



# A New Life in Christ

*Workbook for New Believers*



*"Let us know, Let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD. His going forth is established as the morning;  
He will come to us like the rain, Like the latter and former rain to the earth" (Hosea 6:3).*

DISCIPLESHIP SERIES

# A New Life in Christ

*Workbook for New Believers*

**TRUE JESUS CHURCH**

**Department of Literary Ministry**

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## About This Workbook

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Welcome to the family of believers who belong to our Lord Jesus Christ! You have already received water baptism, footwashing, partaken of the Holy Communion, and you might have also received the Holy Spirit. You know that in addition to keeping the Ten Commandments, “you are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality” (Acts 15:28, 29, NIV).

You’re probably wondering, “What next?”

Aside from all that has been mentioned, what else do you need to know and do? Since you’ve already got started on your journey of faith, this workbook only serves to help you continue on your journey. This journey, however long or short, will not be without its obstacles. This workbook, then, also acts as a reminder that with the help of our Lord Jesus, you shall persevere for his Spirit will guide you and his Word will light your way.

This workbook has been designed to help you in your personal study as well as in a classroom setting. The amount of time and effort you put into your workbook will determine its worth to you. If you choose to go by the pace of one-lesson-per-week, the whole course will last about four-and-a-half months. The advantage of going at this rate is that your personal study may correspond with the class your church offers. Bear in mind, however, that the important thing is not about how quickly you complete the book. Rather, the important thing for you to remember is that you want to get as much knowledge and insight from each lesson as you can; so that you can take another step forward in your journey of faith.

For your **personal study**, carving out quiet time from your busy schedule will be your first consideration. What part of today is the time when you are least likely to be interrupted? Ideally, you’d want to stick to a certain time every day. But sometimes, this isn’t always possible. Allow for flexibility. For example, if you have to move your personal study time to your lunch hour tomorrow, that’s okay.

Do you begin with Lesson 1 and end with Lesson 18? The answer is yes, although you might find it helpful to first look through your workbook from cover to cover to get an idea of what the lessons are about. Then go to Lesson 1 and proceed from there. Because each lesson comes with Bible verses, you’d want to look up these verses to help you better understand God’s Word. Whenever possible, you’d want to complete one lesson in one sitting and review the material during the next few days. But, if, some days, you find yourself only able to study one or two sections of a lesson, do not be discouraged. Pick up from where you left off the next day.

A journey is like that: you keep on going. This requires involvement and commitment. Your workbook is like that too. You need to be involved and committed. Apart from reading the text and looking up Bible verses, you'd want to think about all that you've read and what all this means to you on a personal level. Is the Bible coming alive for you, so to speak? Do you, in retrospect, see how God has actually been there for you all this very long while? Write down your thoughts in the margin. If you have any questions, write them down as well. Every lesson also comes with a section on questions that help you review the text. When you come to this section, tackle the questions and write down your answers in the space provided. If one of the questions call for a memory verse, look it up, memorize it, and write it down. You will also come upon an activity section at the end of every lesson. Again, be involved.

A section on case studies is included in every lesson. This section is most valuable in a **classroom setting**. Find out if a class on the Discipleship Workbook is currently in session at your local church or if one is being planned. These classes will be facilitated by an instructor who will guide you through the lessons and, in particular, be there to lead the discussions on case studies that have been presented in the workbook. Be prepared to participate. Ask questions. Share your opinion. In the process, you will discover that you are learning from your brothers- and sisters-in-the-Lord, as much as they are learning from you. We are in this together.

But this is what our journey of faith is about. It is written that "faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Heb 11:1, NIV). By accepting water baptism into the family of Christ, you have already expressed such a faith. The journey that lies ahead of you now may be few or many in years. Either way, the Word of God tells us that, at the appointed time, this journey will bring all those who have stayed on track to the New Jerusalem where God shall dwell with his people. There, they shall see God face to face. There, no tears shall fall. There, instead of the sun or moon, the glory of God will illuminate the city.

May every one of us, then, fix our eyes on this promise as, starting from today, we begin taking one sure step after another in this journey of faith.



## Building A Relationship with Christ

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# 1

## Studying God's Word

“Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers” said Moses to the Israelites (Deut 8:1). Before Moses’ death, he gave the people a farewell speech. He wanted every one of them to remember God’s direct involvement in their 40-year journey. Recalling one incident after another, Moses reminded them how members of their community lived or died, depending on whether they had obeyed God’s commandments or not. Moses, who got to know God intimately through this whole experience, admonished the Israelites to remember that “... man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord” (Deut 8:3).

Today, this teaching is for us to grasp as well. As Christians, we look forward to entering our promised land. The gospel you have heard and received is the good news of this promised land that Jesus Christ preached about 2000 years ago. But for our soul to get to the kingdom of heaven, we must journey through the wilderness of this physical life. How can we make it? Our source of spiritual nourishment and strength, as it was for the Israelites, shall be “every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.” Because God’s Word is necessary for our spiritual life, studying the Bible is as important as eating. Spiritually speaking, we can’t accomplish anything if we are spiritually famished. So let us make Bible study an integral part of our daily lives. In this lesson, we shall learn where to begin.

### Some Basic Principles

**Believe the Bible is from God.** God’s Word is found in the Bible. The Bible is a collection of 66 books that were written by different people, in different parts of the world, over a period of some 1,400 years. The amazing thing is that although few of the authors knew each other, all of them wrote about one thing — God’s plan for man to be with him in heaven. How could this be? Only the Lord God could have coordinated such efforts. This is why the apostle Paul said: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2Tim 3:16).

**Treasure Your Bible.** Today, if we are living in a developed country, Bibles are a commonplace item. They are in bookstores, churches and libraries. We probably have one or more in our home. But there was a time in the history of the world when only a few people had access to the Bible. Originally written in



Hebrew and Greek, the Bible would, over time, be translated into different languages. But before the invention of the printing press, Bibles were often much too expensive. Then there were rules that prevented ordinary folks from reading the Bible. Unfortunately, even today, for various reasons, ordinary folks in some parts of the world still do not have access to a Bible. Knowing that it's such a blessing for you to have your own Bible, you should cherish this gift and study God's word every day. Don't just stick your Bible on the shelf to collect dust or leave it in a pile on the floor and pick it up once a week for church. God's word was written for you to read, study, and think about. Make the Bible your daily companion. It will prove to be your most valuable possession in life.

**Hunger for God's Words.** God called out to his people through the prophet Isaiah, "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live..." (Isa 55:2-3). Instead of seeking in vain for fulfillment with earthly enjoyment, we should fill our souls with God's Word. Through careful study of and constant meditation on what God has to tell us, we shall be nourished and satisfied.

### Suggested Guidelines

**Picking a Bible.** The New King James Version is the recommended version in the True Jesus Church, as is the Revised Standard Version. But if you already own the New International Version, this easy-to-understand version will help you become acquainted with God's word. You may also find that studying the Bible in your mother tongue helps you get to know God better. And if, at a later date, you do so wish to study the Bible in its original languages, you might want to read the Hebrew and Greek versions.

**Have a Bible within reach.** Having a Bible within reach when you feel inspired to study God's Word is a good thing. If you have a copy that's not too heavy, you might want to take it with you each time you leave your home to go to school or work. Or would it be more convenient to borrow one from the library during your lunch break? Did you say you listen to yours on a walkman when you're jogging around the block? Oh, and some of you have a Bible in your laptop?

**Armed with a Purpose.** If, at first, your purpose is to get a general idea of what the Bible is about, then you might want to start reading the Bible front to back. Or do you have a burning question? For example, if you're wondering what it means for a person to be blessed according to Jesus' teachings, you'd want to begin your search in one of the four gospels, namely, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

**To Schedule or Not To Schedule.** Do you function better by sticking to a written schedule every day? Reading the Bible and studying God's Word is akin to eating for the soul. Like eating for the body, eating for the soul is also a very

personal matter. For example, does your schedule call for you to eat three square meals a day? Do you snack throughout the day? Or do you eat six small meals at regular intervals? Only you can decide what's best for you. The important thing to remember is that you must eat every day.

**Find some company.** "Two are better than one..." wrote the preacher in Eccl 4:9-10. You may find that reading God's words and studying his commandments with another believer is a helpful thing to do. For example, if on a day when one of you is feeling less than motivated, the other can get the Bible study going as soon as you meet. And if one of you is not clear about a particular passage, the other can shed some light. This suggestion also works for larger groups.

Write down other guidelines that have worked for you.

Write down new ideas that could work for you.

## **Questions**

1. Before Moses parted company with the Israelites, he spoke to them one last time. Read Deut 8 and briefly describe what you think is the most important thing Moses said.

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2. Living as disciples of Jesus today, we are actually walking in faith to a promised land. Where is this promised land?

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3. Every day of a disciple's life is like one step forward in his or her spiritual journey through the wilderness. To help us complete this journey, which quote from Scripture can we commit to memory?

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4. Before every word in the Bible becomes of immense value to you, you must first believe that the Bible is a book inspired by God. T/F

5. Why must we hunger for God's Words?

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6. Do you have a favorite version of the Bible? Describe in two or three sentences why it's your favorite.

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7. Why is it helpful for a Christian to have a Bible within reach?

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8. The Bible comprises of the \_\_\_\_\_ Testament and the \_\_\_\_\_ Testament. There are a total of \_\_\_\_\_ books. Out of this number, \_\_\_\_\_ are in the Old Testament, and \_\_\_\_\_ are in the New Testament. They were written over a period of about \_\_\_\_\_ years.

9. What did the apostle Paul say about God's Word?

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10. Every day, we eat to feed our body with proper nutrition so that it may function at optimal level. How can we care for the health of our soul?

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**Case Studies**

1. Cathy tells you, “I know that knowing about the Bible is good for you, but it’s not like I have a pressing need to know the Bible that well. I mean, it’s not like I’m preaching on the pulpit or anything, so why should I read the Bible? In fact, even when I do read the Bible, I don’t know what’s going on most of the time. I know of a lot of Christians who don’t really take much time to read the Bible, yet they come to church every Sabbath. These brothers and sisters seem to be doing just fine without much Bible reading. In fact, I’ve even seen how Deborah keeps up her daily Bible reading. Before going to bed, she prays for about a minute and then randomly opens the Bible. As she rests in her bed, she’ll quickly read a little from a random section that catches her eye. I mean let’s be realistic, we can still be a faithful Christian without going through the motions, right?” What problems do you see with Cathy’s comments? How do you think her daily Bible reading is going? How do you answer her questions?

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2. Caleb comes to you and starts saying, “You know, I think I’ve come to a point where I know the Bible pretty well. I’ve listened to so many sermon tapes and attended so many Sabbath services that I feel like I pretty much know what the Bible is all about. I was just talking to Jason the other day, and I don’t even think he knows anything about the Bible. I mean look at this: Jason has believed in Jesus for 10 years! If I know the Bible better than him, and I’ve only believed in Jesus for 10 months, then I must be a quick learner. I admit, I don’t read the Bible as much as I used to; still, I’ve read so much Bible in the past and have heard so many sermons, I don’t think I really need to read the Bible anymore.” What are your thoughts on what Caleb is saying? Is anything wrong? What?

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3. Recently, Heather got a new job; she has to work extremely hard every day. Pastor Nelson sees Heather sitting on the pew, looking very worn out and tired after the Sabbath service. He stops to ask her how everything is going. Heather replies, "Pastor, I feel really weak in my faith. I try to read the Bible every day, but even when I do get a chance to read the Bible, I don't get much out of my Bible reading. After I come back from work, I have to cook dinner, clean the house, and do other chores for my family. By the end of the day, I'm so tired that as soon as I open up the Bible I usually fall asleep." You are sitting next to Heather on the pew, can you encourage or offer her any advice? What is Heather's obstacle in her daily Bible reading and how can you help her resolve this problem?

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**Activity**

1. Make a list of reasons why you think some Christians don't read the Bible on a constant basis. Then make a list of reasons why you think other Christians not only read the Bible but deeply desire to know more and more about God. Compare and contrast your two lists. Check off the points you especially identify with on your list and ask yourself "Why?" Do you think you need to make any changes in how you view the importance of Bible reading in your life?

## Understanding God's Word

Large crowds followed Jesus everywhere he went. With each miracle they saw Jesus performed, the crowds became more and more impressed. One day, after Jesus fed 5,000 men with only five barley loaves and 2 small fish, they were ready to “take Him by force to make Him king” (Jn 6:15). But Jesus left before the crowd had a chance to act on their desire.

However, some of them did catch up with him the next day. This time Jesus told them what was on their mind. He told them that they were only looking for a free lunch. He told them not to labor for food that perishes, “but for the food which endures to everlasting life” (Jn 6:27). He told them, “I am the bread of life” (Jn 6:35).

But when this large group of people heard this, they were not at all impressed. They were especially offended that Jesus said he was “the bread which came down from heaven” (Jn 6:41). They were even more offended when Jesus said, “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” (Jn 6:51).

The Bible records their reaction. “Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, “This is a hard saying, who can understand it” (Jn 6:60)? That day, many of Jesus’ disciples left him. Because they could not understand God’s Word, they left him almost as easily as they’d followed him. In this lesson, we shall look at how believers can truly understand God’s words.

### Some Basic Principles

**Be Still.** The crowds Jesus spoke to were called the Jews. Many generations ago, their ancestors lived in Egypt as slaves. They lived there until God sent a man, named Moses, to rescue them and bring them to the land where the Jews were now living. But the journey took 40 long years through the wilderness. Far away from civilization, these ancestors only had God to rely on. God spoke to them through Moses. But one day Moses had to tell them, “Stand still, that I may hear what the Lord will command concerning you” (Num 9:8). If the Jews had been aware of this admonishment that day, they would have done well to listen to Jesus speak about spiritual food for their soul. Instead, they were busy looking for food to fill their stomachs.

**Prepare Your Heart.** During Jesus’ public ministry, he often used parables to teach an absolute truth. In one parable, Jesus told the story of a farmer who sowed his seed. Some fell on the path, some fell on stony ground, and some fell

among the thorns. None of these grew into healthy plants. But those that fell on good ground did grow to produce fruit (Lk 8:4-15). Jesus explained that God's Word must fall on the good ground of our heart for it to grow and mature. You may have seen ground that's hard and dry, with little or no plant life. Even rain runs off its surface. However, for ground that's been tilled and conditioned, rain will seep through and bring a seed to life.

**Be patient.** In the parable of the farmer, Jesus said, "But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience" (Lk 8:15). You may already know that a seed must stay in the ground for a length of time before you see any growth above the ground. But that's only the beginning. If you water and feed the plant and give it time to grow in a place that gets the proper amount of light, it will eventually bear fruit. In a sense, you can expect the same of God's Word. In the beginning, you may wonder if any good is going to come out of your studies. Be patient. Don't give up. Instead, be encouraged that the more you study God's Word, the more you will understand why God has chosen to plant his seed in the good ground of your heart.

### Suggested Guidelines

**Learn to Ask Questions.** When you study a passage, write down your questions or things you want to learn more about. A basic way to start is to list the 5w's and 1h: what, who, where, when, why, how. Just by answering each of these questions, you can discover things that you may not have noticed. This exercise also helps you remember what you have read. The same method also works for topical and character studies, although answering questions of this nature involves more extensive reading and research because you often have to study many different passages before you can find the answer. Asking good questions is the first step that leads to new discoveries.

**Interpret Scripture with Scripture.** After you have formulated your questions, you need to find answers. This is not a matter of guesswork or personal opinion. The Bible is its best commentary. You want to find out what God has to say rather than what you or anyone else has to say. Instead of going straight to commentaries, you need to search the Scriptures. Sometimes you may find the answer in the passage that you are studying. Other times, you need to use a concordance to look up related passages by key words and find answers within those other passages. Yes, all this takes time and effort. But the joy you experience of discovering and tasting the sweetness of God's word will far surpass the hard work you put in.

**Pray for Understanding.** In order to understand God's Word, we need to have the Holy Spirit reveal his message to us. In a letter to the believers in Corinth, Paul explained that "no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:11). When we study God's Word to understand what he has to tell us, we must therefore pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth (Jn 16:13).

**Continue Your Search in Sermons & Bible Study Classes.** When you attend Sabbath services and listen to sermons, be prepared to take mental or written notes. Do the same when you attend Bible study classes in your local church, ask questions or share your thoughts.

**Support Your Search with Study Aids.** Borrow or purchase a taped sermon. Get a copy of a publications catalog to see if there are any church publications that can help you in your studies. Subscribe to church periodicals such as *Manna*. And check out the list of “Selected Reference Tools for Bible Study” (Appendix A).

**Take Your Search to the World Wide Web.** Log on to [www.tjc.org](http://www.tjc.org). Or sign up for e-mail Bible study by sending your request to [bible.study@tjc.org](mailto:bible.study@tjc.org).

Write down other guidelines that have worked for you.

Write down new ideas that could work for you.

## **Questions**

1. Why did the Jews try to take Jesus by force? (Jn 6:15)

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2. Jesus told the Jews not to labor for food that perishes. Instead, he said they ought to be more concerned about “food which endures to everlasting life?” If you could hear Jesus now, what do you think he wants you to do?

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3. List at least 3 principles that may help you to understand God's Word.

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4. Why must you keep still when someone is speaking to you? How can you apply this principle in your spiritual life?

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5. If you live in farming country or have driven through one on the freeway, you would have seen farmers prepare the ground for planting. What time of year do farmers prepare the ground, and what equipment do they use for this purpose? If a person's heart is like the ground, what can you do to prepare yours so that God may reap a bountiful harvest?

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6. What does "keep it and bear fruit with patience" (Lk 8:15) mean to you?

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7. The Bible tells us that many of Jesus' disciples left him when they could not understand what he was trying to tell them. These people did not know it then, but they had everything to lose. What must you do to remain on track in this journey to the promised land?

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8. Why might studying the Bible with a question in mind help you understand God’s Word a little better?

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9. It is important that you are in the habit of studying the Bible with a prayerful heart. This means that you are relying on Jesus to help you better understand God’s Word. T/F

10. Look up Luke 24:45 in your Bible. Memorize it and write it down.

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**Case Studies**

1. Hope is a newly baptized believer in the True Jesus Church. Soon after Hope was baptized, she started to read the Bible. She asked Andy, who was baptized a few years earlier, for his advice on how she should study the Bible. Andy told Hope that she should only read the Bible and listen to sermons on the Sabbath; he explicitly mentioned that extra-Biblical reference materials were the “tools of the devil.” He told her to stay away from any reference materials because they would corrupt her pure faith. As Hope was reading the Bible one day, she read about how Jesus went to a place called Capernaum. Hope wanted to know where Capernaum was and asked Janice if she knew. Janice, who happened to have a Bible Atlas, showed Hope where Capernaum was. Hope was shocked that Janice carried a Bible Atlas since Andy explicitly told her that any types of books except for the Bible were Satan’s tools. Now Hope is confused. Because of her confusion, she no longer reads much Bible; she tells people that she can’t understand what the Bible is all about. She has decided to just listen to sermons and pray. Is there anything wrong with this situation? What do you think of what Andy told Hope? Is there anything wrong with Hope’s resolution to just listen to sermons and pray? What advice, if any, would you give to both Andy and Hope?

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2. Ben works tirelessly every day because he is the CEO of a large company. However, when he comes home he is usually very tired. When he does

have spare time, he usually uses it for his family and friends. After Ben got baptized in church, he realized the importance of Bible reading, so he tried to find more time to read the Bible. He heard the pastor say, "Read three chapters a day." So Ben decides he'll set aside a time in his schedule, between 11 to 11:30 P.M., to read the Bible. He always reads three chapters no matter what because he knows Bible reading is his Christian duty. Before he goes to bed each night, he would open up the Bible and start reading from the first chapter his eye lands on. One day the pastor asks Ben how his Bible reading is going. Ben replies, "Pastor, to tell you the truth, I don't know what I'm reading. But I always read 3 chapter a day without fail. However, recently every time I open up my Bible I keep opening up to the same page. So I've been reading a long list of names for about three days in a row. I think I need to start opening up the Bible in another place." Do you see any problems with Ben's Bible study? What do you think Ben could improve upon?

