On other occasions, a holy emotion will spread over people as the children of God rejoice. There will be moments of tears, moments in which God’s incredible power is apparent, moments of inner scrutiny. These are all unique movements of the Holy Spirit, times when God blesses us with His Presence. God’s eternal world becomes an exciting reality as we worship and exalt him: ***“Because, where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst.”*** Matthew 18.20.

God welcomes, with joy, the praises expressed from the heart of His people: ***“I will give you thanks in a great assembly; I will praise You among many people.”*** Psalm 35.18. A service is blessed when the entire congregation offers sincere praise to God. Worshiping God together helps create a spiritual atmosphere of faith, trust, and love. This atmosphere makes it easier for the preacher to obtain clear spiritual direction and creates an environment in which preaching the Word of God is much more effective. When you praise God sincerely, you are more receptive to the teaching of God’s Word because, although praise cannot replace preaching, it greatly enhances it.

#### 3. DIFFERENT WAYS OF PRAISE

Praise takes various forms: singing, music, the raising of our hands, clapping our hands; all these are acceptable expressions of praise in the house of God. When praising, we need to be sensitive to those around us. We also need to keep in mind that the Pastor is in charge of the service and is ultimately responsible for its order. You should always be sensitive to his instructions. Enthusiasm does not give you the right to dismiss the Pastor’s directives, nor does it give you the power to dismiss the feelings of those present in the worship service. ***“for God is not God of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”*** 1 Corinthians 14.33.



God is not the author of confusion, and at the same time, He does not expect our services to be dead and dry, without even raising a sound of praise.

From Genesis to Revelations, we find that God's people and creation praise God profusely, loudly, and joyfully. The Word also tells us that we are members of a body and that the body must be of one mind to accomplish something for God. Being likeminded is essential in our worship and praise to Him.

Praise has many expressions. It is a mistake to think that everyone must respond identically. We are individuals, and we are all blessed with particular vocabularies and personalities. It would be wrong for you to try to be someone else because everyone is loved by God just as they are. You should not think less of yourself or someone else simply because they do not respond to God the same way you do. However, everyone should give his or her best effort to God. The important thing is to remember is that God accepts praise only based on sincerity and honesty.

Apostolics are known for our vibrant worship. Vibrant worship is one reason why our services are different. In Strong's Concordance, we find that the Word praise, in its original application in both the Old and New Testaments, meant the following for the people of God: to exalt; sing a hymn of praise; reverence or worship with outstretched or raised hands; play a musical instrument, accompanied by vocals on occasion; cheer with emotion; and to give applause. Let us now examine each of these five definitions.

#### 4. FIVE EXPRESSIONS OF PRAISE

(1) ***In praising God, we publicly testify to His goodness: "Come, hear all who fear God and I will tell what he has done to my soul."*** Psalm 66.16. ***"I say to you, whoever confesses me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God."*** Luke 12.8. When the Church meets to worship, there will be times when the entire congregation moves to exaltation, including the preaching. During moments like these, the congregants extol His greatness and mercy with testimonies, songs, and preaching. In this type of service, spoken praise is predominant.

(2) ***We raise our hands in adoration and worship because that is what the Word teaches: "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord."*** Psalm 134.2. ***"Let men pray everywhere, raising holy hands, without anger or contention."*** 1 Timothy 2.8. Raised hands are a symbol of surrender to a higher power. There is something special in praying or praising God with uplifted hands; it creates an atmosphere of sincerity and respect. Many believers have received the Holy Spirit with their hands raised.

(3) ***We play musical instruments with all our hearts because, in the Bible, we read: "Sing to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of a psalm, with trumpets and the sound of a horn; Shout joyfully before the Lord, the King."*** Psalm 98.5,6. God expects us to worship him with our music. The important thing here is not the instruments or the musicians, but God who is exalted. A talented musician may quickly draw attention to himself but remember: if we are praising God, He must receive all the glory. Music should exalt God and not create a misguided feeling in people. There are certain rhythms and musical streams that are contrary to true worship. We need to be careful about the kinds of music we choose. We believe that dancing and jumping in the Spirit is good, but if these expressions are mere reactions to a rhythm or melody, or any combination of these; it is wrong. Music can help create a spirit of worship in service, or it can impede true worship. That is why every musician must be sensitive to the Spirit so that his music is a blessing and not something else. All music in the Church must exalt God.



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(4) **We make shout and dance in the Spirit because the Bible says: "Praise his name with dance ...praise him with tambourine and dance..."** Psalm 149.3; 150.4. Expressions of praise to our God should fill our services. "David danced with all his might before Jehovah." Acts 3 mentions the lame man who was healed and entered the temple, jumping, and praising God. On the day of Pentecost, when the disciples were accused of being drunk, Peter explained that those speaking with tongues were simply exalting God because they had been filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).

(5) **We clap our hands and sing because the Bible says: "All peoples, clap your hands; Cheer to God in a voice of jubilation."** Psalm 47.1. **"Shout joyfully to Jehovah, all the earth; raise your voice, and applaud, and sing psalms."** Psalm 98.4. Clapping is a natural way of expressing honor; if someone is worthy of our applause, that is God!

## 5. THE PSALMS

The book of Psalms deserves a separate consideration when we talk about praise and worship to God. The psalms of the Bible are the best and most extensive collection of written praises that the world has ever known. Let your heart rejoice by reading the following selection of quotes from the "book of hymns of Israel." In it, you will learn who should praise God. You will also know where, why, for what purpose, and how we should praise him.

Psalm 5.11: **"But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; Let those also who love Your name Be joyful in You."** 9.1,2: **"I will praise You, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High."** 22.22: **"I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You."** 29.2: **"Give unto the Lord the glory [c]due to His name; Worship the Lord in the [d]beauty of holiness."** 32.11: **"Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous; And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!"** 34.1: **"I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth."** 47.6: **"Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!"** 57.9: **"I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing to You among the nations."** 63.3,4: **"Because Your loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name."** 66.8: **"Oh, bless our God, you peoples! And make the voice of His praise to be heard."** 67.3: **"Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You."** 69.30: **"I will praise the name of God with a song, And will magnify Him with thanksgiving."** 71.8: **"Let my mouth be filled with Your praise and with Your glory all the day."** 71.14: **"But I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more."** 95.1,2: **"Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms."** 101.1-4: **"I will sing of mercy and justice; to You, O Lord, I will sing praises. I will behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me. A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness."** 103.1,2: **"Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."** 107.8: **"Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!"** 113.3: **"From the rising of the sun to its going down the Lord's name is to be praised."** 145.1,3 **"I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable."** 147.1 **"Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful."** 150.1,2,6: **"Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him**









## LESSON 19

### THE STRENGTH IN UNITY

*What is the unity of the Church, and why is it important? How can we obtain it? What results do we get through it?*

Text to memorize: *“till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.”* Ephesians 4.13–15.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Church of the Lord is an institution with a great destiny, not only in eternity but also here on Earth. However, often internal conflicts occur in the Church that hinders its progress. This happens because we are always under attack from opposing spiritual forces, who try to distract and divide us so that we neglect our mission. The obsession of the enemy and his agents is to disintegrate the Church. Judas says that *“In the last time there will be mockers, who will walk according to their evil desires. These are the ones that cause divisions, the sensual ones, who do not have the Spirit.”* However, Jesus promised that *“the doors of Hades will not prevail”* against His Church (Matthew 16.18), so we must strive to keep together, taking care of the Lord’s business that saves souls. To accomplish this mission, we need unity. Unity is a great force.