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**Activity**

1. Get all types of extra-Biblical reference materials (including some with Biblical commentary/interpretation), either from your local church library or from other brothers and sisters. Familiarize yourself with all the reference materials you can find, and try to discover at least one thing in the reference materials (i.e., those with Biblical commentary/interpretation) that the True Jesus Church (officially or generally speaking) would not agree with (if you have any problems, ask someone to help you). After you have done this activity, ask your local ministers (pastors, elders, deacons) what they think about using these extra-Biblical reference materials. Consider carefully what they have to say to you.

# 3

## Applying God's Word

In the Bible, there's a written account of a eunuch who applied God's Word as soon as he heard it. He was an official of the queen of Ethiopia, and he held a position like that of a present-day finance minister. The story unfolds when the official was on his way home after worshipping in Jerusalem. Travelling on desert road in his chariot, the official spent the time studying God's Word. But there was a small passage he couldn't understand.

Philip, a disciple of the Lord Jesus, was sent to minister to him. Philip noticed the official was reading from the prophet Isaiah and he asked the official if he understood (Acts 8:26-39). The official confided he needed help, and he invited Philip to join him in the chariot.

It so happened that the scripture the official had trouble understanding was none other than that about Jesus. Philip told him that the passage was about Jesus who had come from God to this world, where, when he was 33 years old, he died a slow and painful death on the cross. Coming from a culture where animals were sacrificed for the forgiveness of sins, the official understood that Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice. Philip explained that Jesus' blood opened a fountain to cleanse man's sins and lead him to salvation; and that this cleansing power was available to the official through the sacrament of water baptism.

And this is how the Bible records this official's reaction. "Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?'" (Acts 8:36).

As you can guess, the official was baptized immediately. This is just one example about a person applying God's Word as soon as he heard it. Having been baptized, you too share a similar testimony. In this lesson, we shall study the importance of applying God's Word.

### Some Basic Principles

**Be Humble.** The virtue that stands out the most in the above example is the man's humility. Though a high-ranking official with a great deal of power in the queen's court, he was not offended when Philip appeared out of no where and asked if he knew what he was reading. Instead, he listened to a complete stranger. In the process, the official received the gift of eternal life. It is as promised in Psalm 147:6, "The Lord lifts up the humble."

**Look, Listen and Learn.** The official's position in the queen's court tells you that he was a man of many years. That the queen trusted him with all her wealth also tells you that he was someone who was admired and respected in that nation. You would not be mistaken if you also imagined that in this powerful position, many people answered to him. He probably could do no wrong. Yet, this official understood that there were some areas of life where even he needed help, and he was not afraid to ask for it. It is written, "A wise man will hear and increase learning" (Prov 1: 5).

**Act On It Now.** The official responded to God's Word with a sense of urgency. When he saw water, he seized the opportunity to be baptized. Being the official who had charge of the queen's treasury, this man knew the buying power of money. But after listening to Philip, the official understood that no money could ever buy the gift of salvation. He also understood the essence of time. No amount of money could buy that either. Says the scripture, "Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near" (Is 55:6).

### Suggested Guidelines

**Be Familiar with the Bible.** The Ethiopian official was a man who studied God's Word whenever and wherever he could. Because of this, he understood the big picture of God's Word. So on this day, after Philip explained the meaning of a small passage that he had been puzzling over, everything the official had ever read now came together and made sense. Applying God's Word immediately, then, was the natural thing for him to do.

**Make a Conscious Effort.** From the beginning of time, man's struggle to apply God's Word has remained an ever-present everyday challenge. The psalmist, a man who knew his own weaknesses and understood the power of God's Word reflected: "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word." Here we see the psalmist talking about his problem and thinking about applying God's Word. But he didn't stop there. In the next 2 verses, we actually see him making a conscious effort. He prayed, "With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You" (Ps119:9-11).

**Pray for Understanding.** "Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart" (Ps 119:34). The presence or absence of understanding is often why we do or do not do something. For example, when a preschooler understands why he must not rush out into the street to get to the other side, he will wait for his parents to hold him by the hand and walk him over. By the same token, when we understand why we must not do the things that we wish, then, we shall be more likely to pray for God to give us the strength and the courage to do the right thing.

**Rely on the Holy Spirit.** Don't be surprised if, at first, you find that, more often than not, "you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal. 5:17). You are not alone because this is a common struggle for every believer, no matter how long

ago or how recent he/she has been baptized. But we can hope for improvement. Before Jesus was taken away from his disciples, he promised them that God would send the Holy Spirit to help them. The Lord said, “He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (Jn 15:26). Today’s believers can count on that promise, as well. Even so, we must not let our guard down. Peter, one of Jesus’ closest disciples warned, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8).

Write down other guidelines that have worked for you.

Write down new ideas that could work for you.

### **Questions**

1. List at least 3 principles that will be helpful when you are applying God’s Word in your walk of faith.

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2. Memorize Psalm 147:6 and write it down.

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3. How was the eunuch a humble man?

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4. Read Prov 1:5. What characterizes a wise man according to this verse?

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5. The eunuch responded to Philip's message with a sense of urgency. Why must we do likewise when we hear God's Word today?

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6. The eunuch was able to make sense of Philip's explanation so quickly because he was familiar with the Scriptures. T/F

7. How can you hide God's Word in your heart?

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8. From the time we wake up until the time we fall asleep, who can we rely on to help us remember to do the right thing?

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9. Why did the psalmist pray for understanding?

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10. As disciples of Jesus, we believe that he made the ultimate sacrifice and died so that we may have eternal life. Therefore, we can do no less than learn to apply God's Word in every area of our daily lives. T/F

### Case Studies

1. Julie was recently baptized and has been studying the Bible voraciously ever since her baptism. In just a few short months she has already almost finished reading the whole Bible twice. During the lunch break, after the Sabbath church service, Julie tells the pastor that she has gotten so much out of the Bible. She excitedly relates to the pastor all the joy she has received from reading God's word and listening to sermons. Julie then tells Tom, "You know, I almost read one book of the Bible a day. I especially love to read the gospel books. My favorite book of all is Matthew. Jesus' teachings are so good to read. And I always put what I learn from the Bible into practice." Amanda, who is listening to the conversation, blurts, "So

you must think you're pretty smart, right? I mean you sound like you're ready to go on the pulpit and preach a sermon." Julie then gives Amanda a dirty look and says, "Are you trying to be rude or are you just born that way?" Amanda just returns Julie's dirty look and walks away. After the service, Julie rushes home extremely unhappy. She vows she'll never talk to Amanda again. In fact, Julie thinks about the many avenues of revenge available to her. Before Julie goes to bed that night, she reads a large section of the Bible as usual. During her Bible reading, she comes across a passage she read a few times before: Matthew 18:21-35. The passage talks about Jesus' teachings on forgiveness. The verse really touches Julie because she relates the passage to her argument with Amanda. At the same time, she starts to think about the day's argument and thinks angrily, "Why is Amanda so insensitive to other people? I can't stand her! But Jesus says I need to forgive her. But Jesus probably meant forgive only good brothers and sisters. I don't think Jesus cares if I'm angry with a rude person like Amanda. I'll get her back for what she did." What's wrong with this picture? What advice would you give Julie on applying God's word?

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2. Gary, who has been baptized for about a year now, confides to Bill, his close friend in church. He tells Bill, "After I got baptized, I was so excited about my new faith. I wanted to read the whole Bible in a month. And pray for hours every day. I really had a strong desire to seek after God. I would be so deeply moved by the passages I read in the Bible that I would try to put everything I learned into practice. But I don't know what's happened. Now, I cannot relate at all. When I listen to the preacher, it all seems so dead to me." Bill, feeling very concerned asks, "Well, what do you do with your free time?" Gary replies, "Oh, I've been watching these videos I tape so I can keep up with the story line of the most popular TV show. My roommate sometimes asks if I want to pray with him. He's so rude. He likes to do that when I'm in the middle of a good story." What do you think is Gary's problem? Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation, and how have you overcome?

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**Activity**

1. Make a short list of some of the important virtues found in the Bible (e.g., humility, gentleness, mercy, love, self-control, etc.). Now try to find the polar-opposite vices for each virtue on your list (e.g., pride, rudeness, vengefulness, hate, lust, etc.). Now pick a virtue or a vice you feel you could most improve upon. Find about ten verses/stories that are on point to the virtue or vice you picked, then study what the Bible teaches in those verses/stories. Write or print out the verses, in whole, or the stories, in outline form (a concordance may be useful to find the verses or relevant stories). If possible, commit the verses/stories to memory. The most important thing to remember is the teachings found in the verses/stories. Now, over a period of time, evaluate yourself on whether you have improved upon your chosen virtue or vice. Whenever you encounter a challenging situation that calls for application of your virtue (or the defeating of your vice), try to mentally run through all ten or so verses/stories as an activity in Bible application.

# 4

## Prayer Is A Constant

As you get to know God better through the study of his Word, you will find that a relationship is slowly but surely developing between you and the Lord our God.

This is no more different from an adopted child who is getting to know her biological father through his personal letters or his published works. Even though she's never met him in person or seen any of his pictures, this child still finds that she knows the man well enough to want to connect with him. This is true of believers everywhere. As spiritual children of the one true God, we cannot help but yearn to connect with the Lord. Most of the time, this longing translates into prayer, where we speak to God from our heart.

From the Old Testament to the New Testament, the Bible reveals that men and women connected with God and prayed to him as naturally as they spoke to their biological fathers. It was as if the Lord was an involved and attentive parent whose door was always wide-open and whose telephone line was never tied up. Certain of God's unconditional love and confident of his response—be it a Yes, No, or Not yet—these men and women reached out to the Lord in prayer as they went about their day. They prayed to him in the morning, and they prayed to him at night. They prayed to him when they were happy, and they prayed to him when they were sad. Although God is spirit and these men and women could not always see God face to face, their prayers speak of a meaningful relationship between God and his children. In this lesson, we shall study how we can also make prayer a constant in our own personal relationship with him.

### Some Basic Principles

**A Two-way Communication.** Prayer is so wonderful because God hears you and answers you. The Lord promised, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Mt 7:7-8). You probably have a few testimonies of your own. For example, God may have helped you through a difficult time because you cried out to him in prayer. Perhaps you experienced a deep sense of peace after you took a personal struggle to the Lord in prayer. You may have recalled a Bible passage in your prayer that addressed your particular needs at the time. The Holy Spirit may have reminded you of God's great love that you were moved to tears in

prayer. Although God’s answer doesn’t always come in the way or the time that we expect it to come, we know that he listens to us, and we can experience a deep spiritual communion when we speak with him in prayer.

**Anytime, Anywhere.** As children of God, every one of us has a built-in need to reach out to him in much the same way a child reaches out to his/her parent. In many instances, this child could be found to say no more than an I love you, a Please, or a Thank you. We see an example of this kind of interaction in David’s life. Sent to tend his father’s sheep in isolated pastures where wild animals lurked, David learned, at a young age, to reach out to God (1 Sam 17:34-37). He had the same faith when, a little older, he was confronting Goliath, the giant, at the battlefield (1 Sam 17). He carried this faith with him when, as a grown man, he was running away from King Saul and was hiding in a cave (Ps 57). And even when David became king and was living in a palace, he had this same faith to reach out to God in prayer, at anytime and anywhere (2Sam7:18-29).

**Nothing Is too Trivial.** The Bible speaks of a man whose master sent him to the old country to find a bride for the master’s son. On the evening he arrived outside the city, the man prayed. “Behold, I stand here by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, ‘Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink’ – let her be the one whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master” (Gen 24:13, 14). It is written that even before the man finished speaking, there was Rebekah, coming out with a pitcher (Gen 24:15)!

### **Suggested Guidelines**

**Be Aware of God’s Presence.** Nehemiah was a man who was keenly aware of God’s presence in his everyday life. Although he lived a comfortable life in the court of King Artaxerxes, his heart was with the people of his homeland. As soon as he heard that they were living in great poverty and that their city was unprotected, Nehemiah wept and prayed with fasting. Because Nehemiah felt that he needed to return to Jerusalem, he had to ask for the king’s permission to leave. So being always keenly aware of God’s presence, Nehemiah prayed before he spoke to the king, who immediately helped to make his trip possible. Then, when there was opposition to their rebuilding the wall that protected their city, Nehemiah simply turned to God in prayer. Even when Nehemiah was improving the living conditions of his people, he made it a priority to instill this same awareness into the hearts of his people (Nehemiah, chapters 1 – 13).

**Change and Adapt.** As with all things, you need to give yourself time to change and adapt to a life of prayer. Perhaps there is no better testimony than that seen in Jesus’ apostles. While Jesus knew instinctively to turn to God in prayer at all times and particularly in difficult situations, we see that his apostles didn’t know how (Mt 26:36-46). But all that changed. For example, the Bible tells us that after Jesus went back to heaven, the apostles returned to

Jerusalem and spent the time in prayer with other believers (Acts 1:12-14). Then, when they were ready to select a man to replace Judas who had betrayed Jesus to his death, Peter knew how to lead about 120 men and women in prayer (Acts 1:15-26).

**Respond to Inspiration.** Have you ever found yourself thinking, I just want to pray? Was there a time when it occurred to you that you completed a difficult assignment on time only because the Lord had sent someone to help you at just the right time? When thoughts of prayer cross your mind and you can take a break, find yourself a quiet corner to pray. Or even if you're rushing down the hall to go to the next class or the next meeting, pray in your heart. And if you're a parent juggling work, carpool schedules and the family dinner, be prepared to whisper your prayer of thanksgiving each time you catch your breath. For a glimpse of some of the deepest thoughts of prayerful men, read the book of Psalms.

**Schedule Prayer Time.** Bearing in mind that a few quick "hellos" and "goodbyes" cannot build a meaningful relationship, it helps for you to plan ahead and schedule prayer times each day. The Bible speaks of Daniel, a man who had the responsibility to help govern a great kingdom. Although he was a busy man, the Bible records that, as was his custom since early days, he knelt down on his knees three times a day, and prayed and thanked God (Dan 6:10). Jesus, too, had a busy schedule that we can all relate to. In his case, he woke up before anyone else and went off to pray (Mk. 1:35). We also learn that he prayed at the end of his work day (Mt. 14:23). Then there's the psalmist who prayed "seven times a day" (Ps 119:164).

**Make the Commitment.** For a relationship to succeed at any level, there must be a sense of commitment from both parties. This is true of personal as well as business relationships. In many ways, a spiritual relationship is the same. The Bible tells us that God committed Himself to loving us even before we learned to love him. Now that we know what he's done to save us, it is fitting that we commit ourselves to loving him. Paul, an apostle, was such a man. After Paul became a believer, he committed his life to loving God. He went everywhere and talked to anyone who would listen to everything he knew about a loving God. Equally importantly, Paul impressed upon the believers to be committed to God through prayer. "Pray without ceasing," Paul wrote (1Thess 5:17). He also let the believers know that he was praying for them (2Thess 1:11). And he asked them to pray for him (2 Thess 3:1).

Write down other guidelines that have worked for you.

Write down new ideas that could work for you.

## Questions

1. What does “Prayer is a Constant” mean to you?

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2. Praying is talking to God from your heart. T/F

3. List at least 3 principles from this lesson.

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4. Whenever Jesus needed to make a decision, he did not say, “Let me think about it.” What did he do instead?

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5. When we think about Jesus and his prayerful relationship with the heavenly Father, it was as if they were constantly on the phone with each other—or if you prefer, they were always online and never signed off. Why was this a good thing for Jesus?

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6. When was the last time you had such an experience and knew in your heart that you were getting through to the Lord and he to you?

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7. Psalm 61 is one of David’s many prayers to the Lord. Using this as an example, write yours in the space provided. Although David’s prayer is eight verses long, your prayer may be of any length.

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8. Why must a disciple be aware of God’s presence in his or her every waking moment?

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9. In addition to spontaneous prayers that may sometimes seem like quick “hellos” and brief “good byes,” why must we make time for substantive prayers?

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10. Prayer was a constant in Paul’s life. Briefly describe how we know this to be true.

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**Case Studies**

1. Steve, a long-time Christian, asks you, “Why do I need to pray to keep up my relationship with God? Everyday at work I see hundreds of people who don’t pray, and they seem to be doing just fine. In fact, I’ve seen how John keeps up his relationship with God; he prays for about a minute before he goes to bed. We can still be a faithful Christian without praying, right?”

How would you answer Steve?

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2. Elizabeth, a recently-baptized believer, loves to read the Bible and pray everyday. Every Sabbath, she goes to the prayer room and prays for at least half an hour. Sometimes, she even fasts and prays during the lunch hour. But after a few months, you notice that Elizabeth no longer prays or reads the Bible. Concerned, you ask her how she is doing in her walk of faith. Elizabeth says, "I feel like a cup of hot coffee that has gradually grown cold. I know my faith is weak, but I just don't feel like praying anymore."

How would you advise Elizabeth?

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3. Robert is a college student and lives in the dorms. He has two roommates who do not believe in the Lord, and they are always in the room when Robert wants to pray. Even when they're not in the room, Robert doesn't like to pray because he's afraid his roommates might come in and see him speaking in tongues as he is praying. Since he doesn't want to offend his roommates, he decides that it's okay to only pray when he goes to church on Saturdays.

Do you think Robert will have any problems with his spiritual progress?

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What do you see as Robert's biggest obstacle? How would you advise him?

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## **Activity**

1. Decide on a certain time in the day for prayer, and keep this consistent every day. You may decide to have one longer session, or break it up into two. Be sure to choose a time that works for you and that you will be able to stick to. If you're an early riser, schedule a longer prayer time in the morning or if you're a night owl, schedule your prayer time at night.
2. If you don't already have one, ask someone to become your prayer buddy. Ideally, you should meet to pray together. If this isn't possible, you can pray at the same time in your respective places. Share your prayer lists with each other, and keep each other updated about the status of your prayer items.



# 5

## What to Pray About

Jesus was a man of prayer. The Bible tells us that before Jesus began his public ministry, he fasted for forty days and forty nights in the desert. Except for angels who attended to him, Jesus was alone (Mk 1:13). He was about 30 years old, and the time had come for him to fulfill his mission. Being in the form of a man, the Lord could only have experienced many of the same emotions as would a person about to embark on a rescue mission that would result in certain death. But Jesus also knew full well that the eternal lives of countless people hinged on this one sacrifice he must make. For such a significant cause, Jesus, the Son of God, could only fast and pray to God the Father for the strength and perseverance to accomplish his mission.

The Bible also tells us that throughout Jesus' three-year ministry, prayer would continue to be the pivot of his life. For example, when a busy day lay ahead, Jesus made it a point to get up before daylight, locate a quiet place, and spend the time alone in prayer (Mk 1:35). The Bible tells us that Jesus was also committed to praying at the end of a busy day (Mt 14:23). Even a time-out resulted in prayer (Lk 5:16). It is no wonder, therefore, that one day, a disciple said to Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Lk 11:1). In this lesson, we shall study what it is that Jesus taught his disciples to pray about.

### Some Basic Principles

#### As quoted from Mt. 6:9-13

**"Our Father in Heaven"** When we pray, we must keep in mind that we are communicating with God and that he is listening to us. Not only is our Lord the majestic and almighty God, he is also our loving Father (Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6). We can come to him as a child would his father, presenting to him anything, because he cares for us (1 Pet 5:7).

**"Hallowed Be Your Name"** This phrase reminds us to honor and glorify Jesus' name. We can praise and thank the Lord for his wonderful deeds and blessings in our prayers and in our talks with others. A thankful heart is vital to effective prayer (Ps 116:17, Phil 4:6; Col 4:2; 1Thess 5:17). We can also glorify Jesus' name by living godly lives that will honor him. Literally speaking, we must not take Jesus' name in vain (Ex 20:7, Dt 5:11) or use it carelessly.

**"Your Kingdom Come"** We pray that the Lord's kingdom and all that it represents—love, joy, righteousness, and peace—will reign in our hearts, families, and society. We pray that the Lord will manifest his kingdom in this

world, driving away evil and darkness with his glorious light. We look forward to the coming day when we will be with the Lord forever in his heavenly kingdom.

**“Your Will Be Done”** We have many needs and desires, but it is important that we align these with God’s will. As Jesus faced his coming crucifixion, he prayed, “Father, if it is Your will, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done” (Lk 22:42). We can bring all of our requests before the Lord, but ultimately, we should ask that he accomplishes his will for us. Remember that in prayer you are to fully surrender your will over to God’s will (Mt 6:10; 26:39; Heb 5:7,8).

**“Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread”** The Lord is our Sustainer and Provider, so we can bring to him our every need, both spiritual and physical ones. We should remember to give thanks to him for his sustenance. It also reminds us to be content with having our daily provisions (Prov 30:7-9).

**“Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Forgive Our Debtors”** In our prayers it is important to confess and repent of our sins. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9). Otherwise, sin will separate us from God and ultimately lead to death (Jas 1:15). As we ask God to forgive our sins, we should also examine ourselves to see if there is any enmity between us and other people. If we do, we need to forgive them from our hearts and make peace with them (Mt 5:23-24). Unity is an important principle for effective prayer. The early church’s unity was one reason they had effective and powerful prayer (Acts 1:14; 2:1, 46; 4:24, 32).

**“Do Not Lead Us Into Temptation, but Deliver Us From the Evil One”** We pray that the Lord will keep us from temptation and sin, preserving our faith until the day he comes again. God not only sustains us physically, but he also sustains us spiritually. Jesus is the “author and finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:2), and we rely on him to guide us step by step through this journey of faith.

**“For Yours is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory Forever”** Our Lord Jesus is the almighty God and Lord of the universe. We pray with the understanding that all glory belongs to him, and we seek none for ourselves.

### **Suggested Guidelines**

A prayer list can often help you stay focused and motivated. Since most of our prayer content falls into three categories, the following serves as an example.

#### **Things Pertaining to God.**

Praise and thank God for his grace and salvation (Ps 50:14; 116:13, 17; Dan 2:19-23; Phil 4:6).

Praise and thank God for his blessings in your life and in the lives of those around you.

Pray that the gospel may be spread (Col 4:3)

Pray for God's power to preach his word (Acts 4:29-30) and to do his work.

Pray that God's will may be done (Mt 6:10, 26:39)

**Things Pertaining to Others**

Pray for family members, relatives, friends, or brothers and sisters in church who need God's hand (Lk 22:31-32; Acts 12:5; Col 4:12; 1Thess 5:25; Heb 13:18)

Pray for those who are newly baptized or seeking the truth.

Pray for those who have sinned against you or have persecuted you (Mt 6:12).

**Things Pertaining to Ourselves**

Pray for the Holy Spirit if you haven't already received this promise (Lk 11:10-13).

Pray for the forgiveness of your sins (Mt 6:12).

Pray for deliverance from evil and temptation (Mt 6:13)

Pray that you can surrender to God's will and come under his rule (Mt 6:10; 26:39).

Pray to edify yourself and build yourself up in the spirit (1 Cor 14:2, 4; Jude 20)

Pray for God's comfort in suffering (Jas 5:13) and for healing (Jas 5:14-16).

Pray for God's guidance on important decisions (Lk 6:12,13).

Pray for wisdom (Jas 1:5) and revelation (Dan 2:16-19).

Pray for your physical needs (E.g. Mt 8:2; 2Cor 12:7,8).

Humbly pray for spiritual gifts to serve the church, keeping in mind that spiritual gifts are given according to God's will (1Cor 12:11; 14:1, 12-13).

**QUESTIONS**

- 1. Jesus was a man of prayer. T/F
- 2. What lessons can we learn from Jesus' prayers?

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- 3. Memorize the Lord's Prayer and write it down.

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4. How does knowing that God is our heavenly Father affect our attitude during prayer?

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5. How can we “hallow God’s name” in our daily lives?

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6. As we bring our requests before God, what should be our attitude?

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7. Why is it important to ask for God’s forgiveness in prayer?

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8. How does our relationship with others affect our prayer?

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9. Why would a prayer list be helpful?

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10. As human beings, our greatest challenge may perhaps be when we pray that God’s will be done. Was there a time when you wondered if you

actually meant what you prayed about? How did you struggle and overcome so that God's will was done?

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### **Case Studies**

1. Jenny has prayed every day for God to strengthen her faith and help her family. However, recently she's been having some problems with her prayers. Jenny says, "As you probably know, I always pray that God will improve my faith and bless my family. Thanks to God's grace, my faith has improved and my family doesn't really have problems anymore. But nowadays, things are going so well that I just don't know what to pray about anymore. So until things start going bad again, my prayers just seem pointless."

How would you advise Jenny on improving the content of her prayers?

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2. Darrell has a reputation of being a godly and faithful Christian. Without fail, he attends every service and is never late. Darrell is excited because he's been assigned to lead Bible studies in his local area. Darrell really wants this Bible study to make an impact on people's faith, so he thinks, "If I had the power to heal like apostle Peter or Paul, others would believe in God. If that crippled sister was healed, that would really encourage others in their faith." With that in mind, he begins to pray for the spiritual gift of healing. He prays to God for this gift every day for three hours. After six months of this kind of prayer, Darrell still does not have the gift of healing. Losing his faith in God, Darrell gives up praying and resigns from leading Bible studies.

Is there was anything wrong with the content of Darrell's prayer? If so, how would you suggest that Darrel change his prayers?

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3. Cassie has been seriously observing Lisa in church ever since Lisa commented, "What an interesting dress." Cassie was sure that it was a sarcastic remark with a veiled insult. Lisa was probably just jealous. Now during her prayers, Cassie can't help but wish that God will discipline Lisa for her rudeness and jealousy. A few Sabbaths later, Lisa accidentally spills coffee all over her new blouse. Cassie can't help but have a good laugh in her heart. Later that day, Cassie offers up a prayer of thanksgiving to God for giving her justice.

How do you think the relationship between Cassie and Lisa affects Cassie's prayer life?

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What changes do you think Cassie needs to make?

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### Activity

1. Make a prayer list. List all of your prayer requests and group them in a way that is easy for you to remember. Post this list in a visible area, and share this list with your prayer buddy.
2. If you have a long prayer list, you may want to split up the items and devote certain days for certain subjects. For example, you can devote Sunday for family, Monday for God's work, Tuesday for friends, Wednesday for the church, Thursday for brothers and sisters in church, Friday for personal cultivation, and Saturday for praise and thanksgiving.

# 6

## What Makes an Effective Prayer

In the New Testament, an elder of the Early Church wrote to encourage the believers who had gone to live in different parts of the world. He wrote about how they should live as believers, and one of the important points he raised was that of an effective prayer. He reminded them, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit” (Jas 5: 17, 18).

Now, Elijah was a prophet of the Old Testament. He was sent to minister to the kingdom of Israel at a time when its heart, though not completely divorced from God, was actively engaged in the worship of false gods. Although its king came from a people whom God had chosen to call his own, King Ahab did not care to obey God’s Word. It meant nothing to him that God had a special relationship with him and his people. In fact, Ahab scoffed at God’s Word by marrying a Phoenician princess who worshiped other gods. He even went so far as to set up an altar to her god, Baal. The Bible tells us that “Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him” (1Kgs 16:33).

Together, the king and his new wife promoted the worship of this other god in the kingdom of Israel. The queen also did not tolerate opposition and massacred anybody whom she caught (1Kgs 18:4). So God sent Elijah to speak to the king.

One day, Elijah appeared before King Ahab and told him that it would not rain in the land. About three years later, in the midst of a severe famine, Elijah came to tell the king that it would rain again.

But even before rain drops starting falling, the Bible records that Elijah already said to King Ahab, “Go up, eat and drink: for there is the sound of abundance of rain” (1Kgs 18:41). Where did such confidence come from? Why did Elijah think his prayer would be effective? In this lesson, we shall study what makes an effective prayer.

### Some Basic Principles

**Believe in God’s Word.** Imagine walking up to a king and telling him there would be no rain in the land, or walking up to him a few years later and telling him there would be rain again. Elijah did just that. Note that Elijah spoke these specific words to the king: “except at my word” (1Kgs 17:1) and “I will send

rain on the earth” (1Kgs 18:1). Elijah gave King Ahab God’s message, word for word. Elijah did not doubt that God could withhold rain or give it, as he pleased.

**For the Love of God and His People.** But in a society that was, at first, flourishing economically in spite of having turned its back on God, Elijah was opening himself to ridicule, contempt, and the possible loss of his life. Yet, he stood firm because he knew how his nation had come to being and understood more than anyone else that they were “a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” (Deut 14:1-2). He also believed that his people would either flourish or perish in the land God had given them, depending on whether or not they only loved the one true God and fully obeyed his commandments (Deut 30: 15-20).

**Rebuild A Broken Relationship with God.** Baal, the false god, stole the heart of the Israelites because they bought the myth that he was responsible for the rain that brought prosperity to their agriculture-based economy. Then came the drought. For 3 years, God withheld rain, and there was a severe famine. The Bible tells us that just before God ended the drought, Elijah arranged for a confrontation to settle, once and for all, who alone was the one true God. One day, Elijah asked Baal’s prophets to pray for fire to burn their sacrifice. All of Israel watched and waited from morning until evening. Nothing happened. When the time came for Elijah to pray, he first repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down. This action reminded the people that they had forsaken their commitment to God. Before God would answer them, they must turn their hearts back to the Lord. When Elijah prayed, God answered with a fire so fierce that it burnt the drenched altar together with all the stones that made up the altar. Therefore, the people confessed and gave their hearts back to God (1Kgs 18: 16-39).

**Persevere.** But Elijah still had work to do. He went to the top of Mount Carmel to pray for the promised rain. Except for the company of his servant, Elijah prayed in solitude. We do not know how long he remained up there but the Bible tells us that in between prayers, Elijah told his servant to look toward the sea for signs of rain. “There is nothing,” the servant told him the first time. After some time, Elijah said, “Go again.” This happened a third time, a fourth, a fifth, and even a sixth. Each time, Elijah went right back to praying. Finally, after the seventh time, Elijah’s servant reported that there, above the horizon, was a small cloud, the size of a man’s hand (1Kgs 18:42-44).

### **Suggested Guidelines**

**Be Humble.** Although God had chosen Elijah, above every one else in that nation, to deliver a stern message, Elijah did not forget he was only a man. It is written that “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet 5:5). Equipped with such an understanding, Elijah was able to empathize with the recipients of the message, and he translated his empathy into earnest prayers. Though it hurt him to watch his people suffer from the thirst and hunger that resulted from the famine, it grieved him even more that they had been losing



the essence of their being to the worship of a false god. With this understanding, Elijah continued in prayer, from one year to the next, until the Lord God had accomplished his good will.

**Pick a Quiet Place.** After the nation of Israel saw God prove Himself, Elijah retreated to the mountain top. There, far from the crowd, Elijah could pour out his grief and plead the Israelites' cause. Picking a quiet place to pray is something every believer must do. Jesus left us an example. The Bible tells us that he often picked a quiet place to pray. In fact, he encouraged it. One day, Jesus said to his disciples, "When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Mt 6:6).

**Ask in Faith.** James, the elder in the introduction of this lesson wrote that when believers pray, they must "ask in faith, with no doubting" (Jas 1:6). You can tell that Elijah was a firm believer. With all of Israel watching him, Elijah prayed for God to send a fire to burn up his sacrifice. He was confident that God would say yes. Elijah had this kind of faith because he had, over time, developed a close relationship with God and understood his will

**Pray with the Right Motive.** In his epistle, James also rebuked those who prayed to God for the wrong reasons: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures" (Jas 4:3). When we ask the Lord for something in prayer, our ultimate goal is for God's will to be accomplished and his name glorified. God does not listen to prayers with self-seeking intentions because such pursuits for fleshly desires can only pull us away from God.

**Fast and Pray.** Can you imagine Elijah trying to sandwich a meal or two in between his prayers while on that mountain top? Following the greatest miracle in all of Israel at that crucial time, Elijah would certainly have been encouraged by the people's confession. Now, armed with the knowledge that God's special treasure, though until recently tarnished, was being restored, Elijah would be motivated to fast and pray with even more conviction. Jesus often fasted and prayed. He also encouraged it. One day, the father of a boy told him that the disciples' prayer could not heal his son. Jesus said to his disciples, "...this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Mt. 17:14-21).

**Enlist Support.** Elijah's servant was within earshot to lend him support. That's why when Elijah asked him to look for signs of rain in the horizon, he could do so right away. The Bible also tells us that when Jesus went to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, prior to his impending death, he took his closest disciples with him for support. Although they fell asleep and weren't of much help to the Lord, this account shows us that believers need to support one another in times of earnest prayer (Mt 26:36-46).

Write down other guidelines that have worked for you.

Write down new ideas that could work for you.

### **Questions**

1. Why did the elder use Elijah as an example to show that a man can have an effective prayer?

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2. List at least three principles that make an effective prayer.

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3. Elijah gave God's message to Ahab, word for word. What does this tell you about Elijah?

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4. Do you think it's possible that the people of this generation could have a "Mt. Carmel" experience? If you think this could happen, how would you prepare yourself to become like "Elijah?"

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5. Elijah and Jesus prayed in lonely places. On a day that's convenient, pick a lonely place. Next, briefly describe your experience. How is it different

from praying with a large group of people? Or does it not make any difference?

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6. Nearly all of Israel was watching Elijah when he asked God to send a fire to burn the sacrifice. Why do you suppose he was certain that God would not let him down?

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7. The rain did not fall immediately following the Israelites' confession. Nevertheless, Elijah told the king that rain was coming. What do you think was going through the minds of the entire nation as they watched and waited? What do you think was going through Elijah's mind in that time? If at some point in your walk of faith, you find yourself waiting and praying, what do you hope you can recall from this lesson?

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8. The Bible tells us that Elijah did not stop praying until the rain came. What does this teach us about perseverance in the family of God?

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9. Recall a time when you fasted and prayed. What was the occasion? Did you feel it was a voluntary effort or did you feel it was compulsory? Would you fast and pray again, or are you already fasting and praying on a regular basis?

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10. "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours," wrote James to the believers. Although he was just an ordinary man, he was able, through his effective prayers, to do the Lord's will and help turn the heart of a nation back to

God. Elijah’s testimony serves as an encouragement to us today. Although we do not know how or when God will call us to do his good will, we need to learn from Elijah and his effective prayers. T/F

### Case Studies

1. John advises that you should try to pray every day. He says, “Prayer is essential for any Christian. When you wake up in the morning, make sure that you have a quick prayer before you leave the house. Before bedtime, you should kneel down and pray for at least one minute. I try to squeeze in at least one minute of prayer when I wake up and about five minutes before I go to bed. Sometimes I’m really tired and don’t know what I’m praying about, but I feel prayer is part of my Christian duty. Anyway, I think having a consistent prayer life makes God happy. So regardless of how busy you are, you should always remember to pray.”

Analyze what John is telling you. Is it all good advice?

What do you think his prayer life is like?

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What changes do you think he needs to make?

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2. Ellen and her husband are new believers and love to pray. Usually, she gets to church an hour before service to have a long prayer with God. Unfortunately, a few months later her husband dies from a serious car accident. Ellen is devastated. She no longer comes to church to pray and hurries back home after service, though she has no one to go back to. You can tell that Ellen is depressed and lonely. Recently, she confides in you saying, “Ever since my husband died, I don’t feel like doing anything. I don’t feel like praying. I don’t feel like reading the Bible. Sometimes, I don’t even want to come to church. I often think to myself, ‘I just wish it would all end.’ I just don’t have reason to live anymore.”

How would you comfort and counsel her?

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What problems do you see hindering this sister's prayer life?

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3. Scott graduated from a prestigious university and is currently pursuing advanced studies in theology. He reads the Bible in Hebrew and Greek and often tells his religious education students that they should do the same in order to understand the Bible more fully. One Sabbath after church service, Scott and Jane are assigned to clean the bathrooms, but Jane leaves without doing her duties. Scott thinks to himself, "Jane doesn't love God at all. But that's not a surprise, because she can't even read the gospels in Greek." After his cleaning, Scott goes to the prayer room, asking God to discipline Jane for her lack of love. He also prays that he will get the top grade in his advanced Hebrew class.

What problems do you see with Scott's attitude toward others and his prayer life?

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What changes would you suggest?

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### **Activity**

1. Start keeping a simple prayer log which includes the date and brief description of what you've prayed about. You may want to write down any reflections you have on the prayer items, also. As God answers your prayers, write them down in your logbook. Soon this prayer log will become the footprints of your walk with God.

# 7

## Grow in the Grace and Knowledge of Our Lord

Your walk of faith will be a life-long journey. If you persist in your faith, the Lord Jesus will continue to walk with you and guide you on this journey. You will also witness how your spiritual life matures over time. But whenever your faith weakens, your spiritual growth will slow down or even come to a stop, and you may feel more and more distant from the Lord. Therefore, a constantly growing faith is key to a growing relationship with the Lord.

But how can we maintain our faith? Peter, before he left the world, reminded the believers to be diligent in the faith. He concluded his epistle with these words, “You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, 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” (2Pet 3:17-18). Therefore, in order to stand firm our faith, we must grow in the Lord’s grace and knowledge.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ refers to his saving grace in our lives. Christ does not leave us alone after he cleanses our sins during baptism. He continues to work on us until we enter the heavenly kingdom (Eph 2:10; Php 2:12,13). We need to depend on his mercy and forgiveness when we have done wrong. We need to be transformed by the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. By keeping ourselves in his love, we can grow and become mature (ude 20).

To grow in the knowledge of our Lord means to know him more and more. Not only should we become familiar with the Scriptures, we must learn to know the Lord more intimately. We need to know what pleases him and what grieves him. This knowledge comes from experience. It comes from the continual practicing of his words and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (Col 1:10; Eph 1:10-21).

In sum, we can grow spiritually only if we remain in Christ and center our lives on Christ. The Lord tells us, “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” (Jn 15:4).

In this lesson, we will look at the characteristics of a growing relationship with the Lord as well as some guidelines to keep in mind as we work on building this life-long relationship.

## **Some Basic Principles**

**Increase in the Likeness of Christ.** The final and ultimate goal of our discipleship in Christ is to become mature and complete (perfect) just as God is perfectly complete (Mt 5:48; Eph 4:13, 24). When God’s specially called people, his church, reach perfection, the church will be ready to be taken by Jesus—like a bride is ready to be taken by her bridegroom (Rev 19:7,8). Our growth and relationship with Christ will never be complete until we are finally and completely joined with Christ in the new creation. At that time, we will be like God, our Father, because we shall see God as he is (1 Jn 3:2). Therefore, daily, we must pursue holiness and godliness before Jesus comes again (2 Pet 3:11, 14). A believer must never quit pursuing after spiritual growth or be satisfied with what he or she has already achieved; instead, a disciple must constantly pursue growth into God’s divine image.

**Increase in Knowledge.** For little children to grow, they must eat the right kinds of food that’s appropriate for their age. (1 Cor 13:11; Eph 4:14; Heb 5:11-14; 2 Pet 3:18). This is true of our spiritual growth. When we first believed, we may compare that stage of our faith to that of an infant and live on milk for a while. But gradually, you’ll find yourself looking for pureed foods. Before long, you will want solids. Such is the nature of a deepening relationship with the Lord. And bearing in mind that every child is different, your relationship with Jesus will grow at a speed that only you and the Lord knows. Regardless, you have to know what you need in order to grow effectively. If you are unfamiliar with God’s word, then you need to read the Bible more. If you are unsure about the basis of your faith in the True Jesus Church, please take the time to study the doctrines. Grow in your knowledge of God and God’s truth and you’ll reap the rewards of a closer relationship with God.

**Increase in Steadfastness.** A mature faith is like true love in a personal relationship. Although the man and woman may encounter growing pains, the relationship endures. It is not like puppy love that gets off to a promising start but soon fizzles out. Paul’s letters to the believers of the early church reveal his true love for our Lord. As we can tell from our study of the Bible, Jesus loved Paul first. Paul reciprocated (Acts 22:6-12). Paul’s letters also reveal that in spite of trials and tribulations, his love for Christ never fizzled out. Paul was steadfast in his love. Because he understood that Christ’s love was real and permanent, he never allowed any of these trials and tribulations to come between him and Christ (Rom 8:28-35). He reiterated, “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:38,39).