#### 2. THE GREATEST ENEMY OF THE UNIT

Let’s review Ephesians 4.13: *“Until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, a perfect man, tailored to the stature of the fullness of Christ.”* Here, Paul connects the unity of the Body of Christ with the development of its members. Without this growth, there can be no unity. The greatest obstacle to the unity of the Church is the believer’s immaturity. Immaturity is a problem that causes delays in the work of the Lord. Our life experience should be sufficient for us to grow into *“a perfect man, made to the fullness of Christ.”* This does not always happen. Ephesians chapters 5 and 6 show us that although the Church in Ephesus was ancient, it lacked spiritual maturity. Paul urged them, saying: *“Look therefore, diligently as you walk, not as fools but as wise, making good use of time, because the days are bad. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”* Ephesians 5.15–17. Here the Apostle states that lawsuits in the Church result from their folly and cause a valuable waste of time, something that undoubtedly displeases the Lord.

Proverbs 6.16–19: *“These six things the Lord hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.”* The language of this Scripture is hard. List seven things that the Lord hates, closing with: *“He who sows discord among brothers.”* Why is the sin of discord especially mentioned? Because it destroys the unity that Christ desires for his disciples. Jesus prayed: *“that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have*



**given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”** John 17.21–23. For the Lord, the unity of His Church is vital.

Likely, some who sow discord don’t intentionally seek to create division. Instead, the problem is that their personal needs concern them more than the interests of the group to which they belong. On one occasion, the disciples of Jesus entered into a discussion about which of them would be the greatest. Luke 9.46. The Corinthian brothers also staged contests that led them to dissent: **“for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.”** 1 Corinthians 3.3–7.

One of the most common expressions of spiritual immaturity is the so-called “double mind.” What does this mean? According to the Word of God, a “double-minded” person who desires spiritual things but, at the same time, lives carnally. He is a person of contradictory thoughts. **“The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways”** and similarly **“to the wave of the sea, which is dragged by the wind and thrown from one part to another.”** James 1.8.6. Later, James says: **“Where do wars and lawsuits come from among you? Is it not of your passions, which fight in your members?”** James 4.1. We see then that a church cannot unite if its people are immature, carnal, selfish, or envious (V. 2).

A broken church is like a plastic bag with marbles inside. If the plastic breaks, the balls immediately scatter everywhere. The Church must be more like a group of magnets that attract each other and remain united, not by external pressure but by each other’s internal strength. It is in the harmony of the Church members that empowers us to become **“... a holy temple in the Lord resides; in whom you are also together built for the abode of God in the Spirit.”** Ephesians 2.21–22. **“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity! 2 It is like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments. 3 It is like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the Lord commanded the blessing— Life forevermore.”** Psalm 133.

### 3. THE PROBLEM OF INDIFFERENCE

Conflict-free relationships do not necessarily mean there is communion or unity. Often, some relationships do not move beyond indifference, a “political” strategy or even a prudent truce. In disregard, there is no conflict, strife, or friction, but a stale silence often cloaked in good manners. In indifference, people live and interact as little as possible, in a mutual effort to avoid crashes. Everyone lives “in their world.” Anyone who observes that superficially peaceful environment can classify it as healthy, or at least acceptable. After all, “a bad peace is always better than a good war, isn’t it?” Yes, but that is not the kind of communion God desires for His people; it does not represent the divine ideal of brothers living together in harmony that Psalm 133 teaches us.

A quiet group is not necessarily a united group. Sometimes these are people who walk close to each other but avoiding any contact that compromises them too much. “How are you? How are you?” “Well, thank God. And you?” “Very good. Thank you. See you later.” And each one on his way, as if to say: “Mission accomplished. I already greeted him.” But things are not like that. Some brothers are like the hedgehog, that little barbed animal



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that lives in the country. Hedgehogs are unsociable rodents that build their caves underground, communicating with each other. However, they rarely get together. Only if it is freezing do they gather to warm up a bit. In close proximity, their spikes produce punctures and pain, so they quickly separate again.

This vicious circle of approaching one another and then distancing from one another also happens because of attitudes and expressions that cause pain like spikes. So we choose to walk away. But, walking away - although it can end the immediate conflict and avoid injuries - interrupts communion and, therefore, a divine blessing. The fact that I do not fight with my brother does not mean that we have fellowship. Nor does it say that I love him, nor that our lives are united in one Spirit and that the presence of God flows between us as in one body. In this case, the only thing that "not fighting" means is that we have isolated ourselves just enough to walk together without having our souls touch. We are hedgehogs in our little caves and not the blood and life of the Body of Christ! The Bible teaches us that two people cannot walk together for a long time if they do not agree with each other (Amos 3.3).

On the other hand, it is incredible what God can do when he finds a group that says they have communion with Him but truly live in harmony. There, the Spirit of God descends and manifests freely. ***"It is like the dew of Hermon, which descends on the mountains of Zion, where the Lord sends blessing and eternal life."*** Psalm 133 ***"When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."*** Acts 2.1-4.

When there is true unity, there is God's real presence; There are blessings and salvation. Therefore, we need to be more than just gathered. We need to be united in the same feeling and one heart. Not only together, but also unanimous in the love of Christ who called us to walk with Him: ***"He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."*** 1 John 2.6,9-10;1.10.

#### 4. REACHING TRUE UNITY

The unity of the Church has three dimensions: doctrinal, functional, and spiritual. Unity in doctrine comes when we clearly understand and apply the norms of conduct and thought that God determined for his Church. Some things are acceptable and unacceptable to Him. We must all live in conformity to his standard to be blessed by Him. Functional unity has to do with administration, plans, structure, methodology, etc. This kind of unity is associated with our efforts in the work of the Lord. The most critical and challenging of all is spiritual unity. Spiritual unity strengthens our relationships with God and the brethren. Doctrinal unity produces doctrinal power; functional unity provides functional power; spiritual unity has spiritual power!