## **Suggested Guidelines**

**Make Every Effort.** In order for a relationship to work, both parties must be committed to put in time and effort. The Lord wants our relationship with him to work. In fact, he has proved, beyond a shadow of doubt, that he is committed

to the relationship. He came down to earth and offered Himself on the cross so that we may be reconciled to him. Now that we have believed in him, it is up to us to make every effort to get to know him better and draw closer to him. The apostle Peter showed the believers of the early church how they could deepen their relationship with Christ. He gave them a list of virtues to add to their faith: goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (2 Pet 1:5-7).

**Train Yourself Constantly.** Even if you have heard many sermons or read through the Bible many times, you may still be a spiritual infant if you never practice what you hear. Spiritual maturity and a solid relationship with the Lord come about by constant training (Heb 5:14). In order to grow in our knowledge of God, we need to actually put his words into practice. When you carry out God's will, you will experience how true God's promises are. You will understand the meaning of God's word not just conceptually but through experience. You will realize the loving purpose behind God's commands and learn to appreciate them. Through all this, you will discover how awesome God is. The more you practice the Lord's commands, the more you'll know him, and the more you know how good the Lord is, the more you will love him.

**Don't Lose Sight of Christ.** We can only complete our journey to heaven if we hold firmly to our faith in Christ (Heb 3:14). In trying times, fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:1-3). Christ is faithful. As long as we continue in our faith, he will not abandon us. He will keep us until his coming. Keep ourselves in the love of God as we wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring us to eternal life (Jude 20-21).

**Learn to Appreciate Christ's Love.** Out of 10 lepers who were healed, only one came back to thank Jesus (Lk 17:11-19). The other 9 went on their own way and forgot about their Savior. To remain and grow in Christ, we must be grateful to all that Christ has done for us. Count your blessings. Remember how Christ lifted you from the slimy pit. Think about how much he cares for you. Paul never forgot how great Christ's sacrifice of love was (Gal 2:20; 1Tim 1:15-16). Christ's love compels us (2Co 5:14). If we are grateful, we will not forget our Lord.

**Learn to Please God.** In a loving relationship, we care about how our loved one feels. We don't want to hurt them. We want to do everything to please them. Our relationship with God is not built on fear, but on love. So we should care about how God feels and please him in every way (Col 1:10). Do not grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30). If we love God, we will actively seek his will. If we love God, we will obey him out of a cheerful heart, not compulsion. With such active faith, we won't need to be reminded to pray or study God's word. We don't need to be forced to do sacred work.

Write down other guidelines that have worked for you.



Write down new ideas that could work for you.

### Questions

1. Your spiritual growth is a life-long process. T/F
2. In order to grow spiritually, we must remain in Christ. T/F
3. List at least 3 principles or guidelines that will help you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord.

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4. What does it mean to “increase in the likeness of Christ”?

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5. What does it mean to “increase in knowledge”?

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6. What does it mean to “increase in steadfastness”?

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- 7. Just as a child needs a particular type of food for a particular stage of growth, so do we in our hope to grow to maturity in the faith. T/F
- 8. Read 1Pet 2:1-3. What do these verse mean to you?

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- 9. Read Heb 5:14. When was there a time when you had to take “solid food”?

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- 10. Our spiritual growth includes learning how to grow in unison with other church members. T/F

**Case Studies**

- 1. Jane has recently believed in Jesus. As a new believer, she has a deep respect for God and God’s word. However, Jane never likes to read much about the Bible. One day, she hears a fiery sermon that speaks about God’s righteous judgment on the sinful and wicked people of an evil generation. As a result, Jane now conceives of God as some kind of high-handed judge. One day, Jane has a serious argument with her best friend. She feels horrible because she lost her temper and said some nasty things. Later on in the day, Jane begins to take out her frustrations on her husband and children. So instead of getting better, the day goes from bad to worse. Jane knows God doesn’t approve of her conduct, and she can’t seem to let go of her sin. In a way, Jane feels torn between facing God and admitting her guilt and avoiding God because she believes God could never love a sinner such as herself. Finally, Jane sinks into a deep spiritual depression because she continually thinks about how God could never forgive her for all the wrongs she has done. Feeling so much self-pity, Jane thinks about not going to church anymore.

If were Jane’s church friend, how would you help Jane in her relationship with God?

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What things do you think keep Jane from deepening her relationship with God?

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2. Jason has been a believer for a few years now. When Jason first believed in Jesus Christ, he always had a burning desire to read the Bible, attend services, and pray regularly. Unfortunately, as time passed, the fire inside him seemed to slowly be extinguished by his busy work schedule and other worldly influences. More and more, Jason began to feel distant from God. Jason remembered the days when he first believed—how he felt so close to God. Now, Jason knows God is very far from him. When Jason interacts with others at work, he is very harsh, unforgiving, and quick tempered. Jason knows that the farther away he feels from God, the farther away his character reflects God’s character; yet, Jason doesn’t seem to know how to re-establish a close and intimate relationship with God anymore.

What do you see or imagine is the source of Jason’s problems?

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How would you advise Jason on resolving his feelings of alienation with God?

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If you were in Jason’s shoes, how would you go about re-establishing an intimate relationship with God?

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## **Activity**

### **Area for Improvement**

List out areas in your walk of faith where you feel you still need to grow.

For example:

Sometimes I complain to God when things don't go well.

### **How to Be More Mature**

Beside each item you listed in the "Area for Improvement" column, put down how you think you can be more spiritually mature in this area.

For example:

I should be thankful to God at all times; God allows these difficulties so I may learn to trust him more.

## Overcoming Obstacles through Christ

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## Overcoming Temptations and Sin

In the arctic, people hunt wolves as a source of food and clothing. They dip a long knife into animal's blood and allow it to freeze. Then they stick the knife into the snow with the blood-covered blade pointing upwards. Wolves detect the blood from miles away with their highly developed sense of smell.

Attracted to the smell and taste, they come to lick the bloody icicle pop. As the wolves lick the blood away, they expose the blade and it begins to cut into their tongues. Pretty soon, the blood they are drinking is now their own, but they are too oblivious or engrossed to care. Finally, the wolves bleed to death from drinking their own blood.

Like a hunter, Satan entices our sinful desires and draws us away from the Lord. He appeals to the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life (cf. 1Jn 2:16). Temptations often offer us instant gratification or immediate solutions to our needs. They blur our vision and distract us from the everlasting blessings of God. Those who obey their desires rather than God's will and those who are not spiritually discerning will fall for Satan's bait.

Temptation is deceptive. It makes us question God's authority and justifies what is wrong. Unless we are watchful, we will ask ourselves, "why not?" Then we will soon find ourselves "licking the icicle pop." But the consequence is fatal. Those who indulge themselves in their temptations will find hidden inside a spiritual and emotional emptiness. Underneath the beautiful surface of sin is spiritual death.

### Some Basic Principles

**Temptations and Sin Are An Ever-present Danger.** As it was with Adam and Eve (Gen 3), temptations come to every person in very ordinary circumstances. No one is immune. The young child may be tempted to lie about sticking his or her hand in the cookie jar. The adolescent may be tempted to fudge on a take-home test. The college student may be tempted to download a term paper off the World Wide Web. The employee may be tempted to take some company office supplies home. The businessman or woman may be tempted to deliver less than what the client has paid. No one place is safe. The housewife may be tempted to gamble on a lotto ticket or two at the supermarket. The driver on the road may be tempted to drive a little faster over the speed limit. No time of day is safe either. Notice that temptations come when you are wide-awake. Temptations put you in situations where you make wrong and unwise choices. For the general public, yielding to

temptations is an acceptable way of life. However, believers must learn from the first book in the Bible and know that when we give in to temptation, we sin against God.

**Walk By Faith.** Just as we need light to see where we are going, we need faith to see where we're heading spiritually. Sin and temptations will cloud our vision, making us lose sight of what we are walking towards. Many people today get so caught up in their life in this world that they forget they are merely pilgrims on the earth, travelers of faith (Ps 39:12; Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 1:17; 2:11). They make choices based on what they can see and feel without considering the consequences on their own spiritual life. Paul says that we should put our hope in what is not seen. For the things that are seen are temporary, whereas the things we can't see are eternal (2 Cor 4:18). When we conduct our daily lives with faith with our eternal blessings in view, we will not easily be swayed by the tangible things of this world.

**Count Yourself Dead to Sin, But Alive to God.** When Paul wrote to the Roman believers about living a sin-free life after conversion, he said, "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:11). What does this mean? According to Paul, after we have been baptized, our sinful self has died. Temptations do not work on "dead" people. If you are dead to sin, sin is no longer appealing to you. To reckon ourselves dead to sin means that we say no to everything that is against God's commands. It means showing no interest whatsoever in sin. Sin should no longer exercise control over us. We have to submit to our new master, Jesus Christ, and live a life to please him. Our bodies have been redeemed by his blood, so we must surrender to his will rather than our own desires.

### **Suggested Guidelines**

**Avoid Temptation.** Apostle Paul encouraged Corinthian believers to "flee sexual immorality" (1 Cor 6:18). He told Timothy to "flee also youthful lusts" (2Tim 2:22). The spiritually wise fears God and shuns evil (Prov14:16). Instead of lingering around sin, he runs away from it. Joseph did just that when his master's wife tempted him daily to have sex with her; Joseph resisted by ignoring her, avoiding her, and finally running away (Gen 39). Joseph's example of overcoming temptation is a model for us to follow in all types of temptation, not just sexual temptation. If you do your best to avoid tempting situations, then it'll be much harder for you to actually engage in sinful activities.

**Deal with Your Evil Desires.** Avoiding temptation is only a means of removing temptation from your sight. It doesn't attack the root of the problem. Just because you hid that packet of cigarette doesn't mean you are not longing for a smoke and endanger your health. Just because you stay away from casinos doesn't mean that you won't ever feel the urge to gamble. Jesus taught, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (Mt 5:29). Of course, Jesus didn't really teach us to

literally pluck out our eyes. Jesus' message was that we should get rid of that part within ourselves that might cause us to sin. Although it may be a painful process, we can accomplish this by making a determination and asking God to change our hearts. If by God's spirit a believer puts to death all of his or her lustful desires (Rom 8:13), the person has overcome temptation because what was once temptation would no longer be temptation (see Jas 1:14,15).

**Confide In And Get Help From God-fearing People.** If temptation is getting the better of you or you feel like you're going into a spiritual tailspin, don't be afraid to ask for help. Many times, just confiding in someone you trust about your struggles and asking that person to pray for you can make you feel better. There's a healing in confession because it allows you to recognize your sinfulness as opposed to covering it up. So James says "confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed..." (Jas 5:16). Don't be afraid to admit your sin and weaknesses. No matter what the sin, no matter how embarrassing, you can always confide in God. But we often also need the comfort of other people, because, in sin, we can't really see God as clearly anymore. So don't forget to turn to God-fearing brethren when you're struggling with temptation or have given into sin. Another brother or sister may have a testimony about how they faced the same or similar temptation; they can share their struggles and how they overcame their temptations. God's Word says, "Two are better than one, because they have good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion..." (Eccl 4:9,10).

**Watchful and Pray.** If we are constantly watchful in prayer, temptation won't catch us in a spiritual slumber. So Jesus once encouraged his sleeping disciples to "watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation" (Mt 26:41). Many people fall into temptation because they don't realize they're being tempted. Hunters often catch their prey unawares. Likewise, the Bible describes Satan as a hunter, describing him as "a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet 5:8). If we're to avoid Satan's traps, we must be watchful in prayer. If we don't take Jesus' encouragement to watch and pray seriously, we'll be easy prey for Satan's temptations. Ask the Lord for spiritual strength and deliverance. Prayer gives us the strength to overcome temptation. Jesus told us to watch and pray so that we would not fall into temptation, because "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (Mt 26:41). Prayer can be likened to physical training because it strengthens our faith "muscles." We need prayer to increase our spiritual strength. Trying to overcome temptation without prayer is as if you are trying to lift a 100 LB weight without proper training. You will either fail or get injured in the process.

**Read God's Word.** When we are faced with temptation, we may try to find ways to justify our sin. The line that separates right and wrong suddenly becomes fuzzy, and sometimes it disappears altogether. But the Bible sets clear standards on what is right or wrong. God's word is sharp and living, even discerning the hidden intents of our heart (Heb 4:12). Apostle Paul says, "All Scripture...is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction



in righteousness” (2Tim 3:16-17). Filling our hearts with God’s Word will keep us from veering off the narrow path (Ps 119:11) and guide us back when we have strayed.

**Pursue Righteousness.** To only avoid sin is passive spiritual living, but we must do more—actively engaging a righteous and spiritual life. Apostle Paul instructed Timothy to “flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace...” (2Tim 2:22). Passivity leads to complacency, and complacency leads to spiritual slumber, which in turn leads to sin. So, for example, king David’s complacency, after he became king, led him to lose his spiritual watchfulness and fall into temptation. At that time, David committed the worst sins of his life (2 Sam 11). If David had been more watchful and had actively pursued a righteous life, drawing closer and closer to God, he would have been able to resist Satan and overcome his temptations (Jas 4:7-10).

### Questions

1. How does walking by faith rather by sight help us overcome temptations and sin?

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2. Was there a time when you prayed and God saved you from falling into temptation?

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3. The apostle Paul tells us, “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality \_\_\_\_\_ “ (1 Cor 6:18).

4. When you have removed temptation from your sight, you have overcome temptation. T/F.

5. Read Rom 8:13. What did Paul say?

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6. Memorize Mt 26:41, and write it down.

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7. If we don't take Jesus' warning to watch and pray, we'll be easy prey for \_\_\_\_\_.

8. When we are faced with temptation, we usually try to find ways to justify our sin. T/F

9. How can you hide God's Word in your heart? (Ps 119:11)

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10. "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ with those who call on the Lord out of a \_\_\_\_\_ (2Tim 2:22).

### **Case Studies**

1. Brock, a church brother, confides that he has been watching adult movies on cable television late at night. Recently, he has had difficulty praying because scenes from the movies flash in his mind every time he closes his eyes. He has completely stopped reading the Bible and has lost interest in attending church services. He knows what he is doing is wrong, but he lacks the strength or the will to stop. What practical advice could you give him? What could you share from personal or others' experience that could help him? What other action might you take?

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2. Jane, a recent college graduate, confides that she's been tempted by a recent job opportunity. She says the job pays so well that she could pay off all her student loans in no time at all. Unfortunately, this would mean that she must miss every Sabbath service. She tells you that she knows God made the Sabbath for her to rest. Jane tells you that she doesn't want to forsake the fellowship she has with other brothers and sisters on the Sabbath. But she also tells you that she can't bear the burden of the loan

any longer. It is as heavy as the burden of her parents' disowning her from the family ever since she became a believer in her freshman year at college. How would you counsel her? What could you share from personal or others' experience that could help her? What other action might you take?

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**Activity**

- List out some of the external temptations (a thing, event, or action) that you feel could or does draw you away from God. Beside each item you listed in the "Outside" column, put down what you think it is "Inside" yourself that attracts you so much to the external temptation (i.e., the thing, event, or action).

<b>Outside</b>	<b>Inside</b>	<b>Prevention</b>
People praise and flatter me	My vain glory and pride	1) Don't get excited to hear such praise and try to turn my ears away.  2) Know that everything I have is from God. There is nothing to be proud of.

## Repentance

Just as sin separated Adam and Eve from their creator, sin can also ruin a believer's relationship with God. In the history of Israel, sin was always the reason for her downfall. The prophet Isaiah pointed out to the people why God seemed so distant from them: "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden his face from you, So that he will not hear" (Isa 59:2). Our fellowship with the Lord can likewise suffer as a result of our sins. If we do nothing about our sins, our hearts will soon be hardened and we will turn away from the living God (Heb 3:12,13).

Despite Israel's rebellion, the Lord offered them a way to restore their relationship with him. God cried out to them, "Return to Me, and I will return to you" (Zech 1:3; Mal 3:7). Only when we turn away from sin and turn back to God's way can we once again enjoy the fellowship we had with God. As believers whose sins have been cleansed by Christ's blood, we still commit sins in our lives, whether in our thoughts, speech, or actions. But we must learn to humbly return to God when we have failed to obey him and ask for his forgiveness.

This lesson examines the meaning of repentance and how we can restore our relationship with the Lord when we have sinned.

### Some Basic Principles

**Confess Your Sin.** Nobody likes to admit that they are wrong. Confession is humiliating. But the Bible tells us, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn 1:8). Denying our sin certainly doesn't help us. We may fool ourselves into thinking that we are pure and righteous, but we still stand guilty before God. We just need to come to him, tell him that we are sorry, and determine not to go back to sin. God's love is so great that he will freely pardon us when we repent: "If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1Jn 1:9).

**Let the Truth be our Guide.** The Bible is our moral standard, and it helps us see where we have gone wrong. Like a mirror, God's word points out our shortcomings so we may correct ourselves (Jas 1:22-25). Like a double-edged sword, God's word exposes sins that we may not even be aware of (Heb 4:12). We need to constantly examine ourselves against the teachings of the Scriptures. Then we will not be led astray by sin's deceitfulness.

**Walk in the Light.** True repentance involves not only confession but also change of heart and change of actions (Isa 55:7). In our daily living, we must shun evil and practice righteousness. “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1Jn 1:6,7).

**Forgive Others.** God expects us to be forgiving before he forgives us. Therefore in the Lord’s prayer, the Lord reminds us that when we seek the Heavenly Father’s forgiveness, we also need to examine ourselves to see if we have first forgiven “our debtors” (Mt 6:12). In the parable of the unmerciful servant who refused to forgive his fellow servant for a small debt even though he was forgiven of a much greater debt, the Lord teaches us that the Heavenly Father treats each one of us the same way we deal with our brothers (Mt 18:21-35). If we forgive our brothers from our hearts, our Father will also forgive us of our sins.

### Suggested Guidelines

**Fear God and Shun Evil.** The Bible tells us that people sin because they do not fear God (Rom 3:18). To fear God is to feel reverence for the all-knowing, all-present, and all-powerful God. If we truly believe that God is our sovereign Lord, we will obey his commands and stay away from evil. If we truly believe that “God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccl 12:14), we will watch our thoughts and conducts.

**Respond to Correction.** The believers in Corinth responded to Paul’s correction in a positive manner (2 Cor 7:11). Where before there were divisions in the church, they now sought to worship together as one body. Where before they mocked at the sanctity of marriage, they now promoted family values. Where before they took each other to court, they now settled disputes according to God’s commandments.

**Let the Holy Spirit Counsel You.** Before Jesus was taken away from his disciples, he promised them that the Holy Spirit will teach them and help them remember all that he’s taught them (Jn 14:26). This promise is also for today’s believers. So if you have sinned and the Holy Spirit puts it in your heart to do the right thing, be prepared to listen to counsel and act accordingly.

**Fast and Pray.** Sin and repentance often go hand in hand with fasting and prayer. We see this in the Bible. When the people of Nineveh learned that God was going to destroy their great city in forty days, they immediately fasted and prayed. The king even issued a proclamation, “Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water” (Jon 3:7). The Bible tells us, “Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it” (Jon 3:10).

Write down other guidelines that have worked for you.

Write down new guidelines that could work for you.

**Questions**

1. What did the prophet Isaiah say was the reason God seemed so distant? (Isa 59:2)

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2. What happens to our hearts if we do nothing about our sins? (Heb 3:12,13)

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3. Read Zech 1:3 and Mal 3:7. Do you think God has ever cried out to your with these words?

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4. What does 1 Jn 1:8 -9 tell us about sin and repentance?

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5. People sin because they do not fear God. T/F
6. Like the Corinthian believers, today's believers must also respond to correction in their faith journey. T/F
7. Jesus taught that believers must not hold grudges against each other. T/F
8. What must a believer do when the Holy Spirit moves him or her to repentance?

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9. What did the people of Nineveh do when they learned that God was going to destroy their city in forty days?

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10. What does Jonah 3:10 tell you about sin and repentance?

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### **Case Studies:**

1. Olive loves to watch movies. Every opportunity she gets, she will try to get other people to watch movies with her. She likes all kinds of movies. However, Olive also loves to come to church to worship God, pray, and study the Bible. Recently, Olive was put in charge of the Religious Education (R.E.) at her local church. She has been doing an excellent job. In fact, Olive is one of the most respected teachers among her R.E. students. One Sabbath Day, following church services, Olive took all the children from her R.E. class to see a very sexually explicit and violent blockbuster movie. There, she reminded the children that they should not use movie stars or the plots in the movies as models for their spiritual life. But over time, one of her students, a young sister in the eighth grade, decides that it would be a good idea to get a boyfriend. The young sister recalls how the good-looking hero in the movie had intimate relationships with a number of beautiful women. The young sister is excited about experiencing what it's like to have a boyfriend. So the young sister decides to start chasing one of the best-looking guys at her school. Eventually, this young sister gets this popular guy at her school to go out on a date. As time goes on, this guy wants to spend more and more time with the young sister. In fact, he wants to spend so much time that this young sister can

no longer come to church on the Sabbath. Olive, her R.E. teacher is concerned about this young sister's faith. She calls her student and asks her if she wants to go see a movie with her on Saturday night. The young sister accepts Olive's invitation and they go see a popular romantic comedy. What problems can you see in this story? Can you find any Biblically-based sin in this story? Is there any place for repentance in this story? Think about or discuss the role sin and repentance could or should play in this story. Do you see any obstacles that could hinder repentance here?

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2. Johnny and Zack live in the same neighborhood and go to the same local church. They spent much of their free time together. However, all that changed after Zack got back the videocassette recorder he had lent Johnny. Not only was the VCR case damaged, the machine would not work when Zack tested it. Furious, he calls Johnny, who confesses that he had dropped it accidentally. Zack tells Johnny that he better get him a new VCR. Johnny refuses. The two brothers have a heated argument and no longer want to talk to each other. At the Sabbath day service, Zack sees Johnny at church and feels disgusted. As time went by, Zack feels like he no longer enjoys coming to church. But he does anyway. He simply ignores Johnny and gives him an occasional dirty look. About a month later, Johnny feels bad about the whole incident and brings Zack a state-of-the-art VCR one Sabbath Day. It is even better than the old one. As Johnny is giving the new VCR to Zack, the latter simply snatches the VCR out of Johnny's hands and says, "It's about time!" Other members try to patch up the relationship between these two brothers, but Zack only drove away with the VCR. What problems do you see in this story? How would repentance help resolve the problems between these two brothers? What obstacles do you see that could hinder repentance here?

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**Activity:**

1. Make a short list of things you think you need to repent of (i.e., what you could improve upon or change your mind and actions about). After making your list of things to repent about, think about how you will go about repenting of each sin or vice. Try to repent of these sins and vices, bearing in mind that process of sin and repentance is often a life-long process. Be patient with yourself and pray for God's empowerment to overcome sin. Remember also that while repentance begins with a turn of mind, repentance means nothing if there is no outward manifestation to support the changes in your mentality.

## Be Watchful

A guard who falls asleep on duty is negligent of his duty and makes himself vulnerable to the enemy. As Christians, we cannot afford to slumber. Too much is at risk. If we fall asleep spiritually, we will decline in our faith, we will fail to carry out our mission, and we will become Satan's prey. As the Lord's servants, if we do not watch, we will be caught by surprise when the Lord comes (cf. Rev 16:15). He will assign us a place with the unbelievers (Lk 12:35-46). Since watchfulness is so critical in maintaining our faith and Christian duty, the Lord Jesus emphatically warns his followers, "what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mk 13:37).

Being watchful means being spiritually awake and focused on your priorities. you are always examining your own faith. It means that you constantly examine yourself to see where your faith stands. Self-examination often occurs in prayer, so prayer and watchfulness go hand in hand (Mt 26:41; Eph 6:18; Col 4:2).

The Bible warns, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12). As a maturing disciple, you must learn how to be spiritually vigilant (Mk 13:33-37; Acts 20:31; 1 Cor. 16:13; 1Thess 5:6-8). Being overly confident in your spiritual walk with God can mean certain spiritual failure in your faith.

The apostle Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples, was not watchful after Jesus told him to be watchful; instead, Peter fell asleep as Jesus fervently prayed for the strength to drink God's bitter cup of trials (Mt 26:36-46). As Peter progressed in his faith, he clearly began to better understand the role being watchful played in a Christian's spiritual walk. So late in his life, Peter warned believers to be watchful of the devil, who is, spiritually speaking, a roaring lion seeking to devour the spiritual life and vitality of Christians (1 Pet 5:8). In this lesson, we shall study the importance of being watchful in our own journey of faith.

### Some Basic Principles

**Examine All Things Carefully.** An important Biblical principle for being watchful is to test and examine all things carefully, holding fast to what is good (1Thess 5:21). Whether you are examining your actions or motives, you must carefully weigh whether your actions and motives are godly and righteous. Being watchful means you must have the right actions and motives. Remember that God examines your inner heart and motivation, not your outward religiosity or actions (Jer 12:3).

**Look Out For Your Weakness.** Being watchful means being wary of your fleshly weaknesses and Satan's attacks (Mt 26:41; 1 Pet 5:8). To be watchful, you must first understand that you have weaknesses. In times when you feel spiritually weak, you must be extra careful and watchful over your faith because God's judgment can be just around the corner (Rev 3:2,3; 16:15). Moreover, as Christians, we must be alert and ready for Jesus' Second Coming (Mk 13:32-37).

**Be Equipped with the Armor of God.** You are in a spiritual battle, so you must be watchful. The Bible often connects watchfulness with guard duty and battle, but don't confuse spiritual battle with physical battle. You can't beat the devil with a bat over the head. It is only by having the right spiritual armor and weapons that you can effectively engage in spiritual warfare. Through constant practice of God's word and relying on God's power, we train ourselves to be effective Christian soldiers who can stand firm in the faith (Eph 6:11-18; 1Thess 5:1-9).

**Do Not Be Overly Confident.** Remember pride and over-confidence will lead to your spiritual downfall. (1 Cor 10:12). Complacency is one of the leading causes of spiritual stagnancy. When you feel that you know God well enough, or that you have done enough sacred work, that's the moment when your spiritual growth comes to a standstill. You will remain stagnant until you humble yourself again and seek further progress. The Laodicean church suffered from over-confidence (see Rev 3:14-22). Thus the Lord commanded them, "Therefore be zealous and repent" (Rev 3:19). They must wake up from their self-conceit, see their spiritual poverty, and restore their fervor.

**Self-examination Leads to Repentance.** It was only after Jesus had looked at Peter (when he had already denied him three times) that Peter saw past his outward actions and saw within himself. It was a single look from his suffering master, Jesus, that pierced Peter's conscience and forced him to look within himself. And it was only after he looked within that he realized how horribly he wronged Jesus by denying his master three times (Lk 22:54-62). Still, the Lord Jesus prayed for Peter and was willing to take Peter back after he had repented of his sin (Lk 22:32). Likewise, only after you repent of your sins can you return to God (Lam 3:40).

**Watch Out for the Faith of Your Brothers- and Sisters-in-Christ.** Being watchful can include watching out for the faith of other brothers and sisters, in addition to watching out for your own faith (Acts 20:28; Eph 6:18). God's overseers and holy workers have a special duty to watch over the believers' faith (Acts 20:28; Heb 13:17). So along this vein, the apostle Paul says in the same breath "bear one another's burdens" and "bear your own load" (Gal 6:2, 5). The burden Paul speaks of in Galatians chapter 6 may refer to the burden a believer feels living a sinful life. This is the principle: you must examine your own faith and work before you can help uphold another's faith. Always try to restore the faith of those who are caught in sin versus beating them down (Gal

6:1). So being watchful over yourself can be seen as a prerequisite to being watchful over others. If you can do more self-examining and less outward judging you won't easily fall into temptation's trap.

**Reflect on Yourself during the Sacraments.** Partaking in holy sacraments at church require serious self-examination, especially for the sacrament of Holy Communion. The Bible teaches you to examine yourself before you partake in the sacrament of Holy Communion (1 Cor 11:28). The principle you can gather from this Biblical teaching is that partaking in the sacraments (through which you partake of Jesus' life) means you yourself must be holy. That is, to be part of Christ's body (the church) and to partake of Jesus' life requires holiness and thus self-examination.

### **Suggested Guidelines**

**Constant Self-Examination.** The most practical step in being watchful is to constantly examine yourself. The Bible says, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves" (2 Cor 13:5). So the Bible encourages you to self-examine to see if you are approved in Jesus Christ. Ask yourself some basic questions. Do I still enjoy studying God's word and prayer as I used to? Do I still have the fervor to serve the Lord? Do I still feel the love for others? Self-examination helps you re-evaluate your relationship with the Lord and discover where you have fallen short. Self-examination also keeps you spiritually alert and prevents you from complacency.

**Watch and Pray.** Again, prayer and watchfulness go hand in hand. Prayer is probably the most effective way to self-examine your faith and spiritual conditioning. As you close your eyes in prayer, try to shut out the outside world and look deeply within. Try to focus on your relationship with God and you'll find out that the self-examination of your faith will be much more effective. There are many ways you can watchfully pray. Pray that God examines you (Ps 26:2). Pray with thanksgiving (Col 4:2). Pray in intercessory prayer for others (Eph 6:18).

**Read God's Word.** The scriptures will become a mirror by which you can see yourself (Jas 1:23). However, you must remember that self-examination means nothing if no action is taken to improve upon what you've examined or seen needs improvement (Jas 1: 22, 24).

**Keep Track of Your Faith Journey.** Keep a diary or some kind of record of how you view your spiritual condition. Keeping a written record may help force you to examine yourself because you have to put it on paper. The key to this technique is that you have to be very honest in your record keeping (i.e., you have to honestly look at yourself and record what needs improving). Don't just make false records of how great you are, which could easily become a self-deceiving activity.

**Ask Others to Help You.** Your brothers- and sisters-in Christ can help you maintain watchfulness in your faith. The reason it's good to live and fellowship with other believers (whether it's family or friends) is that you can encourage

and be watchful over one another's faith. It's often hard to maintain your spiritual vigilance when you're all by yourself, which is why it is important to continuously attend Sabbath services and fellowship with other brothers and sisters.

Write down other guidelines that have worked for you.

Write down new ideas that could work for you.

### Questions

1. Why is it important for you to be watchful in your journey of faith?

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2. How can you be watchful in your journey of faith?

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3. You need to be constantly aware of your weaknesses and satan's attacks if you are to be effective in your watchfulness. T/F

4. Pride and over-confidence are good tools to being a watchful Christian. T/F

5. If we're not watchful of our spiritual condition, we will not know when we should repent of our sins and whether our actions are righteous. T/F

6. What does watchfulness have to do with the Lord's coming?

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7. Before we take part in the Holy Communion, we must \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
8. Prayer and Bible reading are two good practical ways to be watchful in our faith. T/F
9. How can keeping a diary help you to be watchful?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. We must be watchful in our journey of faith (a) once a month (b) once a week (c) once a day (d) every day (e) every minute of every day

**Case Studies:**

1. Randy is a fervent believer. In the three years that he has been baptized, he has attended every church service. He prays three times a day, and he reads three chapters of the Bible every day. Over lunch one sabbath day, someone mentioned that Randy should lead their Bible study sessions from now on. Everyone within earshot agreed. "Yeah," Randy thinks to himself, "I should be in charge. Out of everyone here, I'm the most dedicated and faithful." He says to the group, "Ok, I accept the position. I'm confident I can do a good job. I want you all to know that I fast and pray every morning, so I'm very spiritually qualified to lead the Bible studies. Mind you, I've read the Bible three times over. I sure know it like the back of my hand." Anna, who was listening intently, tells Randy, "You're full of it." Hurt, Randy's face turns red. Randy decides he won't come to church anymore. A few weeks later, Randy confronts Anna over the telephone. Flabbergasted, Anna brings her indignation to church. When the brothers and sisters tell her to apologize to Randy, Anna couldn't believe her ears. That sabbath, Anna decides she too has had enough of church. How could Randy, Anna, and the brothers and sisters have all been more watchful? What do you think about Randy's faith? How would you counsel Anna, without getting sucked into a vicious cycle?

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2. Rose, is by nature, a very helpful person. When she was newly baptized, many brothers and sisters sought her out when they needed a listening ear. Unfortunately, one by one, they would discover that each time one of them confided in Rose, the whole church would soon hear all about it. Before long, Rose finds that no one needed her ear anymore. Rose is confused. “That’s funny,” she thinks to herself one day. Think about or discuss the role self-examination could play in resolving Rose’s confusion. How could a little more self-examination help Rose’s ministry to other members? Do you see a relationship between self-examination and the efficacy of one’s ministerial work?

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**Activity:**

1. One of the practical steps mentioned above was to keep a diary or some kind of record of your spiritual condition. However, remember that the key to effectively gauging your spiritual condition on paper is that you have to be very honest in your record keeping. Try to make a diary entry on your spiritual conditioning at least every two or three days. Think about recent events or decisions in your life that you think God may not have approved of. What is the source of the problem? Why do you think God might not have approved of that event or decision in your life? How can you better the situation and your spiritual conditioning? After you examine the flaws in your situation or spiritual condition, try to do something about it. Remember, being watchful over a bad situation doesn’t mean the situation gets better spontaneously. Unless you do something after examining a bad situation, watching over a bad situation is just that—watching. A palace watchman who sees the enemy attacking the palace and keeps silent is about as useful as a watchman who was asleep.

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## Overcoming Trials and Tribulations

An upright and wealthy man had seven sons and three daughters. One day, out of the blue, some of his sons and daughters were kidnapped. As someone was coming to report this tragedy to the wealthy man, a fire erupted in the corporate skyscraper the man owned and used for all his business enterprises. The man watched as a blazing fire burned up all his most valuable business assets and killed many of his employees. Due to a technicality, the insurance company would later squirm out from covering the man's losses. After the disastrous fire, someone called him up on his cell phone to tell him that the rest of his children were killed when a sudden tornado hit the house where a family gathering was taking place. The man is devastated by this sad turn of events in his life. His wife tells him, "Just curse God and die!" He refuses. Soon afterward, the man is afflicted with a skin disease that causes him to break out with puss-filled boils from head to toe. Later, some "friends" come to comfort the man by telling him to repent because he is a sinner who is just now being punished by God.

The Bible tells a similar story. The man who suffered these terrible things was called Job. After Job went through so many tragedies in such a brief period of time, he said, "My spirit is broken" (Job 17:1). Having your spirit broken is sort of like dying inside (Eccl 12:6). The emotional stress and anxiety that comes from human suffering can easily make us wish for death (1 Kgs 19:4). But as we go through life, there will be days when the emotional and physical trials of life seem too much for us to handle.

Everyone's faith will go through tests. These tests will come in one form or another. Losing a loved one to death is a difficult thing to accept. Losing our sense of security because our finances are a mess and we're neck-deep in debt is like living in a pressure cooker. Life won't always be easy. Tests may come from places where we least expect it. For example, a brother in church that you have always respected may say or do something to hurt your feelings. You may be criticized when you try to serve God. But all these should not defeat us and make us lose faith. Jesus once said, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33). In this lesson, we shall study how to overcome the trials and tribulations that we encounter in this world.



## **Some Basic Principles**

**Don't Be Surprised.** Sufferings come in many forms. Disasters. Loss. Persecution. Sicknesses. We as believers are not immune from the sufferings of this world. In fact, we are destined to suffer, especially for the sake of our faith (1Thess 3:3; Acts 14:22; Mt 24:9; Jn 15:18-20). Therefore, Peter encouraged the believers who were scattered throughout the world, “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you” (1Pet 4:12). With such a preparation, we will not be caught off guard when trials come to us.

**Believers Benefit from Suffering.** As fire purifies gold, trials purify our faith so that our faith, “being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1Pet 1:7). While material comfort often makes us fall into spiritual slumber, trials discipline us and bring us closer to the Lord. Through trials, we develop Christ-like characters such as perseverance, patience, purity, and compassion. Not only so, when we suffer for the faith, we “partake of Christ’s sufferings” (1Pet 4:13). God allows sufferings for our good. For those who love God, sufferings always have a good purpose. “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor 4:17). In view of the eternal glory that suffering is achieving for us, our trials become but light and momentary.

**Cast Your Cares Upon the Lord.** Cast your burden on the Lord and as king David sang, “...He shall sustain you” (Ps 55:22). In difficult situations, we often forget that God is on our side. It’s easy to forget that God cares for us when we suffer because God is often the very one we blame our suffering on. Yet, we usually don’t realize how being able to feel pain, both physical and emotional pain, is actually a blessing. Although God doesn’t like to see us suffer, he allows suffering so that we may mature spiritually. Even then, we can always turn to him in our distress and cast on him all our cares because he cares for us (1 Pet 5:7). Not only does he sympathize with us, he provides us with the strength we need (1Pet 5:10). Realizing how great the Lord’s love is, Paul claimed victory over trials of all kinds. God, who loves us so much as to give us his own Son, will be our constant help in trouble. Therefore, no suffering, however great, can ever separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:28-39).

**Let Go And Move On.** When we face a difficult situation, we tend to tense up, get worried, and become depressed. Often, sorrow and anxiety sap our spirit to carry on. The wise king Solomon once said, “Banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body...” (Eccl 11:10 NIV). This verse refers to both mental and physical trials. In trials, we need to learn how to let go and move on. We have to learn how to let go and move on because if we don’t our life, both secular and spiritual, comes to a standstill. A stagnant life, like a stagnant faith, is weighed down and essentially worthless (Prov 12:25).

**Light at the End of the Tunnel.** There's always a light at the end of the tunnel for God's faithful people. Faith and trust in God are the keys to mending a broken heart (Ps 28:7). He is a steady source of comfort and strength. The prophet Jeremiah once wrote about God's heart towards his suffering people, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you...thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope...And you will seek me and find me, when you search for me with all your heart" (Jer 29:11-13).

### Suggested Guidelines

**Respond to Discipline.** The first thing to do when meeting with difficulties in life is to consider what we can learn from the suffering. Perhaps we have shortcomings that we need to improve on. We may have drifted far from God without realizing it. Our afflictions may also be due to our wrongdoings. When we see where we fall short, we should correct ourselves and ask for forgiveness. Even if we have done no wrong, trials help us grow and reach spiritual maturity. If we respond to the Lord's discipline with gratitude, we will "yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb 12:4-13).

**Take Your Weakness As Your Strength.** Sometimes trials are physical as well as emotional. Despite our fervent prayers for healing, God may not always heal us physically like we'd hope he would. We have to learn to humbly accept God's will. We have to learn how to embrace our human weakness before we can become strong in the Lord. The apostle Paul had a physical ailment he called a "thorn in his flesh" and a "messenger of Satan to beat me." Physical afflictions are a way to beat our self-will down and humble us. We often need to be physically "beaten" and tried by illness before we can develop humility and trust in our character. So physical affliction is one of God's tools to develop our character and faith—a tool every disciple should be aware of. We must learn Paul's lesson. When he prayed for the thorn to be taken away from him, God didn't seem to be listening at first. But later Paul would learn that God had this to tell him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). It's a hard lesson to learn, understand, and accept, but we must learn that it's only when we're weak that God can work through us effectively. When we can finally embrace our human weakness and rely on God's strength to overcome our trials and tribulations, God's strength becomes our strength.

**Seek Others And Don't Isolate Yourself.** Trials often mean suffering, and, in suffering, you will often feel as if you're waging a lonely battle. But emotional struggles don't have to be lonesome one-person affairs. The Bible says, "Two are better than one...And a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccl 4:9-12). It's harder for outside circumstances to break your spirit if you have other peoples' emotional support to help you through difficult times.

**Encourage Others With Good Words and A Cheerful Face.** Unless you have an extremely sad and difficult life, you won't always be broken-hearted. One day your broken heart will heal. At that time, you may even be able to help someone through their difficulties. It is written, "Anxiety in the heart of man

causes depression, but a good word makes it glad” (Prov 12:25). In the same way, a dreary face can depress, while a cheerful face can uplift (Prov 15:30). Encourage others with good words and a cheerful face. By doing so, you just may lighten up your own day in the process.

Write down other guidelines that have worked for you.

Write down new ideas that could work for you.

### Questions

1. If you become a Christian, you will not experience suffering for the rest of your life. T/F
2. Memorize John 16:33 and write it down.