The basis of the unity of the Church is in the spiritual life of its members. Every member of the body of Christ needs to develop this spiritual life, that is, a relationship with Jesus. When God's power in the Church transforms hearts, there are no divisions, and unity becomes a reality. By having the mind of Christ, we develop a humble attitude, and, as members of His body, we focus on serving each other. The needs of others become the same or more important than ours. We learn to ***"...not [look] at each one for his own, but each one also for the others."*** Philippians 2.4. And how do we get this ability? Through the love of God.



***“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”*** Philippians 2.1-2. ***“Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.”*** Colossians 3.13-14. The perfect bond, absolute unity, is achieved with love. There can be no unity in the Church if there is no love. Love does not consist of what we feel, but in what each one can and is willing to give. It is an explicit equation. The Bible says that ***“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son...”*** John 3.16.

Love defeats the giants of pride and individualism so that congregants can experience unity. Renouncing each one of us, we get to commit to each other, to help each other in love. We learn to practice forgiveness, tolerance, true communion. We develop bonds of love with each other. As believers, we discover that the joy and strength of unity can overcome any conflict and that together we can achieve much more than we can apart. ***“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about whatever they ask for, it will be done to them by my Father who is in heaven.”*** Matthew 18.19.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The enemy works to convince us that it is impossible to live together and work together so that everyone ends up living on their own, just as the world’s people live — individually. We need to return to our origins, when ***“... all who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they sold their property and their goods, and distributed it to all according to the need of each one. And persevering unanimously every day in the temple, and breaking bread in the houses, they ate together with joy and simplicity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church every day those who were to be saved.”*** Acts 2.44–47. This is the strength of unity!

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## LESSON 20

### THE LORD'S SUPPER AND WASHING OF FEET

*What is the Lord's Supper, and what is its purpose? Is it essential to participate in it? How should we do it? Why do we practice Christian foot washing?*

Text to memorize: And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, **"Take, eat; this is my body."** Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, **"Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."** Mathew 26.26-28.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

We believe in the practice of the Lord's Supper, which He instituted. Unleavened bread is used in this ordinance, representing the sinless body of our Lord Jesus Christ. The unfermented wine represents the blood of Christ, who consummated our redemption. The celebration of the Lord's Supper is essential for the Church. It is the most important sacrament of the Church after water baptism. It is a spiritual experience that takes us to the final moments of Christ's ministry on Earth, to his passion or sufferings in Jerusalem. At the same time, it makes us participants in His sufferings at Calvary. The Lord's Supper is vital for every member of the Church. It must be done with dignity. For this, we must prepare in advance, because only in that way can we receive the spiritual benefits that it brings us.

#### 2. INSTITUTION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper is the "Christian version" of the Jewish Passover, which consisted of the sacrifice of a lamb once a year to remember the liberation of Israel's slavery for more than four hundred years in Egypt (Exodus 12.1–14). Easter also reminds us of the salvation of the Hebrews from death, that last night, they were in Egypt. Easter comes from the Aramaic language and means "to pass over" or "set aside." It recalls that the Hebrew households' doorposts were smeared with the blood of a lamb, so the angel of death did not enter the houses (V. 13). Jesus celebrated and participated in this Easter throughout his life, even with his disciples. But it was on the last Passover with them, when he was about to be sacrificed, that He introduced a significant change and established in place of the Passover, what we now know as the Lord's Supper.

Let's reread Matthew 26.26–28. While they were eating Easter, Jesus instituted this supper. It is necessary to understand that what Jesus did there was establish a new covenant with his people. Before, He had made a covenant with Israel in the desert that required continuous sacrifices for sin. Here, Jesus established a new covenant with His Church. This new covenant replaced the old system, which required sacrificing many lambs and the shedding of their blood. In the old covenant, the lamb's blood was shed, and the lamb was then eaten. In the new covenant, the bread, which symbolizes Christ, is consumed, and the wine, which represents his blood, is drunk. It was the early Church that called this new covenant "the Lord's Supper."

#### 3. PARTICIPATING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

There are five important biblical reasons why we participate in the Lord's Supper.

(1) We remember that Jesus died for us: **"And having given thanks, he broke it, and said: Take, eat; this is my body that is broken by you; do this in memory of me."** 1 Corinthians 11.24.



(2) We participate in the Lord's Supper out of obedience: ***"He also took the cup, after having dined, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this every time you drink it, in memory of me."*** V. 25.

(3) We participate in the Lord's Supper to announce His death until He comes: ***"So, then, every time you eat this bread, and you drink this cup, the death of the Lord you announce until he comes."*** V. 26.

(4) We participate in the Lord's Supper as a testimony of our communion or unity in Christ: ***"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the [e] communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread."*** Vv. 16-17.

(5) We participate in this act to have eternal life: ***"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."*** John 6.51-54.

In 1 Corinthians 11.27–29, Paul speaks of three things we should consider when participating in the Lord's Supper: ***"Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."*** The first thing Paul says is that we must eat worthily (V. 27). Theologically, the word worthy means "with the favor of God." We recognize that God makes us worthy by His mercy; nevertheless, God's son must keep himself without sin in this world. Sin makes the person unworthy, and only those who are worthy can participate in the Lord's Supper. Therefore, we must ensure that we participate in this sacred act with dignity. How? By departing from sin.

Verse 28 tells us to test ourselves first. This refers to taking a thorough examination of oneself before participating. According to the Bible, examining oneself does not mean perfection because that is impossible. When someone knows that he is living in unrepented sin, it is better to refrain from participating in the Lord's Supper. V. 29 teaches us that we must "discern" the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. These are the two vital elements of the Lord's Supper. But what does it mean to discern them? It means that we must examine them until we understand their real meaning. Participating in the Lord's Supper without considering what the scriptures say on this point can bring serious consequences.

At least three consequences come from eating the Lord's Supper in an unworthy or improper way. Let's see what they are. 1 Corinthians 11.29–32: ***"For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world."*** In the first place, a person who eats unworthily is guilty of the Lord Jesus' body and blood. Second, he who eats without discernment eats and drinks judgment for himself; That is why those who have not been baptized cannot participate in the Lord's Supper. The third consequence is that some get sick, while others get physically weak and others "sleep."



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Someone may ask: Why so much demand and hardness? On that question, we must remember that the Lord's Supper's main reason is to participate in our Lord Jesus Christ's sufferings on the Cross of Calvary. Of course, that was not something easy for Him, but quite the opposite: something excruciating. We must, therefore, seek to participate in the Lord's Supper with the highest respect for the sacrifice that the Lord Jesus made on the Cross for us.

### 4. THE WASHING OF FEET

In conjunction with the Lord's Supper, our Church practices the custom of Christian Foot washing. Not all Christian churches practice foot-washing; however, there are biblical reasons why it should be practiced. ***"Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded."*** John 13.1-5.

While at the last supper with his disciples, the Lord practiced foot-washing, one of the noblest acts that our Savior carried out while on this Earth. The King of kings and Lord of lords humbled himself as a servant! We must be aware of the deep spiritual sense that this has for us. Our Lord gives us a beautiful example of simplicity and humility in washing the feet of his disciples. What Christ did was not merely circumstantial or a simple religious ritual. Through the act of washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus established doctrine for His Church; even more, he left us a new commandment, as we will see next.

It was the first day of the Passover feast, and the Lord had already instituted the sacrament, with which he proclaimed his imminent sacrifice on the Cross, and the coming into effect of the New Covenant through His shed blood. Jesus then gets up and, surprisingly and unexpectedly, begins to wash the feet of His disciples. This ceremony as a part of the Lord's Supper as undoubtedly an act of communion and humility; and not a custom that corresponded to the oriental tradition of washing your feet, because in that practice the servants washed their lords' feet, but here it is the Lord who washes the feet of his servants. Besides, traditional washing took place before dinner, but here the foot-washing was done later.

It seems that everything was prepared in that room for this act: the water, the bowl, the towel. Everything except one thing: where was the servant? It is then that Jesus, who is Lord and Master of all and should have been served by his servants, positioned himself as a servant of all, setting himself as an example. Jesus washed everyone's feet, including the apostle Peter, who at first refused: "Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, ***"Lord, are You washing my feet?"*** ***Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."*** ***Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!"*** John 13.6-8.

Jesus' warning to Peter that if he did not allow him to wash his feet, "he would have no part with Him" teaches us the enormous importance of this Christian ceremony. Peter's salvation was at stake at that moment! Immediately, Jesus adds a new and impressive spiritual element to the act: ***"Those who are clean need only wash their feet."*** V. 10a. Jesus says that feet get dirty, and therefore, feet should get cleaned. Foot-washing is a symbolic expression, which indicates that they were clean from the pollution of the world. We know that Jesus









## LESSON 21

# THE IMAGE OF GOD IN MARRIAGE

*How can we reflect the image of God in marriage? How can we model the relationship of Christ with His Church in the marriage relationship?*

Text to memorize: *“Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”* Genesis 1.26-28.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the verses we have read, we find a phrase that is the cornerstone of humanity’s biblical understanding: God’s image. The image presented is associated primarily with the unique social concept of marriage. In times when marriage is facing an unprecedented global crisis, it is necessary to give priority to studying the biblical teachings on the divine order that should preside over conjugal and family life.

### 2. REFLECTING THE IMAGE OF GOD IN MARRIAGE

In the beginning, the first couple - Adam and Eve - found themselves in peace, united and experiencing God’s whole purpose for their lives, that they were one flesh in marriage. God created them in His image, male and female. He did not create solitary beings, but two: two who were one. *“The day God created man, in the likeness of God he did. Male and female created them; and he blessed them, and called their name Adam, the day they were created.”* Genesis 5.1,2. Speaking in human terms, we link the identity of a husband, wife, and children to a family name. This, however, identifies them superficially. Family identity has a deeper root. Ephesians 3.15 says that it is from God that every family takes its name, in Heaven and on Earth.

This Scripture expresses one way God relates to people by using family images: God is our Father; He is the husband of his people Israel; It is like a mother raising her children; He is the husband of the Church. When a man and a woman unite in marriage, God gives them this name: the family name. The husband, wife, and children live up to their name’s true meaning when they reflect the divine nature and image in their human family.

### 3. THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH AS A MODEL FOR MARRIAGE

The Divine Husband serves as a model for the husband. The Church serves as a model for women. Ephesians 5.22-24: *“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the Church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the Church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.”* Paul’s instructions to husbands and wives constitute a glimpse of the relationship between Christ and his Church; A heavenly model for every earthly marriage. The man must ask himself: How should I conduct myself with my wife? The answer is: Look to Christ, the divine husband, in his relationship with the Church: he loves her, sacrifices himself for her, is attentive to his interests, and takes care of her. Be sensitive to her needs and what causes her pain as you are with your body members.



In turn, the wife must ask herself: How should I conduct myself with my husband? Answer: look at the chosen bride, the Church, in her relationship with Christ: respect him and acknowledge that his calling is the **“head”** of the family. Respond positively to his leadership, listen to him, cheer him up, stay united in purpose and will with him; Be a genuine help, for God has said that it is not good for man to be alone. That is why he made him an ideal help, according to Genesis 2.18. No husband and wife can do this by relying only on their willpower or resolve, but since you are God’s workmanship, the Lord will help you achieve it.

#### 4. OUR ATTITUDES TO GOD AND TO THE SPOUSE

1st Peter 3.1-7: ***“Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.”***

Our attitudes towards God determine our attitudes towards our spouse. A husband may fall short concerning his wife’s expectations and God’s ideal for him as a husband. Nevertheless, the woman seeks to be a good wife in every possible way, taking Christ as an example, who obeyed his Father and trusted Him, even though his people rejected him (John 1:11). Or, a wife can frustrate her husband, disregard his authority, and even disrespect him. However, a husband is still obligated to honor her, take care of her and pray for her, following the example of our heavenly Father who **“knows our condition.”**

#### 5. HUSBANDS AND WIVES CALLED TO ACT ACCORDING TO THE DIVINE ORDER

Marriage roles are assigned; they are not chosen, nor are they culturally determined. God has commanded them: ***“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.”*** Colossians 3.18,19,23,24. The Christian serves others as a way to serve the Lord. In these verses, that truth applies specifically to the relationship between husband and wife. The role that God assigns to the husband is to care for and protect his wife. Also, from a different position, she must serve her husband. Spouses do not select these roles, nor are they assigned according to the culture in which they live. God arranges these roles as a means through which His life on Earth is manifested.

In James 4.7 and Ephesians 5.21, we see that the directive of submission actually applies to every believer, in his relationships with others and, of course, with God: ***“Submit yourselves, then, to God; resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”*** ***“Submit to one another in the fear of God.”*** In this context, the word submission demands its full biblical meaning for family life: the husband and wife are both subject to God for their assigned functions’ performance. In the service they provide to each other, the husband and wife serve and honor Christ. The word **“submit”** from the Greek *Hupotasso*, is made up of *hupo*, **“under”** and *tasso*, **“arranged in an orderly manner.”**



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In this context, it describes a person who accepts his place under the order constituted by God. It also reminds us that God's commandment to submit is not only directed to wives.