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3. When we face an emotionally difficult time of suffering or trials, we should not just keep thinking about how bad our life is. T/F
4. When we are in suffering, we should isolate ourselves and try to work things out alone. T/F
5. When we suffer, it means that God longer cares about us. T/F.
6. List at least 3 principles that will help you to overcome trials and tribulations.

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7. How is it possible that a sorrowful person can bring himself or herself to cheer up another person?

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8. Why was Paul able to say that nothing could ever separate him from the love of God? (see Rom 8:28-39)

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9. Go back to 2 Cor 12:9. What did God tell Paul?

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10. Study Psalm 55:22. Do you have a testimony to share? Write it down.

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**Case studies**

1. Barbie was brought to the church by Nancy. Nancy always patiently answered her questions when she had doubts. Nancy fasted and prayed for her until she finally received the Holy Spirit. Nancy also helped her financially when she was in debt. Barbie was deeply moved by Nancy's Christian love, and decided to be baptized. After believing in the Lord, Barbie became a very fervent sister. She studied the Bible diligently and prayed earnestly. With such a progress in her faith, she was soon assigned to teach the Elementary class at church. One day, as she walked down the hallway, she heard two sisters talking in a room. "Barbie is a good sister, but I don't think she should become an RE teacher so soon. I mean, she is still a spiritual baby." Barbie stopped and listened. She couldn't believe her ears. The voice was Nancy's! She was deeply hurt. She resigned from her work as RE teacher and stopped coming to church. "Now I know that all

church-goers are hypocrites!” She resented Nancy and vowed never to see her face again.

What went wrong in Barbie’s faith? If you were Barbie, how should you overcome this feeling of hurt?

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2. Brian and his family were recently baptized into the church. They have been fervent believers for many years now. One day, however, Brian goes in for his medical checkup and discovers that he has prostate cancer. Brian, who is a father of three children and has a lovely wife, is emotionally devastated by the shocking news. Brian, who feels the news is as good as a death sentence, goes through a stage of serious depression. He begins to blame God for his misfortune and cannot come to accept the reality of his illness. He decides that he and his whole family will never again step into a church or worship God anymore. Without any peace in his heart, Brian is prone to raging around his house. He left his job and often breaks things in his house. While his wife and children understand why Brian is so upset, they don’t know how to help him. If you were one of Brian’s close friends at church before, and Brian’s wife and children come to you for help, what would you do?

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## Activity

1. From your observations of trials you face in your everyday life, make a list that you can evaluate on a Biblical/spiritual basis. Write down an action that creates some emotional turmoil in your life. What emotion or emotions does it evoke? Write a short description how you think you deal with the emotional turmoil the action causes in your life. An example has been done for you. Don't forget to examine the way you deal with the emotion(s) evoked by the action.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Emotion(s) Evoked</b>	<b>How do I deal with it?</b>
My parents scream and yell at me all the time	It makes me feel angry and sad at the same time	Sometimes, I yell back at them. Other times, I keep quiet and then take it out on my friends later.

## Rejoicing in the Lord

People often see God as a killjoy—someone who enjoys making life miserable by burdening us with rules and regulations. But is God really a maniacal overlord who enjoys putting cake before your hungry eyes only to take it away at the last second? Does God enjoy watching you, like a little plaything, squirm through trials and temptations? The Bible records a time Jesus attended a wedding party (Jn 2:1-11). But a problem was encountered at the party: the people ran out of wine. Fortunately, Jesus was there and miraculously turned water into wine. Biblically, wine could symbolize strength and joy in life (Judg 9:13; 2Sam 16:2; Est 1:10; Ps 104:15; Eccl 10:19; Songs 2:4f).

You may feel spiritually drained and disheartened in your faith at times, i.e., you may feel as if you've run out of wine. But Jesus' sign of turning water into wine teaches you an invaluable lesson—not how to drink till you're joyfully drunk, but how to let God spiritually transform your life. You should be filled with the Holy Spirit, not wine (Eph 5:18). The fulfillment of God's transforming power is all you need to renew your strength and joy in life. Remember, Jesus didn't come to kill your joy; Jesus came to complete your joy—turning your water into wine. Learn how to rejoice in the Lord and you'll enjoy your spiritual life that much more.

### Some Basic Principles

**Abide in Jesus' Love.** In Jn 15:1-9, the Lord teaches us to abide in his love by keeping his commandments. Then in verse 11, he says, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (Jn 15:11). Therefore, Christ's abundant joy is ours if we abide in his love. Abiding in Jesus' love means you'll obey Jesus' commandments, and his commandment is that we love one another (Jn 15:12).

**Your Spiritual Joy Is A Measure of Your Love for God.** Renewing your love will naturally renew your joy. Sometimes being a Christian seems like too heavy a burden to bear. The Bible seems filled with weighty laws and commandments you must follow; however, all the commandments distill into two: love God and love others (Mt 22:34-40). Obeying God's commandments shouldn't weigh down your spirits. You'll only feel burdened by God's commandments when you've lost your love for God and for others (1 Jn 5:3). Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24:12, "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold." 1 John 3:4 explains this prophetic statement,

“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness.” The reason you can’t experience joy in your spiritual life is because your love has grown cold and you’re living in the darkness of sin.

**Rejoice in Your Suffering as Jesus’ Follower.** As we have studied in the lesson on trials and tribulations, Christians are bound to suffer. But as believers we do not despair when we suffer. The followers of Jesus had much to say about joy in suffering. James reminds us to “count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of [our] faith produces patience. (Jas 1:2,3). When we suffer because of our faith, we should all the more rejoice because we become partners of Christ in his sufferings (1Pet 4:12,13). Like the apostles, we should consider suffering for the name of Christ an honor and rejoice because we are worthy to suffer for Christ (cf. Acts 5:40-41).

**Rejoice and Be Thankful Always.** This principle also applies even when you’re not suffering trials or temptation (1Thess 5:16; Eph 5:20). Jesus, in Luke 10:20, tells you to rejoice because your name is written in heaven. If you obey God and abide in him, you can confidently come before God’s presence and know you have eternal life through Jesus (1 Jn 5:13). Since you’ve seen Jesus, spiritually speaking, you’ve seen God’s salvation and should rejoice (Lk 1:41-45; 2:30).

### **Suggested Guidelines**

**Be Part of the Fellowship of Believers.** Take every opportunity to fellowship with other brothers and sisters in Christ. Having fellowship means encouraging one another with the word of God and personal testimonies so that we can all grow together in the faith. The fellowship you have with other church members is a great source of spiritual joy (cf. 2Jn 12).

**Be Filled with the Holy Spirit.** One characteristic of God’s kingdom is joy in the Holy Spirit. “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). Since the fruit of the Holy Spirit brings joy (cf. Gal 5:22; 1Thess 1:6), we can experience great joy when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. While people of the world seek pleasures through materials, we are to find joy in the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18). Through constant prayer and practicing God’s word, God’s joy will always live in us.

**Study and Meditate on God’s Word.** God’s word will give you guidance when you feel lost. It will comfort you in your most trying and depressing times. This was the experience of the prophet Jeremiah, who said to the Lord, “Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts” (Jer 15:16). Sincerely seek God when you’re down and you’ll find him. Don’t forget God is always there to take you by the hand and lift you up when you fall. His word will be your source of joy in the midst of your difficulties.



**Sing Hymns.** Singing hymns is also a great source of spiritual joy and cheer (Eph 5:19). By singing hymns, you can uplift your heart when it's depressed or feeling down. Even in your most trying times you can sing hymns to lift up your spirits and praise God (Acts 16:25).

**Be A Helper.** It feels good to help someone in need because you feel like you've done something worthwhile and meaningful. For example, when you preach the gospel and bring people to the Lord, you have great joy. When you counsel a brother who is in despair and he regains his hope, you also share in his joy. When you learn to give and share what you have, not only will you feel good, the Lord has promised that his joy will also abide in you because you have obeyed his command to love others (Jn 15:9-13).

### Questions

1. List at least three sources of joy.

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2. Abiding in Jesus' love and obeying God's commandments is the best way to achieve everlasting joy. T/F
3. Memorize 1Thess 5:16-18 and write it down.

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4. What are some practical ways for us to fulfill Jesus' command to love one another?

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5. As Christians, we should be thankful to God and rejoice always. T/F
6. How can we "abide in Jesus' love"?

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7. Having fellowship with brothers and sisters means doing fun activities with them such as watching movies or bowling. This will give you joy. T/F
8. Why are Christians able to have joy in suffering?  

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9. Helping other people always takes away your joy because you could've used that time on yourself. T/F
10. Praying in the spirit is a good way to keep yourself from being depressed. T/F

**Case Studies**

1. David was not a happy person before he became a Christian. But ever since he was baptized, he's been much happier. David used to beat up his wife, who converted to Christianity before him, whenever he got mad at her. He would usually beat her up after she came back from church. He hated the fact that his wife went to church and left him alone. Fortunately, after many prayers by his wife, David came to church one day and received the Holy Spirit. After receiving the Holy Spirit, David's life was changed. He now understood how badly he treated his wife before. David would cry bitterly every time he even thought about how much he emotionally hurt and scarred his wife through years of abuse. David has now made a sincere commitment to make up for his past mistakes. In every little thing, David tries to make his wife happy and joyful. As a result of the changes he's made after he receive the Holy Spirit, his family is much happier and peaceful. However, one day David loses his job and has a heated argument with his boss. He comes home very angry and begins to take it out on his wife again. He stops going to church and he loses the joy he's enjoyed since his baptism. What has happened and why? If you were David's good friend, how would you advise him in this situation?

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2. Cherry was always a very joyful Christian. Every time she came to church, her face was beaming with joy. Cherry loved to pray deeply and often to God. If she ever encountered a problem, she would always take it to prayer. However, one day her son, who was only 16 years old, was killed in a car accident. Her faith was shattered in an instant. Cherry still tried to pray, but her prayers were unfocused because she could only blamed God

for her son's misfortune. She asked God in her prayers, "God, how could you let this happen to me? I loved you and tried to do everything right! Why did you do this?!" Her prayers became more and more angry towards God, until she finally lost all desire to pray. Eventually, Cherry no longer came to church. At times, Cherry thought about committing suicide because her very existence became too heavy a burden. However, one day, for some unknown reason, Cherry decided to open up her Bible. She turned to John chapter 16. After reading the whole chapter, Cherry began to weep uncontrollably. At the same time, her faith was somewhat renewed and she found enough strength to pray with a sincere heart to God again. After her prayer, she decided to move forward with her life. Cherry came back to church on her own and began to renew her resolve to pray sincerely and humbly before God. During the first prayer she had after she came back to church, Cherry was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to sing spiritual songs. God really comforted her heart in that prayer. If you knew Cherry, how would you have comforted her after she first learned about the death of her son?

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Examine this story carefully and think about/discuss with others how you could regain your spiritual joy after facing a difficult trial like Cherry.

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If you were in Cherry's shoes, how would you react to a devastating event like the death of a loved one? Would it be a good or bad reaction?

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### Activity

1. One of the practical steps, mentioned above, to enjoying your spiritual life was helping out others and bringing joy to others. Helping out and bringing joy to others doesn't mean you have to spend a lot of money or exhaust all your time. Helping others out might be as simple as giving a ride to church to a brother or sister who can't drive. It can be as easy as talking to and encouraging a brother or sister who feels depressed or

lonely. In about a month's time, keep a log of all the helpful things/joy you've done/brought to others. Evaluate how you feel inside after you've helped others or made them more joyful. Do you yourself feel more spiritually joyful or do you feel burdened? Think about your reaction to helping out or bringing joy to others and ask yourself why you react the way you do. Also, if you have nothing in your log by the end of a month's time, think about why you don't help out or bring joy to others. Make a commitment, for the next month's time, to do one act that will help out another brother/sister or bring some joy to another person's life.

## Living for Christ

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## Be A Living Sacrifice

When we were children, we were self-centered. We demanded things from our parents. “I want you to carry me!” “Give me that toy now!” If we didn’t get what we wished, we cried and we kicked. But as we grew older, we learned to give instead of ask all the time. We learned to please our parents and repay their love for us .

The same goes with our spiritual growth. When we first came to the Lord, we had many requests. We asked for healing; we asked for peace; we asked for quick answers to our problems. But as we get to know our Lord and appreciate his love more and more, we want to give him something in return.

How can we repay Christ’s love for us? Will God be pleased with our wealth and possessions? Paul urges us, “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” (Rom 12:1). What God wants from you is not what you have, but YOU—with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, and all your strength. This is what it means to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, and this is the offering that pleases our Lord.

The way to repay Christ is to live for him. In fact, this is only our duty. Christ has purchased us with his blood. We are not our own (1Co 6:19). We now belong to him. Since Christ laid down his life for us, we should no longer live for ourselves but for him who died for us and was raised again (2Cor 5:15).

Living for Christ begins with learning to give. This as well as the following lessons will focus on the theme of offering and dedication. When we give ourselves fully to the Lord, he will use us to accomplish his great purpose. We will become instruments through which Christ brings his love to the world. Our lives will also have purpose and meaning.

### Some Basic Principles

**Sacrifice Out of Love.** We need a lot of love to sacrifice for God, his kingdom, and his people (2 Cor 8:8; 11:11). But we may wonder how we should go about sacrificing ourselves for God. We sacrifice ourselves by giving up what we have. And we must understand that sacrifices require a lot of love on our part. Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, willingly gave up half his possessions to the poor and reimbursed victims of his ill-gotten gain because he experienced a great love from Jesus. The Bible says we love God because God first loved us

(1 Jn 4:19). Those who have never felt or experienced selfless love will find it very hard to selflessly love others. So the first step in learning how to give and offer ourselves to the Lord is learning to love God and man (Deut 6:5; Mt 22:37).

**Transform Our Mind.** To be a living sacrifice for Christ, we can't only offer up our body; we need to offer up our mind as well. The Bible says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2). If we are to devote ourselves to God, we need to transform our mind. As disciples, we can no longer think like people in this world think; we can no longer do what everyone else does. To be selfish and self-seeking is all too common, but only if we have Christ's mind can we willingly serve and love others selflessly (1 Cor 2:16; Phil 2:5-45).

**Give our Heart to Jesus.** Before we can give our worldly treasures to God, we must first give Jesus our heart. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt 6:21). That's why Jesus praised a poor widow once upon seeing her put two small pennies into the temple treasury. After Jesus saw what this poor widow did, he called his disciples to him and told them it wasn't the amount that impressed him, but the fact that the poor widow gave her whole livelihood (Mk 12:41-45). Now if we think about it, this widow didn't have much to give to anyone, let alone the temple treasury; yet, she willingly gave her whole heart to God.

### **Suggested Guidelines**

**Use Your Spiritual Gifts.** If you want to become a living sacrifice for Christ, you need to use the spiritual gifts God has given you to serve other brothers and sisters in Christ (Rom 12:5-45; Eph 4:11f; 1 Pet 4:10f). It is your service and love for others that make you a living sacrifice in God's holy temple (the church). In the New Testament, there's no longer a Temple with appointed priests or daily animal sacrifices; rather, we're all priests of God's church (1 Pet 2:9). Since we are given the status as God's priests and can offer up ourselves as living sacrifices, we must learn how to use the gifts and talents God gives us to help build up his church and proclaim his glory (Mt 25:14-45; Lk 19:11-45; Eph 4:12; 1 Pet 2:9). If you are good at encouraging others, you should encourage others. If you are good at evangelizing to others, you should evangelize. Whatever your gift is, use it for God's glory and his kingdom to the best of your ability. In this way, God will add more and more to your sacrifices, and you'll never feel you've lost anything.

**Offer Up Your Wealth.** Many people today are disgusted when organized religion asks for donations and contributions, especially when they think a corrupt motive is involved. The fact is, a lot of misappropriation of funds among organized religious leaders have taken place. Nevertheless, the spirit of giving in the True Jesus Church should be for you, a willing and joyful sacrifice. We should realize the church is not a geographical place, building, or human organization. God's church consists of God's people—divinely called and gathered out of the world as God's holy and special people. So while the money

a church receives may be used to purchase or improve church buildings, the money must ultimately be spent for the good of the entire congregation – as is true when the electricity, gas, and water bills are paid on time at your local church.

**Give Willingly and Joyfully.** Offering to God shouldn't be a struggle, for in the end, what we receive from God and his church is worth much more than we could ever pay for in terms of cash (Mal 3:10-12). The Bible encourages us to offer up our wealth and resources willingly and joyfully (2 Cor 8:3, 12; 9:5, 7). It is not the amount you offer to church that's important, but it's your willingness to give that really counts. If you give willingly to the church, your gift is accepted according to as much as you have, not according to what you don't (2 Cor 8:12). So you should give as much as you can, according to your ability and your heart. In terms of money, you may be asking, "How much is enough?" Many churches today feel a tithe, or 10%, is required giving, since Jacob (Israel) vowed to give God 10% of all God gave him (Gen 28:22). These churches say tithes are required to support church ministers, just like tithes were used to support the priests and Levites who works for the tabernacle ministry (Num 18:21-45; cf. 1 Cor 9:7-45). However, today we don't generally set an amount you must give under compulsion, because giving should be done according to your heart and not according to your guilt. Paul says, "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..." (2 Cor 9:6f). If you are willing to give 10%, 20%, 30% or more, who is to say no. This is a private matter between you and the Lord.

**Give Your Time and Energy.** Your physical life is finite—a fixed period of time and energy—so you should number your days and spend your time wisely (Ps 39:4; 90:12; Eccl 8:5f). We often hear encouragement from pastors and elders in the church to avoid wasting time on worldly pursuits and enjoyment; yet, realizing you need to stop wasting time on the things of this world means nothing if you don't know what you're going to do with the time you're not wasting. So it's important to discover what God's will for you in your life is. What do you think God wants you to do with your time and energy? You can only productively focus your time and energy in something valuable if you know what that something valuable is. It's hard to get somewhere if you don't know where you're going or why you're heading there.

**What Does God Want Us to Do?** No sacrifice pleases God more than obedience and submission (1Sam 15:22). When Jesus came to the world, he offered the best sacrifice by dedicating himself to carrying out God's will (Heb 10:5-7). While we diligently serve God and give him our time or energy for God, we have to think about what God wants us to do. We need to learn to respect God's will in every choice that we make. Being a living sacrifice ultimately boils down to being what the Lord want you to be, saying what that Lord want you to say, and doing what the Lord want you to do. A life that is centered on God's will is a fragrant offering that pleases the Lord.

Write down other guidelines that have worked for you.



Write down new ideas that could work for you.

### Questions

1. The greatest offering ever made in the history of mankind was \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Why must we offer ourselves as a “living sacrifice?”  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What can you do to offer yourself as a “living sacrifice?” Can you do this at home, at work, and at school? Or does it only count if you become an ordained minister?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Memorize Mt 6:21 and write it down.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What does it mean for you to offer up your mind? (Rom 12:2)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. If you're concerned that offering tithes will create a hardship for you and your family, what's the scripture that shall give you faith?

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7. You offer because you want to, not because you have to. T/F

8. Read 2 Cor 8:12. What does this verse teach you about offering?

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9. What did Paul say was the reason God gave us different gifts? (Eph 4:11-16)

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10. Read Rom 12:3-8. What are the gifts God has given you with which you may now offer generously and cheerfully?

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### **Case Studies**

1. Moses recently converted to Christianity. Before he experienced God's love, Moses was an atheist, who felt God didn't exist. As an atheist, Moses thought the best thing in life was to be happy and find pleasure in all his pursuits. Moses was also born into a very poor family, yet he studied hard and put forth his best effort to get a high-paying job. After Moses was baptized, a church brother came up to him and told him that he should donate 10% of all his income to the church. The church brother said it was his moral obligation to do so. Suddenly, Moses felt an extreme struggle and conflict within his heart. Eventually, Moses willingly gave in to what his conscience was telling him to do. Moses gave the church 10% of his next paycheck, but Moses kept feeling like giving away this money was such a great loss. As a result of his feelings, Moses decided to put in a double effort to make more money. He exhausted himself with overtime work, so he could increase his income. Eventually, Moses became so

spent from his long work hours, he would often fall asleep during church services.

Do you see a problem with Moses' spirit of giving?

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If you were Moses' church friend, how would you counsel Moses?