### 6. FORGIVENESS THAT SAVES AND TRANSFORMS A MARRIAGE

Marriage is a state in which imperfect people hurt each other, but forgiveness causes God's redeeming power to transform a marriage. ***"And it shall be, in that day, Says the Lord, That you will call me my husband, And no longer call me my master, for I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, and they shall be remembered by their name no more. I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me In righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord."*** Hosea 2.16,16,17,19,20.

Through the tragic story of Hosea and his wife Gomer, God reveals to us both the depth and the power of his love for Israel and of the marital bond. God describes his pain and the humiliation he suffered due to Israel's infidelity. In obedience to God, Hosea suffered the same pain and humiliation from his wife's infidelity. But God shows how marriage can be saved: through suffering and forgiveness. This is one of the most profound revelations about marriage that we can find anywhere in Scripture. Successful marriages are not composed of perfect people who live guided by sound principles. Marriage is instead a state in which imperfect people who often hurt and humble themselves, find the grace to forgive each other, and thus allow the redeeming power of God to transform their marriage.

### 7. GOD'S SUPPORT TO THE MARRIAGE COVENANT

Malachi 2.13,14,16: ***"And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying; So He does not regard the offering anymore, Nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. Yet you say, for what reason? Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, With whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion And your wife by covenant. For the Lord God of Israel says That He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."***

When two people marry, God is present as a witness to that ceremony, sealing it with the most potent word: covenant. When people enter the marriage covenant, it is as if God became the sentry of that marriage, for blessing or judgment. We can have in knowing that God supports our marriage! Its power and authority face every enemy that can violently threaten marriage, either from within or outside. The word covenant speaks to us about faithfulness and a lasting commitment. Of this covenant, the power of the Divine Guardian sustains both the woman and her husband when they live within the marriage vows. Divorce, on the other hand, is described in Malachi 2 as an act of violence. Initiating a divorce violates the divine intentions towards the marriage and the spouse to which one has joined.

### 8. DIVORCE AND THE HARDENED HEART TOWARDS GOD

Behind every divorce, there is a heart that's been hardened towards God and his spouse. That hardness allows the devil to exaggerate the defects of the other and leads to surrendering to self-compassion. Matthew 19.1-9: ***"Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, that He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there. The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason? And He answered and said to them, Have you not read that He who [made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this reason a man shall leave his Father and***







## LESSON 22

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FATHERS AND SONS

*Why is it important to follow the divine order in the relationship between parents and children? What are the children's duties towards their parents? What obligations do parents have towards their children?*

Text to memorize: ***"Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."*** Colossians 3.20-21

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Let us read Colossians 3.20–21 again, but now in The Expanded Bible: ***"Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."***

#### 2. THE CHILDREN

A child's relationship with the Lord is in direct proportion to the obedience he gives to his parents. The Lord lives and works in and through the life of an obedient child. Happy children know what the boundaries are and how far they can go. Every child tests his parents' authority to see how much his parents will tolerate. He may feel quite unhappy in a particular situation, where his own will opposes his parents. But deep down, he yearns to know that his parents' authority remains firm so he can depend on it. Even a youth or child full of the Holy Spirit can resent and even rebel against their parents, but he would rebel even more frequently if the parental authority were lacking. A child or young man who persistently disobeys his parents will feel a deep discontent in his spirit because his relationship with the Lord is also damaged.

The Apostle Paul writes: ***"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."*** Ephesians 6.1. Modern methods for raising children place a lot of emphasis on the child's sense of right or wrong, just and unjust. A significant burden is placed on the father to treat the son justly, give the "right" orders, implying that a child might and should rebel if an incorrect order is delivered. We take special note here about this instruction from the Lord because here it does not say: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord when it is fair." The Scriptures do not give the child the responsibility to measure or evaluate their parents' decisions, obeying those that he believes are correct and rejecting those that he thinks are not. The duty to decide rests with the parents, according to the Scriptures. The sole and simple responsibility of the child is to obey. There are no exceptions in the order given to children to obey their parents.

The child will naturally feel that some of his opinions are wiser than his parents, as well as think that he can choose his way against his parents' instructions. However, disobedience sows seeds of hostility and rebellion, which brings God's judgment upon your life. According to the Scriptures, no sin is as damnable as disobedience and rebellion, and no virtue is as blessed as obedience and loyalty. Someone can ask the question: "What if the parents order the child to do something wrong?"

Some fathers or mothers have directed their children toward sin. It is unfortunate when a child has to choose between being guided by their parents towards a known sin or disobeying them. God's commandments must always be observed. The child who fears that he will be forced to make bad choices will have to rely heavily



on the Lord. While he cannot knowingly sin, he must also not allow a spirit of disobedience and rebellion in his heart. God has given the commandments to “honor” our fathers and mothers. If this is in contradiction with another commandment, then God will provide a way of escape. The Scriptures teach that children are to obey their parents. The child should also honor his parents (an internal attitude of respect). Even in the extreme situation mentioned above, the child must be sure that his spirit and attitude toward his parents are in harmony with the teaching of Scripture to honor the parents.

For a child or young person, obedience to their parents may appear as obedience to man’s will. The Scriptures, however, teach that obedience to parents is, in essence, obedience to God. An Expanded version says, “... children, obey your parents in the Lord (as His representatives).” When children submit to their parents’ will, they are learning to submit to a higher authority than their own. Submission to parents is a school for independent and direct obedience to God, which the child will have to give up when he no longer lives under the authority of his parents. It is for this reason that parents teach their children: so that when they grow up, they follow the will of God and the direction of His Spirit, not by order of the parents, but by an inner desire of their own, to obey the Word and the will of God.

Learning to obey is an essential law in the spiritual life. God’s authority often comes into our lives through human influence. When we discover and acknowledge the authorities placed over us by God and obey them, God’s blessing and favor will follow! Children: obey your parents. This is God’s plan for you. By obeying them, you obey Him. That is how you will know the presence and blessing of God in your lives.

### 3. THE PARENTS

The commands of the Apostle can be summarized in three words: love, discipline, and instruction. This simple outline describing the parent’s responsibility is modeled after the way God treats His children. God, in His Word, instructs children to obey their parents. But He also speaks to parents teaching them to give appropriate orientation and guidance to their children. When God delegates responsibilities, He also provides the authority necessary to follow them. A father within the divine order has authority from God. He must exercise it for the welfare and salvation of his family.

No one should clothe themselves with authority. But anyone who has received authority from God must hold it firmly. He must have faith in that investment and keep it infidelity before God, not for selfish reasons. He has been granted by God to use it, not to please himself. The authority that a father, full of the Holy Spirit, has comes from God. To be faithful to God, he must fulfill his duties and responsibilities towards his children. What happens when parents make wrong decisions or give bad instructions to their children? Whenever this occurs, and parents are aware of it, it must be confessed and corrected. We must never hesitate to confess a genuine error and ask our children for forgiveness for fear that this will undermine our authority. Our authority is not derived from ourselves or our unimportant action as parents. Nor does it derive from the acceptance of it by our children. It comes, as all real authority, from the one who is behind us supporting our place.

A military sergeant’s authority depends on the captain; that is, the power that supports him. The captain’s authority depends on the major of the regiment, and so on. The authority of parents depends on God, who has placed them as authorities over their children. Hence, when a father makes a mistake, the question is not, “how will my son react if I admit this?” The question is, “what will God think if I try to hide this or pretend it was right?”



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God honors or recognizes honest and frank repentance, both in the child and in the parent. The fear that you would lose your place and authority to your child by confessing an error is unfounded. On the contrary, your authority is confirmed and strengthened when you exhibit the necessary courage, to be honest and demanding with yourself, just as you want your child to be with himself. Only then can you be the kind of authority that God can support. Let us now study the scriptural instructions for parents, which we can summarize in three words: proclaim, pray, and protect. These are some of the responsibilities that Christian parents must accept to model their relationships with their children as God does with His own:

(1) **Proclaim:** The concept of the father who teaches is common in our churches today. In the Bible, no teaching is more explicit and precise than that of the father's duty to give his children exemplary guidance on how to serve God. The Jewish parents of the Old Testament were expressly ordained to be faithful in this matter: ***"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."*** Deuteronomy 6.6-7.

There is no doubt that the faithful application of this principle by the Jews largely explains the preservation of their religion and national identity for several thousand years, despite repeated attempts to destroy them. Today, the Bible's teaching is desperately needed to safeguard and strengthen the Pastor's teachings and preaching in the pulpit. It has a significant impact on children and young people when they see the faithfulness of parents joining with the Pastor to proclaim God's Word! Our homes need to be "learning centers" to study and practice the principles outlined in the Scriptures about living devoutly. While parents may be tempted to feel that this is entirely the ministry or Sunday school department's job, the Scriptures remain clear regarding this truth. Oh, the blessings that God has reserved for the home where the father consistently reads the Bible to his family and guides them on spiritual paths! There is no substitute for God's Word that can shape young lives as effectively and influence them as much as to follow God's laws.

(2) **Pray:** The prayers of parents seem to have extraordinary power with God in the courts of Heaven. Job offered sacrifices early in the morning for each of his children. Satan asked God, ***"Have you not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side?"*** Job 1.10. When the destroying angel passed through Egypt's land in Moses's time, every home where the head of the house had sprinkled blood on the doorframes was protected. The divine commandment was "one sheep for every house." The father who protected his family with the sheep's blood is a perfect and beautiful type of the New Testament father who keeps his family under the blood of Christ, with his prayers and intercessions. This type of father is like a priest to his family. The priest's first ministry is to speak to the people for God and then speak to God for his people. The Lord told Hosea that he would forget his children because they were no longer priests to Him. The sad thing about our nations today is that they are raising or forming a generation of children "forgotten of God" because their parents have neglected their responsibilities in this matter.

By restoring fathers and mothers in the Church who pray and intercede for their children, we will see children and young people favored by God. Satan fears parents who pray because he loses his advantage for his spiritual attacks. Fathers, kneel before God for your children and claim all the promises of abundance over your family. He will hear you and reward you and your family!









## LESSON 23

### HEALTHY INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

*What does the Word of God say about interpersonal relationships? What is the main factor in developing quality human relationships? How to get along with others?*

Text to memorize: *“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”* Romans 12.17–18.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

It is of the utmost importance that every saint of God learns to maintain good human relationships. Our solemn duty and biblical responsibility are to live peacefully with all people: our family, fellow Christians, business partners, authorities, friends, acquaintances, etc. Galatians 6.10 tells us: *“So, as we have the opportunity, let us all do good, and especially those of the family of faith.”* Here we have two categories of neighbors or neighbors with whom we should get along: people of the world and our brothers in the Lord. For this to be possible, we need to have constant mastery over our attitudes and words. For our happiness and the good reputation of God and His Church, believers must maintain *“a conscience free of offense towards God and men.”* Acts 24.16.

#### 2. THE THREE BASIC RELATIONS

Let’s read Matthew 22.37–40. A lawyer approached Jesus one day and asked him, “what was the greatest commandment in the Old Testament Law?” Our Lord — who came not to set aside the Law but to fulfill it — taught that love was and continues to be the most crucial element in religious life. In truth, God is love (1 John 4.16). Matthew chapter 22 reveals the commandment to love and shows us to whom our love should be directed. There Jesus referred to three primary relationships that every human being has: (1) With God, (2) With others, and (3) With himself.

(1) **Relationship with God:** As we have already said that God is love (1 John 4.8), and we know that Jesus Christ is God manifested in the flesh. Therefore, Jesus is the personification and revelation of God’s love. From Him, we learn the highest form of love: Sacrifice (John 3.16). Because He gave himself for us, now we want to give ourselves to Him. In other words, *“We love Him because He first loved us.”* 1 John 4.19. We need to love him with all our hearts, soul, and mind. It’s imperative. Love for God includes: communicating with Him through prayer, learning about Him through the study of the Bible, and worshiping Him through praise. To love God is also to obey him in all his commandments (1 John 5.3), being one very important that we love each other (John 15.17).

(2) **With others:** When a person loves God with all that he is and has, a deep love for humanity is the visible result of that love. When we receive the Spirit of God, we secure the Spirit of love because *“The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit...”* Romans 5.5. The obvious thing about our love for God is our love for our neighbors, the second great commandment. *“If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”* 1 John 4.20–21. In Matthew 7:12, Jesus gave us this practical standard to be able to love our neighbor as ourselves: *“...whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them...”*



(3) **With oneself:** Our Lord commanded that we love our neighbor as ourselves because he knows that we humans love ourselves. Jesus wants us to base our love for others on self-love. It is not contrary to Scripture that a person loves himself. Every human being must have a healthy respect for himself to have a normal and happy life. This only comes through a positive self-image. If you do not love yourself, it will be impossible for you to express love. This is because true love is giving yourself. How is it possible for you to feel good about giving yourself to others? The only way that a person can respect and love himself is by having a right relationship with God. Only then can a person be free of attitudes and actions that destroy human relationships. When a person is in the right relationship with God, he can love himself and give himself to others without reservation as Jesus, our Lord, did.