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What do you think God would want Moses to give to him?

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2. Orpah, a church sister, is currently in college. She spends most of her time at school. Unfortunately, there are no other brothers and sisters at Orpah's school, and most of Orpah's friends are unbelievers. As a result of spending a lot of time with them, she often doesn't have much time to read the Bible or commune with God in prayer. Orpah's night life usually consists of going out to dinner with her friends, catching the latest movie, and then coming back to watch the one-hour TV dramas she's recorded with her roommates. During the day, Orpah generally busies herself with extracurricular activities, school work, and part-time job. After several months, Orpah begins to think about using more of her time for God. But she doesn't know where to begin. She often asks herself, "Does God want me to just cut myself off from my friends? I mean how can I keep my friends if I don't spend time with them?" Orpah really feels like she isn't doing much for God except faithfully attend Sabbath services. And even when Orpah goes to church, she feels like she doesn't get much out of it.

Do you think there are problems with Orpah's attitude at church or the way she spends her time and money?

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Is there anything about Orpah's confusion in her spiritual life that you can relate to? Discuss your answers with others.

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How do you think Orpah can live a more meaningful life as a Christian disciple?

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**Activity**

1. You learned how you should use your spiritual gifts for Christ in this lesson (e.g., if you have the gift of evangelizing, you should evangelize). There's no secret formula for discovering your spiritual gifts; instead, you need to try your hand at doing something (like evangelizing) before you can discover if God works with you (like evangelizing). Spiritual gifts don't always show themselves right away, so you should try your best at doing a variety of things for God. For your activity, make a list of spiritual gifts you feel you could use to glorify God and help others in church. Over the next month, try to use the gifts you listed to glorify God and edify the church. Evaluate your progress at the end of the month. Did you feel like you tried to accomplish something? If you didn't try, try to do better. If you tried, yet feel you accomplished nothing, don't be discouraged. The sacrifices you offer will often seem ineffective until God work is manifested; yet, you must steadfastly use your spiritual gifts, fervently pray for God's abidance, and patiently wait for God's work (1 Kgs 18:32-45; 1 Cor 3:6; Gal 6:9f; 2Thess 3:10).

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## Seek and Do God's Will

In the previous lesson, we saw that living for Christ is the goal and duty of all believers. True conversion is marked by a total submission to the Lord's will.

The apostle Paul left us a compelling testimony. As soon as he became a believer, he asked, "What shall I do, Lord" (Acts 22:10)? The Bible tells us that from then on Paul became a changed man. Actually, he shocked every one who knew him in Jerusalem because instead of rounding up Christians and throwing them into jail, he began preaching about Christianity and risked being thrown into jail. He gave up a life of privilege; and where previously he had moved in the social circles of the rich and famous, he now became a poor evangelist, carrying the Christian message to unfamiliar places in distant lands where its people had never before heard about Jesus.

Before our conversion, we used to set our own agenda. We decided what we wanted to do. Now, like Paul, we need to ask, "What shall I do, Lord?" In other words, we should learn to respect God's will for us in our lives (cf. Jas 4:13-15). He is now the Lord of your life. Let him set your agenda. We must factor in God's will when we make even seemingly insignificant choices in the course of our everyday lives. The choices we make, from morning 'till night, do shape who we are, in one way or another. Some choices help us. Some choices hurt us. But the believer must add to these considerations the fact that these choices will help or hurt our Lord Jesus Christ. Will the choices we make today bring shame or glory to his name?

While God's commands are clearly written in the Scriptures, we often still need to seek God's will when making choices in life. There are many choices for which the Bible does not give specific instructions, such as where to live, what major to choose, what career path to take, etc. And more often than not, God does not tell us what to do in a vision or speak to us in a voice. He leaves it to us to make responsible decisions. So how are we to know what truly pleases the Lord? This lesson will offer you some principles and guidelines in making decisions in life.

### Some Basic Principles

**Does It Conform to Biblical Principles?** God has revealed his will to the human race in the Scriptures. In making decisions, we should not even consider anything that is contrary to the teachings of the Bible. While some commands are very specific (e.g. "do not eat blood"), many others are more general. For example, God revealed his will through the prophet Micah, "He

has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic 6:8). In this example, justice, mercy, and humility become our guide in making decisions.

**Does God Come First?** Our choices reflect our priorities in life. Esau's choice for the red stew over his birthright showed that he despised God (Gen 25:29-34; Heb 12:16,17). Oftentimes, decisions in life boil down to choosing between our wish and God's wish. If God is important to us, our choices will allow us to put in time and energy in the work of God.

**Does It Bear Good Testimony for God?** Is there a verse in the Bible that says we should not be rude drivers on the freeway or nasty customers in a store? Not really. But the Bible says, "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31; 1Pet 2:12). Will God be glorified if people find out that the rude driver or the nasty customer is a member of the True Jesus Church? Our conduct says a lot about who we are. Imagine hearing a cuss word in the parking lot. You look. It's someone with a Bible. Or you hear yourself threatening to quit – again – because for the fifth night in a row, your supervisor has assigned you to lock up. These are choices a believer must make carefully. We are the Lord's witnesses. Let's make choices to glorify his name.

**Does It Benefit Anyone?** In the same passage where Paul talks about doing all things for God's glory, he wrote, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. (1Cor 10:23-24). He concluded this passage with these words, "just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (1Cor 10:33). Like Paul, who restricted his freedom for the benefit of others, we should also be considerate of others' needs in our speech and conduct.

## **Suggested Guidelines**

**Be Determined to do God's Will.** Some people seek God's will with the wrong motive. They have already made up their mind what they want, but they just want God to confirm and justify their wish. This is not the right way to seek God's will. Only if we are "transformed by the renewing of our mind" can we "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom 12:2). God shows his will to those who fear him (Ps 25:12). He instructs those who depend on him and humbly submit to him. If we have a sincere desire to carry out his will whatever the cost, God will surely guide us in our decision-making.

**Find Answers in the Bible.** This doesn't mean that we randomly flip the pages of the Bible when we need to make a choice and expect God to give us the answer. To be able to effectively put God's word to use, we need to be familiar with the Scriptures. If you make the commitment to read the Bible and

study God's Word, you will get to know God and understand his will. The word that you have hidden in your heart will often help you make a right choice (Ps 119:11).

**Rely on the Holy Spirit.** Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit will teach us and help us (Jn 14:26). He reminds us of God's word and enlightens our hearts to understand the Scriptures. Often, when we seek God's will, the Holy Spirit helps us recall certain teachings in the Scriptures that are relevant to the situation. He also gives us the wisdom to know how to apply the teachings. If need arises, the Holy Spirit can even speak directly to us and let us know what to do (cf. Acts 16:6-10). As a personal counselor, the Holy Spirit is by us all the time. We just need to ask him for instruction.

**Learn as You Go.** Remember that when you are faced with a choice, you need to make the effort to choose. Make the right judgment based on the principles and guidelines mentioned above. God's guidance often becomes clearer as you start to act. Spiritual wisdom and the knowledge of God's will come with constant practice of God's word (Heb 5:14; 2Pet 1:5-8). Always consider the outcome of your choices and examine whether God has taught you anything in the process. Look at the experiences of the people in the Bible, who serve as our example and warning. Listen to the testimony of others who have been through what you are going through. If you humbly seek God's will and trust his guidance in all your ways, God will make your paths straight (Prov 3:5-6).

Write down other guidelines that have worked for you.

Write down new ideas that could work for you.

## Questions

1. The apostle Paul became a changed man after he believed in Jesus. T/F
2. Why should we respect God's will?

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3. What does God's will have to do with our everyday choices?

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4. You need only seek God's will for (a) major decisions (b) minor decisions (c) in all decisions (d) when you feel like it (e) none of the above.

5. The best way to seek God's will is to wait for God's voice or some special vision. T/F

6. List at least 4 principles that will help you seek God's will every day.

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7. Why is it a good thing to hide God's Word in your heart?

8. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit will help us do God's will. Briefly describe how this promise came true for someone who was living in Bible times.

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9. God reveals his will to those who sincerely want to obey his will. T/F.

10. It is God's will that believers everywhere become a good testimony. What does this mean to you?

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### **Case Studies**

1. Carrie has recently graduated from her undergraduate university and is beginning to worry about her future. She doesn't know if she wants to pursue graduate studies in her undergraduate major, apply to business school for a business degree, or begin working right away. Feeling very confused, she begins to wonder what God's will is. She really wishes God would give her some kind of divine revelation. But God seems very quiet. Carrie asks her closest church sister what she should do about her confusion. The sister encourages her to "pray for God's will." One morning, right after her prayer, the phone rang. A company has offered a



job. The only drawback is that she needs to work on Saturdays. But she though, "Well, they called me right after my prayer. It must be God's will." So she decided to take the job. Do you think Carrie made the right decision? How would you know if her decisions were in line with God's will?

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2. Charlie is thinking of settling down. Knowing that he should seek God's will in his choice, he prays and asks God, "Lord, you know the kind of girl I like, big eyes, tall, and slim. Please help me find a girl that meets my criteria. I don't know who she will be or when I will meet her, but I trust in your will. I know that when the right time comes, you will bring her to me, and I'll know that she is the right one." So Charlie waits for God's answer. In the meantime, some brothers and sisters in church try to help him with finding a suitable spouse. He turns them all down because none of the candidates meet his requirements. Is this the right approach in seeking God's will? How should Charlie change his mentality and criteria?

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**Activity**

**THE GOOD**

Think about a situation where a person might be confused about God's will for them. Write down the characteristics or qualities that you feel could give you the ability to see God's will better.

Do you see any of the same qualities in yourself? Ask God to develop these characteristics in your life.

**THE BAD**

Think about a situation where a person might be confused about God's will for them. Write down the characteristics or qualities that you feel would hinder you from seeing God's will for you.

Do you see any of the same qualities in yourself? Ask God to weed out these characteristics in your life.

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## Your Role in the Body of Christ

In the New Testament, there are two books called I and II Corinthians. These books were actually letters written by Paul to believers of the church in the city of Corinth. One of the points that Paul brought up in I Corinthians was that the church was like one body with many parts. He explained that this is because when the believers got baptized, they were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – the body of Christ, which is the church (1 Cor 12:12,13). He told them that every member in church has a specific role. He illustrated this by reminding them that every individual part of the human body has a specific role. It is only when each fulfills its individual role does the body then function well as a single unit. You know this to be true. When your body is working properly, you experience good health.

Such is the nature of the body of the church; although it is our spiritual health that we are now talking about. What, then, is our role once we have believed in Jesus and become his disciples? Before we were baptized into the body of Christ, we were like God's scattered people from the nation of Israel (Ezek 36-37). But the New Testament church can be seen as a renewal of God's people and the true Israel (Eph 2:11-13; 1 Pet 2:9,10). Where before we had gone our separate ways, we now are one. Are we an eye or an ear? Are we the hand or the foot? Whatever our role may be, the important thing to remember is that we fulfill it to the best of our ability.

The fact that believers remain as one body was of paramount importance to Jesus. We see this in a prayer he offered to the heavenly Father just hours before the betrayal that would lead to his subsequent death. "Now I am no longer in the world," Jesus prayed, "but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are" (Jn 17:11). Jesus followed this with a prayer for us. He said, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 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 (Jn 17:22,23).

Such is Christ's love for us. It wasn't enough that he became a sin offering and died in our stead. He did not say in a begrudging fashion, OK, I'm done! about his sacrifice for us. Rather, as head of the church (Eph 5:23) the Lord understood that even after we have taken the first step to believe his Word and have accepted water baptism, we still have a long way to go. But as members of

the church—the body of Christ—we are in this together. We are all sojourners in this journey of faith. With this in mind, we shall study the importance of our individual role in the Church.

### **Some Basic Principles**

**One In Truth.** As Christians, being one in the truth of Jesus’ gospel is very important (3 Jn 2-4). In fact, we might go so far as to say having a “divisive spirit” and false teachings (however insignificant those teachings may appear) are grounds for excommunication from the church (Tit 3:9,10; 2 Jn 9-11). From the example set by the apostolic church, we understand the church’s fellowship requires oneness in doctrine (Acts 2:42). Today, our participation in church life must be grounded in the truth of the gospel (Gal 1:6-10) and the apostles’ teachings (Eph 2:20). If we are not one in truth, our fellowship with one another will not be approved by God, for the Holy Spirit, which abides and lives within the church, is the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17).

**One In Love.** As individual members of Christ’s body, we must have a deep and sincere love for one another. Only a unity, in love, can build up the church (Eph 4:16; 1 Pet 3:8). Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (1 Cor 8:1). We could say this another way: Pride divides a church, but love unifies a church. As human beings, we all have some sense of knowledge and pride within ourselves. As a result, we can never completely avoid disputes within the church, for the church is not yet perfect. We have not yet cultivated ourselves into God’s image, so we lack many of the spiritual qualities needed to avoid disputes and quarrels in the church. Yet, love covers a multitude of sins, and it covers up the imperfections we see in church. Therefore, we need a fervent love for one another, as God’s church, to cover up our own ugliness (Prov 10:12; 1 Pet 4:8). If we can learn how to be unified in love for one another, we would see how the church could quickly be built up. And, with love, our fellowship with one another in church would be that much sweeter.

**One in Purpose.** Generally, everyone in life has a purpose. Even if we don’t know where we’ll be ten years, or even a week, from now, we all have our little goals and purposes. Yet king Solomon, in the book of Ecclesiastes, continually pounded the message, “Life is meaningless.” While overly optimistic people shun this type of message, there’s a truth in king Solomon’s statement. When we come to the issue of ultimate purpose, life does seem quite meaningless. We work and work just to eat, sleep, and eventually die. Yet we often forget that the meaninglessness king Solomon saw was the product of the limitations we, as human beings, face living “under the sun” (Eccl 2:24; cf. 1 Cor 15:12-19, 32). Still, we must learn to transcend our personal ambitions and goals in life to that of Christ’s. Just as a person’s two feet must have a common purpose to walk normally, the church body must have one purpose to reach the goal of God’s kingdom.

## Suggested Guidelines

**Be There for One Another.** Paul's letters tell us that he made it a point to encourage the believers to be there for one another. Depending on the situation of a particular church, Paul took care to choose specific words to convey this message of encouragement. For example, when the Thessalonians were not quite sure how they should go about waiting for Jesus' Second Coming, Paul told them, to "comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing" (1Thess 5:11). He also offered this suggestion, "Warn those who are unruly, comfort the faint-hearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all" (1Thess 5:14).

**Be One in Prayer.** From the model example set by the apostolic church, we learn that the success and spiritual power of the apostolic church depended upon their unity in prayer. (Acts 1:14; 2:1, 42; 4:24). Likewise, the success of our fellowship with each other in church depends upon the success of our ability to pray with a oneness of heart and purpose. If it is love that builds up the church, we have to ask ourselves, "What do we love the most?" Do we love our pride and material possessions more than we love our brothers and sisters in church? We have to understand our prayer is driven by our heart and purpose. Jesus once said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt 6:21).

**Continually Fellowship In Christ.** The Bible teaches us not to give up assembling together, as some are in the habit of doing (Heb 10:25). Here is a common excuse for not attending church: "I can worship God at home. God is spirit, so as long as I worship him in spirit and truth, I don't have to go to church." Such a misconception fails to see two things. First, church gatherings and worship can edify us in ways that worshiping by ourselves cannot. Our prayers are more effective when we gather in Jesus' name because he promises to be among us (Mt 18:19-20). Through church services and activities, we can encourage and serve each other with our God-given gifts. Second, a true worshipper of God would not want to stay away from other believers. It is not possible to love God if we do not love our brethren with action (1Jn 4:20). Gathering with other believers allows us to practice the Lord's command of loving others. Not only so, through fellowship in the Lord, our joy will always be full and complete (1 Jn 1:3,4).

Write down other guidelines that have worked for you.

Write down new ideas that could work for you.

**Questions**

- 1. Who is the head of the church?  
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- 2. Who make up the body of the church?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- 3. The church is the body of \_\_\_\_\_.
  
- 4. Our church life must be grounded in the truth of the gospel and the apostles' teachings. T/F
  
- 5. What does Eph 4:16 mean to you?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- 6. Read 1 Pet 3:8. List the things we should do to in the body of Christ.  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- 7. Search the book of Acts for a time when the apostles were one in prayer. Write a summary in the space provided.  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- 8. Why must disciples be there for each other?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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9. How do you “fellowship” with the brothers- and sister-in-Christ?

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10. Where in the Bible does it tell you that Jesus has prayed for all believers to remain united?

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**Case Studies**

1. Bobby was recently baptized during a church’s spiritual convocation. Bobby only speaks English, but most of the people in Bobby’s local church speak Chinese. Due to the cultural and language barriers, Bobby often feels out of place during church services. However, Bobby has a great love for God and the truth found in the Bible. Because of this love, Bobby still enjoys coming to church to listen to sermons, study the Bible, and pray. However, after service, Bobby quickly leaves because he feels alienated from the other members. One day, after church service, Billy, a Chinese church brother, sees what’s going on and quickly invites Bobby to his house for an informal fellowship before Bobby leaves. But Bobby politely declines Billy’s invitation because of his past experience. Bobby attended an informal fellowship before and was stuck listening to Chinese church brothers and sisters make jokes in Chinese all night long. As time went by, Bobby began to feel less and less inclined to attend services. Finally, Bobby said to himself one day, “I can study the Bible and pray to God right here at home. Why should I go all the way to church to do that?”

If you were a church member who saw Bobby’s feelings of alienation developing, what could you have done?

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Conversely, if you were in Bobby’s shoes, and felt alienated, what do you think would be the best way to participate in church life? Or do you think Bobby was right in wanting to stay at home?

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Do you think it is enough that you can make Bobby feel at home among this body of believers?

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2. Jack, a newly baptized convert to the True Jesus Church, was introduced to the church by Jill. Before Jill brought Jack to church, Jill had some feelings toward Jack. Jack, however, only thought of Jill as his friend. Later, Jill made her feelings known to Jack. Happily, after Jack thought about it for some time, Jack and Jill became a couple. But the love was short-lived. Jill found Jack to be too insensitive. Jack though Jill was too ill-tempered. When they broke up, Jack immediately stopped coming to church. Before long, rumors about their broken romance began flying in church. Jill was furious when she found out who was “talking behind her back.” She refused to forgive the sisters who were responsible. Soon, Jill too quits church. Examine this story carefully and think about/discuss what problems you can spot in the fellowship of this local church.

What steps could’ve been taken to avoid or resolve these problems?

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If you were in Jill’s shoes, what do you think would be the best way to react to the comments made “behind her back”?

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**Activity**

1. One of the practical teachings mentioned above was to try to encourage one another in church. For your activity, try to think of and put into practice one way to encourage the brothers and sisters in church. You can be as imaginative or as straightforward as you want. It may be something as simple as making a phone call during the week to see how someone is doing in their faith. Find someone in church to follow up on your progress. By the end of a month’s time, if you haven’t done anything to encourage another brother or sister, think about why. Make a commitment, for the next month, to do something to encourage at least one brother or sister.

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## Carrying Your Cross

One day after Jesus had begun to teach his disciples about his forthcoming death and resurrection, he said this to the crowd, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Mk 16:24).

Living at a time and in a place where such a cruel form of punishment only exists for us in the printed word, it is difficult for us to truly feel Jesus’ pain. What does a cross feel like? Is it a T-shaped wooden structure that would weigh us down and bend our backs? Imagine carrying one when our head is already cut and our back is already torn. How we’d scream in pain, again and again! How we’d stumble and fall, again and again.

And Jesus asked us to take up our cross daily? Yet, Jesus meant every word he said. Many people follow Christ for the wrong reasons. They do so to seek some short-term material gains. They expect that after they believe in the Lord, life will be smooth and trouble-free. But the Lord has already told us that the way of faith is the way of the cross. No one can follow Jesus to the end if they fail to carry his cross. In this lesson, we shall study what it means for you to carry your cross.