We can see how love is the first factor in obtaining good human relationships. In this, we discover God's wisdom, in the two greatest commandments of the Old Testament to love God and our neighbor, and in the new commandment that Jesus left us in the New Testament: "That you love one another, as I do I have loved." John 13.34. And how did Jesus love us? With a sacrificial and unconditional love. You dedicate yourself earnestly to acquire this love; Make it your goal, your high search. The excellent chapter on love in the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13, will cause us to enjoy the best relationships with God, ourselves, and others if applied to our lives. Study this beautiful chapter.

### 3. PERSONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Many people's problems have their origin in their inability to get along with others. If we are to enjoy life, we have to learn to maintain good human relationships. The people we associate with are in different categories: family, church, employment, government, and others. These relationships are correlated in such a way that a problem in one area can bring deterioration in the others. Let's study the functioning of these relationships and how we can improve in each of them.

(1) **Family:** The deterioration of the family in modern society that has resulted in broken homes, gives a clear warning to the child of God to maintain healthy relationships. The fathers and husbands must be given their place as a loving, sacrificial, provider, and leader. Mothers and wives must be submissive and obedient to their husbands, love their children, and keep their homes. Children must respect and obey their parents in all things. These roles and responsibilities established by God must be accepted if we are to experience harmony in our domestic lives.

(2) **The Body of Christ:** In the church, we are members of each other (Romans 12.5, Ephesians 5.25). In Christ, we are very close to each other and enjoy rich fellowship. But if we are not filled with the Holy Spirit, this can also bring friction. It is not uncommon for those who are very dear and close to us to be the ones who hurt us the most. Because the brothers and sisters in Christ are very close to us, we must be especially considerate.

The Apostles give us many instructions on how to treat each other. The book of Romans says, "**Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love...**" (12.10-16). "**Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.**" Pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another (14.13-19). "**...be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus**" (15.5-7). In 1 Corinthians 12:25, Paul says to the saints "that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another." To the Ephesians, he writes: "**with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...And be kind to one another,**"



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*tenderhearted, forgiving one another...submitting to one another.*" (4.2,3,32:5.21). In other epistles, Paul writes: *"...edify one another."* 1 Thessalonians 5.11. *"Exhort one another"* (Hebrews 3.13) and *"consider one another in order to stir up love and good works."* Hebrews 10.24.

James says: *"Do not speak evil of one another, brethren"* (4.11), *"...Do not grumble against one another."* (5.9) *"...Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another..."* (5.16). Finally, Peter said in his first epistle: *"...love one another..."* (1.22) and *"...host one another..."* (4.9). Indeed, these apostolic exhortations are enough to encourage us to improve our relations with the other brothers.

(3) **Employment:** A person is employed, on average, one-third of his life working to earn a living. Since much of our time is dedicated to our vocation or work, we must adapt our experience and attitude to give our best at work and enjoy it. The child of God must enhance his Christian testimony by being the most dedicated and cooperative employee. But being a good employee is only half of the task. Getting along with co-workers and the public is also essential if it is part of your job. People who work with you every day will get to know you quite well. Your life will be scrutinized daily by others. They observe you in times of tension or exertion, in moments of temptation, or when ill-treated. It has been said that the crucial test of a person's religion is how he reacts when he is mistreated when he is ill or when things are not going well.

At work, there are horizontal and vertical relationships that we support. Vertical relationships are with our superiors and those under us; horizontal relationships are with those at our same level. The Christian must show an attitude of cooperation with his colleagues, submitting to those who have authority over him. He must have a keen sense of fairness and impartiality towards those under him. You always maintain integrity in your place of employment. Loyalty to the company is essential, but people and principles precede economic gains.

Some occupations may allow unlimited conversation between workers, others not. When you work for someone, you sell their time and attention. Don't be with your employer, spending an immoderate amount of time giving "testimony" to others while you are at work. There will be opportunities to discuss at breaks, at lunchtime, or after work. Take advantage of time, not your employer. One of the best ways to witness at work is with literature. Carry brochures in your pocket, in your purse or briefcase. When there is no time for long discussions, a gospel literature piece will be a continuous testimony for the person to take home.

What does the Bible have to say about the relationship between employer and employee? Quite a lot! We just need to understand that the biblical references about servants and masters today apply to business and employees. Although we are not under the old slavery system, servants and masters' principles remain the same. We can find an excellent "labor code" for companies and employees in the Bible: Colossians 3.22–23; 4.1; 1 Timothy 6.12; Titus 2.9; 1 Peter 2.18. Study these texts later. An appropriate attitude is key to job satisfaction. The scriptures referred to continually underline the importance of working "as for the Lord." Seeing our work as an opportunity to serve God, we will work for our patron as if we were working for God himself! A person with this kind of attitude will develop work habits that can result in promotions and salary increases and good working relationships. These principles certainly also apply to teachers and students.

(4) **Rulers:** As God's people, we are commanded to be subject to the Earth's rulers (Romans 13). In 1 Peter 2.17, the Word of God tells us to honor the leaders of our nation. Civil authorities are elected or appointed for our benefit. They provide order and security in our societies (Romans 13.15; Titus 3.1). The Bible also requires that we pay our taxes to the government (Matthew 22.21; Romans 13.7). Respecting the laws of the country is







## LESSON 24

### YOUR PLACE IN GOD'S PLAN

*For what purpose did God place us in the Body of Christ? How does He expect us to interact with the other members of it? What functions should we play?*

Text to memorize: *"Speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."* Ephesians 4.15-16.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Church is alive today because God Almighty himself has lived in it through generations. In fact, and as we have already said, the Church is His body. The Word of God compares the Church with several things: a family, a flock, a fiancée, a garden, a building, etc. But none of these symbolic portraits is as clear as that of the "body of Christ." The Church is not only "as a body," but she is the Body of Christ. It is thanks to this so appropriate analogy of the Church that we can now identify so clearly the elements that compose it and understand its importance.

#### 2. THE MEMBERS

A body must have a head and members attached to it. So too is the body of Christ - the Church - where He is the Head, and we are the members. Each member of this body has been placed there by Him, with a particular purpose. Each member is literally essential and has a unique role to play: ***"For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit."*** 1 Corinthians 12.12–13. Here we find a beautiful account of how we have been placed in the body of Christ, of how we have achieved membership in this body through the miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit. Each of us has received his salvation experience through Him since it is He and no one else who adds to His Church, those who are to be saved in this age, as shown in Acts 2.47.

Acceptance as members of this glorious Body occurs when we obey the plan of salvation as provided by Christ through the mouth of the apostle Peter, ***"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*** Acts 2.38. This is the only condition for our membership in Christ's body, the only gateway to the Lord's Church.

God has positioned every member in His body as He sees fit. Just as members of a natural body are essential to each other - directly or indirectly - also in Christ's body, we are all important and need each other - whether we realize it or not. Even the one who is apparently unnecessary is vital to the Church of the Lord as a whole. Each member of the Church is essential, mainly because it is a soul redeemed with the blood of the Lamb, which is the highest price ever paid. Each member of the body is essential. This becomes evident when we consider that each one has received a particular function to play. We all have an important role to play, and without the contribution of any of us, the whole suffers.



God has made us dependent on each other for that reason: so that we all cooperate as a body. None is more or less important than another, just different. Therefore, that the differences do not hinder us, but quite the opposite, since in our diversity there is great strength: ***“For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, because I am not an eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.”***  
 1 Corinthians 12.14-20.

### 3. THE HEAD

***“Christ is the head of the church,”*** tells us Ephesians 5.23; ***“... By virtue of whom the whole body, nourishing and joining by the joints and ligaments, grows with the growth that God gives.”*** Colossians 2.19. It is apparent in the Scriptures that Christ is the Head of the Church! We must be careful not to change this model. God says that He is the fundamental authority and the expert teacher in His Church. Although each of us has been given a unique place and a ministry, we cannot act separately from the body and survive. Each member is subject to the Head, who is Christ. He has placed each of us in a particular place. There can be no schism or division in this. This Body only works through the direction of the Head.

The true Church has only one head: The Lord Jesus Christ. ***“He is the head of the body that is the church, because it pleased the Father that all fullness dwelt in him.”*** Colossians 1.18–19. This role of Jesus Christ as Head of the Church can only be understood entirely through the doctrine of the Deity of Christ, which we study at Level 1 Birth of our Discipleship school. How could Christ be the Head of his Church and, at the same time, participate in a trinity? There is only one head, and only one body, which is the Church of the Lord.

The same conclusion - about a single or unique head - can be drawn from the local church: there is only one head in the local congregation: the Pastor, who is under the direction of the Lord. The Pastor is the highest human authority, which occupies the highest office of the local church. He receives his authority from the Head of the universal Church, which is our Lord Jesus Christ. Being a member of a body that lives and moves in harmony with its natural head - the Pastor - and with its supernatural head - Christ - means experiencing a feeling of security and peace that is above all others. There is no example more beautiful of God’s perfect plan for this era than a local assembly working together.

Ephesians 4.15–16 describes the maturity and spiritual progress that results from a local church that acts as a body under the Minister of God and under His God. These happy people grew up ***“...of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”***

### 4. THE CHURCH OF GOD

Quite often, when someone mentions the word “church,” a building with a bell tower and a cross comes to mind. In the twenty-first century, when speaking of “church,” one thinks more about a brick building than in believers’ bodies. Other times you think of the name of a particular denomination. But neither facilities nor organizations are the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church of the Lord is a living organism, a body of baptized, molded, and united believers through the Spirit of God, locally and universally.



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To fully understand our place in God's plan, we must understand the difference between Church (singular) and churches (plural). In the Scriptures, our Lord used the term "church" only twice. In Matthew 16.18, He said: **"I will build My Church,"** thereby referring to all His redeemed, to His mystical, intangible, and invisible Body of believers from all over the world; from the past, present and future. This is the universal Church. On the other occasion, when Jesus mentioned the word church was in Matthew 18.15–17: **"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."** Here Jesus refers to a specific group of saints, relating the concept of a body of believers present, visible and tangible, with a place; that is, the local church, which is a specific manifestation of the Body of Jesus Christ. This is the only church that you can become part of practically and effectively.

The local church is where real people with real needs gather and the only place where real ministry and growth can occur. Until we realize and assume that we are an organ (members) of a whole and invisible body, we cannot properly relate to Christ and those who constitute his Church. Someone who thinks that he is a member of the Body of Christ without belonging to a local church in a meaningful way infers or implies that he is an organ independent of the body. This is not only logically ridiculous and impossible but also and totally against the Bible. Every believer must be appropriately connected to a local church that believes and preaches the truth - God's Word.

Just as your local church collaborates with God's work in its city, so does it in district programs. This includes fellowships, camps, and conventions. Saints and ministers from many other local assemblies assemble to worship, achieve a broader vision, and give more excellent care to the Lord's Work. An individual church cannot cover such a tremendous number of areas alone. Yet, when associated with other assemblies of equal vision and goals, the efforts become very significant. This is why your local church is part of national and international districts and programs. Local churches are encouraged to participate with other assemblies of precious and equal faith at the regional and global levels, as Jesus commanded.

Every two years, the Apostolic Assembly celebrates an International General Convention in the United States of America. Saints and ministers from all parts of the world gather to worship together and share visions and burdens. It is a great occasion for fellowship, prayer, and spiritual enrichment. Our organization is composed or organized in different departments: International Missions, Christian Education, Social Assistance, Apostolic Men, Dorcas Sisters, Messengers of Peace (youth), and several others. The women's department is in charge of collecting a special offering called "Flor Azul" every year, which helps our missionaries around the world. Through this and other financial aid, vehicles and land are acquired, temples are built, and the mission field's needs are met. Such donations certainly help to spread the Gospel around the world.

Programs such as Companions in Missions (men) and Precious Seed (youth) also provide local church congregations with the opportunity to support the mission field. This is a great blessing and privilege for members involved in such programs. You can collaborate with international missionary work through your local church! And there are other projects that time and space do not allow us to mention. The goal behind each of them is to conquer unreached territory and win lost souls to the Kingdom of God. The work of God on Earth is not a small task and requires a tremendous cooperative effort.









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Apostolic Assembly of the Faith in Christ Jesus

## COMMITMENT TO LOCAL MEMBERSHIP

*This commitment must be submitted by any person who integrates into our church by water baptism or request for admission*

I, \_\_\_\_\_, in the city of \_\_\_\_\_, country of \_\_\_\_\_,

having understood my need and obligation to be committed to a local church, I **ASSUME MY RESPONSIBILITIES AS A MEMBER** of the Apostolic Assembly of the Faith in Christ Jesus and this local church.

I declare that as of today, I will identify with the other members of this congregation, as well as their needs, and I pledge to pursue the following levels of the School of Discipleship.

### THEREFORE, I DECLARE THAT I WILL...

- (1) ...**PROTECT THE UNITY OF MY CHURCH**, acting in love, rejecting gossip and following my leaders.
- (2) ...**SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF MY CHURCH**, praying at least fifteen minutes a day for their growth, inviting those who do not attend and treating those invited with kindness.
- (3) ...**SUPPORT THE TESTIMONY OF MY CHURCH**, faithfully attending its activities and meetings, living a holy life and contributing regularly with my tithes and offerings.
- (4) ...**SERVE IN MY CHURCH**, through my gifts and knowledge, developing a servant's heart and being prepared to serve.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_