### Some Basic Principles

**Consider the Cost of Discipleship.** One reason so many Christians find it difficult to finish their journey to God’s kingdom is because they never considered the cost of obedience in their faith from beginning to end (Lk 9:62; 14:25-33; Heb 3:14). They think that being a Christian is a status symbol or a guarantee of material blessings. When they realize that they have to give themselves up and suffer for Christ, they abandon their faith. We can’t afford to make that mistake. Using the parables of a builder and a king going into battle, the Lord told the crowd to consider the cost of following him. What is the cost? Jesus’ concluded his parable, saying, “So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:33). Following the Lord entails giving up everything for his sake. It involves suffering for him instead of indulging in pleasure. It involves denying our own desires in order to accomplish his will. Have you considered the cost?

**Deny Yourself.** The Lord Jesus said to his followers, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Mk 8:34). Denying yourself is the first and fundamental step in being a disciple of Christ. Denying yourself means saying “NO” to your fleshly desires.



But why must we deny ourselves? Because of our sinful nature, obeying God's command is *against* our natural tendency. In other words, our flesh doesn't like to obey God. In fact, according to Paul, our natural self is "hostile to God" (Rom 8:7 NIV). When we want to sacrifice ourselves to love others, our flesh tells us to care for our own needs instead. When we want to rest on the Sabbath, our flesh tells us that we still have many unfinished tasks. When we want to get up in the morning to pray, our flesh tells us to get more sleep. If we do not deny ourselves, we are incapable of submitting to God's will, "for the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal 5:17). In order to be a follower and servant of Christ, therefore, we need to "crucify" ourselves by not bowing to the will of our flesh.

**Carry Your Cross Daily.** Jesus says, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Lk 9:23). Following Christ is not just a long-term goal. It is a daily discipline. You must carry your cross 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Doing so involves commitment and persistence. It means overcoming your laziness and selfishness. At the beginning of each day, you need to tell yourself, "I am the Lord's disciple, and today I will do whatever it takes to please my master." In your daily conduct and everyday choices, let God's command be your first priority. You may have to give up your wishes and ambitions. Others may criticize you and dislike you. But if you obey Christ at all costs, you are his true disciple.

### **Suggested Guidelines**

**Be Ready to Suffer.** A disciple must always be ready to suffer physically and emotionally. Denying your flesh is often painful. Sometimes you have to clench your teeth to make yourself submit to what God wants rather than what you want. Letting go of the things you love so much for the sake of Christ also surely involves great pain. Besides these types of sufferings, you also face another kind of suffering—rejection. You may have to endure people's slander, ridicule, and even hatred. Jesus once said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher" (Lk 6:40). So if Jesus was hated, his disciple would be hated as well. And if Jesus suffered, his disciple would suffer as well (Jn 15:18-20). Regardless of the type of suffering, you must be ready at all times to experience pain and hurt for the sake of Christ. Peter encourages us, "Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin" (1 Pet 4:1). Being equipped with the attitude to suffer will enable you to overcome all kinds of difficulties and hindrances.

**Stand Firm in the Face of Persecution.** Today, many countries have civil laws on religious freedom to protect their citizens from physical persecution and torture over religious beliefs. Yet, even today, many Christians live in places where religious persecution by physical torture is not discouraged. But more and more, Christians today suffer socially for their beliefs (cf. Gal 6:12; 1 Pet 4:4). Friends may no longer want to be around an uptight "holy man" or

“holy woman” like yourself. You may hear jibes about being way too conservative. When you try to evangelize, you may face dirty looks that scream, “Get away from me you religious freak!” These are some of the typical sufferings a Christian disciple may have to face socially. It’s no surprise that like attracts like, and we demonize the “other.” That’s the source of a lot of racial and ethnic hatred, as well as the source of social and religious persecution. Jesus warned us about social and physical persecution when he said, “If you were of the world the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (Jn 15:19). But we shouldn’t get too discouraged because Jesus told us that he would not leave us alone (Jn 14:18), but that he would send us the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide us (Jn 16:7). Since Jesus has overcome the world, we should rejoice, because it means that we, as Jesus’ disciples, can also overcome the world (Jn 16:33; cf. 1 Jn 4:4).

**Glory in the Cross Christ.** Today, we often think of the cross in terms of a beautiful symbol of our faith. Christians wear silver and gold crosses on their necks and make artful crosses for their churches. Yet, in Jesus’ time, crosses represented something very ugly and shameful—something you wouldn’t want to connect yourself to. You’d want to connect yourself to a cross just about as much as you’d want to strap yourself down to an electric chair. Yet the Bible teaches us to glory in the shame and sufferings of Christ, as well as to glory in our own sufferings and shame in Christ (Acts 5:41; 1 Cor 1:18; Gal 6:14; 2Tim 1:8,12,16). Perhaps the toughest part of being a Christian is to handle the insult, slander, or rejection we must bear as we acknowledge our faith before others. The people of the world may think that we are strange because we choose to sacrifice our lives for the Lord instead of pursuing worldly wealth and accomplishments. We are often despised because we hold a different set of values. But there is really nothing to be ashamed of to be a follower of Christ. We consider it an honor because we are following and serving our loving Savior who has laid down his life for us. We may lose the world, but we have gained Christ and his reward (Mt 5:10-12; 19:27-29). With that in mind, we will glory in the cross of Christ, and count ourselves blest to be able to bear it.

Write down other guidelines that have worked for you.

Write down new ideas that could work for you.

## Questions

1. Counting the cost of following Jesus means understanding what Christ expects of his followers. T/F
2. “If anyone desires to come after Me,  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Mt. 16:24).
3. What does it mean to take up your cross and follow Jesus?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Jesus wants us to put our Christian discipleship and God’s kingdom in first priority. T/F.
5. A disciple must always be ready to suffer. T/F.
6. When you are persecuted for your religious beliefs, you are carrying your cross for Jesus. T/F
7. You are carrying a cross when you endure ridicule for being submissive. T/F
8. Read Mt 16:24,25. What does it mean to “lose your life” for Christ? What will you gain in return?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Memorize Heb 12:3 and write it down.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Mt 5:10).

## Case Studies

1. Steve and Jim are best friends, but neither of them is a Christian. One day, Steve's friend, Jack, invites Steve to the True Jesus Church. During the service, Steve receives the Holy Spirit and he's so joyful he is moved to tears. From then on, Steve comes to church every Sabbath with his friend Jack. Unfortunately, Jim is disappointed now that Steve always spends his weekends at church. Eventually, Steve is baptized and becomes a fervent believer, changing a lot of his old ways and bad habits. Still, Steve keeps in touch with his best friend Jim. One day, as Steve and Jim are hanging out, Jim asks Steve, "How come you're all holy now? What happened to you? We used to be able to go out, check out girls, and talk trash all the time, now you're so uptight I can't even say a curse word in front of you without you getting on my case. Can't we go back to the way it used to be?" Steve is obviously hurt by Jim's comments, but he really cherishes the friendship he has with Jim and doesn't want to make a scene. One day, Jim says, "Alright, let's go to that dance party at Betty's house, I heard there will be a lot of cute girls there." Steve declines Jim's invitation, and Jim says, "You see, this is what I'm talking about! You need to loosen up my friend." Steve still insists on not going to Betty's party. This infuriates Jim to no end. Finally, Jim decides he won't call or talk to Steve anymore until he becomes "normal" again. Steve is really depressed about the whole matter, and he finally gives in to Jim's demands to act like he used to.

Steve is caught between his obedience to his faith and his friendship with Jim. What are his struggles?

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If you were Jack, Steve's church friend, how would you counsel Steve?

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Put yourself in Steve's shoes, why do you think Steve finally gave in to Jim's demands. If you were Steve, do you think you would've handled the situation any differently? How so?

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2. Jenny has been a True Jesus Church member for about three years now. A few months ago, she turned down an opportunity to advance her career because it required that she move out of state. When she explained to her

colleagues that she couldn't move to an area that had no True Jesus Church, they ridiculed Jenny for making a "stupid career choice." Lately, another opportunity has presented itself. This time, the position requires that she works long hours on regular days and some weekends as well. Her colleagues tell her to take the job. Jenny doesn't really know what to do, although she's leaning toward accepting the new position.

Jenny is caught between her obedience to her faith and the pressure to climb the ladder of advancement. What are her struggles?

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Think about Jenny's first opportunity to advance her career. Did she make a right decision? Why or why not?

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If you were in Jenny's shoes, would you take the new job?

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### **Activity**

1. One of the practical teachings mentioned above was to be ready to suffer both physically and socially for Christ (e.g., losing a close relationship with an unbelieving friend). Another teaching given above was to give your self up for the sake of following Christ (e.g., giving up your bad habit of watching X-rated video tapes). Make a list of all the ways you feel you've suffered or could suffer by following your faith in Christ. Now make a list of all the ways you could've avoided those sufferings for Christ by taking the easy way out. Do you ever see yourself taking the easy way out? Have you ever taken the easy way out? How so? Think about what you've written and then think about how you'd like to improve your obedience and submission to God's will.

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## Share the Gospel, Near and Far

The Bible tells us that after Jesus died, God raised him from the dead. For a period of forty days after that, Jesus appeared to his disciples to show them that he was indeed alive. He met with them, talked to them, and ate with them. Then came the day when he would be taken back to heaven. Before Jesus left, he promised his apostles that, in a few days, they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. He also promised that when the Holy Spirit came they would have power, and they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:3-11).

The rest of the book of Acts, therefore, serves as a testimony of the fulfillment of these two promises. Chapter 2 is a record of how the apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit. It also shows how, immediately after that, the apostles began telling the people in Jerusalem that Jesus, whom they had condemned to die on the cross, was risen. The other chapters in the book shows how, over time, the apostles and other disciples went beyond Jerusalem to tell other people about Jesus and the meaning of his death and resurrection.

Today, we have, by the grace of God, experienced for ourselves the fulfillment of these promises. Every one of us has a different testimony. Someone, somewhere, somehow, had witnessed to us about Jesus. None of the circumstances through which we came to believe was happenstance; for God had purposed in his heart, even before we were born, that we should hear and believe. Now, is there someone out there somewhere who somehow is waiting for us to witness to him or her? Has he heard that no other religious figure in this world can claim to have died and risen to be our Savior (Acts 2:22-36)? Has she heard that if she believes and is baptized, she will also have eternal life (; Jn 3:16; Mk 16:16)? In this lesson, we shall study the importance of sharing the gospel.

### Some Basic Principles

**Do it For Our Lord.** After his conversion, Paul turned his back on a life of privilege. Travelling over land and sea, he carried the gospel to places where people knew nothing about Jesus. As a pioneer, Paul experienced great hardships. He became poor. He knew what it was to be cold and hungry. A lot of the time, Paul got beaten and thrown in jail. When he was not in danger of being beaten to death by the authorities, he was in danger of being killed by bandits, ordinary men, and/or the elements. Despite these troubles, Paul kept right on preaching. He preached because he could not bear to think that men,

women and children would continue to live in ignorance. He preached because he wanted to share Jesus' life story and its significance. That was all that mattered to Paul; for as he wrote to the believers in Corinth, telling people about Jesus was in itself a most rewarding experience (1 Cor 9).

**Preach out of Love.** Paul centered his life around preaching the gospel and saving souls (1 Cor 9:22,23). In whatever he did, he wanted to save those around him. He did all these out of his love for others. He was in great anguish over the unbelief of his own people the Israelites. He was even willing to be cursed for their sake if that could bring them salvation (Rom 9:1-3). Love is the motivation behind all works of service, especially preaching the gospel. When we consider that many are waiting to hear the gospel, our compassion should compel us to always reach out to others with the hope that they may also receive salvation. Freely we have received, let us give freely (Mt 10:8). With the love that Jesus has given to us, let us quickly bring this love to the world.

**Preach Jesus Only.** The apostle Paul constantly emphasized the importance of preaching Jesus only (2 Cor 4:5). He claimed to know nothing "except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). Therefore, he did not resort to wise or persuasive words when he preached the gospel. He simply proclaimed to everyone the death and salvation of Christ. When we share the gospel with others, our message should be centered on Christ and what he has done. We do not need to attract people to church with fun activities or impress them with some eloquent speech. We just need to faithfully tell others about Christ, and let the Lord himself touch the hearts of the listeners.

**Seek God's Guidance.** When you are sharing the gospel, it is as if you have taken on an assignment from God. As such, you are obligated to take orders from the Boss Himself. Paul gave us an example. Once, when he was all set to preach the gospel in new territory, he couldn't get through the border. Paul and his company then went some place else. That night, Paul saw a vision. He saw a man pleading, "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9). That was how God opened the way for Paul to bring the gospel into Europe for the first time. Likewise, we need to seek and respect the Holy Spirit's guidance in order to be effective evangelists.

**God Opens Doors.** Remember God can open doors for the gospel you can't (Acts 14:27; 2 Cor 2:12; Col 4:3). When you feel every avenue for sharing the gospel with others is closed because you've already preached to all your close family and friends, God can easily open another door for you.

**Preaching Requires Self-Sacrifice.** Be willing to sacrifice yourself for the sake of God's gospel (Lk 9:60; 1 Cor 9:19; Rev 1:9; 6:9). Preaching involves giving your time, effort, and sometimes, your wealth. Without a heart of sacrifice, it is difficult for us to be effective evangelists. We need to be ready to preach whenever and wherever the Lord wants us to go, regardless of the cost. Fully surrendering to God's will is vital to the success of your preaching and God's abidance in your ministry for him.



## Suggested Guidelines

**Be Equipped with God's Armor.** Being a witness to Jesus in a world of unbelievers is like going into a war zone. How can you speak of sin and repentance or forgiveness and salvation to a world that does not know there is such a thing as the fear of the Lord? Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus to put on the armor of God in such an unbelieving world (Eph 6:10-20). Armor is protective clothing soldiers wear when they go to war. Paul told the believers that their armor should consist of truth and righteousness, faith and salvation, and the gospel of peace. But an armor of such specifications can only be acquired from your careful study of God's words in the Bible, your obedience to his commandments, and your commitment to a life of prayer.

**Action Speaks Louder Than Words.** As is the case today, believers of the early church did not live in isolated communities far away from the mainstream of society. In a letter to these believers, Peter reminded them to live honorable lives that would make God proud of them (1 Pet 2:12). In that same letter, Peter also told the women who had unbelieving husbands to live lives of purity and reverence so that their husbands may be won by the conduct of their wives (1Pet 3: 1,2). Peter knew what he was talking about. He was one of Jesus' handpicked men for the duration of his public ministry. For three years, Peter learned firsthand from Jesus about the kingdom of God. When Jesus was arrested, Peter's faith was tested. For a short time, his actions were less than honorable. Instead of being a witness to Jesus, he tried to fade into the mob of unbelievers who were wrongly accusing Jesus (Mt 26:69-75). But Peter learned from his mistake.

**Always Be Prepared.** When Peter wrote to the believers, he told them to put God first in their hearts. He gave them what we know today as the Boy Scout motto, "Be Prepared." He wrote, "[A]lways be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15). We must be prepared because God works in mysterious ways. He opens doors of opportunity we never know exist and when we least expect it. Perhaps a family member will walk in through one of those doors. Or a close friend. Maybe a distant acquaintance. Even a stranger!

**Seize the Opportunity.** When the risen Lord gave the commission to preach, his disciples were, as was the custom of the day, reclining on their couches. But Jesus told them to get up and go to work (Mk 16:14f). If we don't take the initiative to preach, God cannot use us to reach out to others. While we have to be constantly aware of God's guiding hand in the church's ministry, the fruitful effect of our preaching won't just naturally happen through spontaneous combustion; we must have a heart to actively engage the opportunities God gives us. Has a relative been teasing you about the enormous amount of time you spend on the Bible? Did you catch a colleague humming your favorite hymn just the other day? Grasp every chance to reach out to those around you. God might have put you where you are for a reason. You never know how or when God may use you to save a soul.



**Be Tuned in to the Situation.** (Acts 14:15; 17:22-45). Finding common ground is often a good starting point to begin preaching to others of different world views. More importantly, finding the common ground of your religious/spiritual beliefs can help direct and streamline your evangelical message. Don't emphasize things you and the one you're preaching to already agree on. For example, you do not need to prove God's existence to someone who already believes in Jesus. But, if you're talking to an atheist, it's essential to begin with the question of God's existence. You need to prove God exists before you can tell him that his soul needs to be saved.

**Ask for Intercessory Prayers.** Paul worked hard at preaching the gospel and at being a faithful witness to Jesus, but he also knew how to ask for help. In a letter to the believers in Thessalonica, Paul wrote, "Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified (2Thess 3:1). Paul understood that when he preached the gospel and when people believed, the body of Christ grows. He also understood that like the human body, the different members who make up the body of Christ must work as a team (1 Cor 12:12-31).

**Seek Help When Needed.** Sometimes, you might feel that you could use some help. Bring your friend to a Sabbath service and introduce him to the minister at the end of the service. Invite your relative to an Open House and have her speak to another church member. Or, if you are having a family service at your home, invite your colleague to attend. If you think taped sermons are a valuable tool, find appropriate messages that will address his or her immediate needs. Then there are many helpful True Jesus Church literature. Check your local church for available publications. For a complete listing of all English publications, go to the church web site at [www.truejesuschurch.org](http://www.truejesuschurch.org).

Write down other guidelines that have worked for you.

Write down new ideas that could work for you.

**Questions.**

1. Who gave the command to preach the gospel?

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2. What should be our motivations when we preach the gospel.

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3. What does “Preach Jesus Only” mean?

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4. Memorize and write down 2 Cor 4:5.

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5. Actions speak louder than words. Do you agree that a believer’s actions could either help or hinder his or her intention to share the gospel? What are some ways you can testify for the Lord through your actions?

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6. Why is it important that you rely on God when you are sharing the gospel?

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7. God can open avenues to spread the gospel when you think all avenues are shut. T/F
8. We need to be ready to share the gospel at all times. T/F.
9. If you can't share the gospel effectively, it's no use to ask for another's help. T/F
10. Since God controls everything, preaching is a matter better left to God. If God wants to bring someone to Christ, then he'll just do it naturally. T/F

### **Case Studies**

1. Jonah heard a sermon recently where the church member on the pulpit preached, "Jesus told all us to bear fruit or else he'll cut us off. Bearing fruit means you must bring someone to Christ or the Lord will throw you into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!" After hearing this fiery sermon, Jonah was scared out of his pants. He started to preach to every single person he encountered telling them to come to church or they would go to hell. At work he always harped on how his unbelieving co-workers would go to hell if they didn't come to church right away. However, Jonah sounded like a madman to his co-workers. Sill, Jonah wouldn't give up. He turned his energies to his boss and continually talked about God's judgment on unbelievers. When the boss could no longer take the constant preaching, he fired Jonah one Friday. Jonah is now totally depressed because he feels like all his efforts in preaching were meaningless. He continually abuses himself verbally for not being able to bring someone to church. Before long, Jonah gives up entirely. What is wrong with this situation? Can you spot any problems with the actions or attitudes of the characters in this story? How would you counsel Jonah? How could Jonah preach to another boss without getting fired?

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2. Natalie heard in a recent sermon that God is in control of everything. So she figured that since God controls everything she no longer has to preach the gospel. She reasoned within herself, "If God controls everything, then I don't need to try to evangelize to others since God himself can bring people to church if he wants to." It all made sense to her. But then one day Natalie heard another sermon that taught unless she preached to her family and friends, she'll be responsible for their souls if they end up receiving eternal damnation. Now, Natalie is extremely confused over the two seemingly conflicting sermon messages. She asked herself, "So do I have to save others or can God just do it?" Discuss or think about how you

could reconcile these two aspects of preaching, namely God's role and your role.

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**Activity**

1. Get a piece of paper and list out the names of all the people you'd like to preach to or could possibly preach to. Now next to each person's name briefly write how some possible scenarios where you start to actually preach to that person. Only list out something that you think can actually play out in real life. Remember to think of tiny details in your imaginary scenarios (e.g., how did you start the conversation/communication with that person?). After you've listed out all the details of how these scenarios will play out, try to actually play out your scenario in real life within a few months time. Remember God needs to work with you so don't forget the importance of praying for God's abidance when you preach.

## Care for Your Brothers and Sisters in Christ

You may have observed that sheep and shepherds formed an integral part of the biblical landscape. Because sheep and shepherds actually dotted the physical landscape of the lands of the Bible, they often became a figure of speech to illustrate a point and/or clarify a thought.

The Bible tells us that before Jesus went back to heaven, he spoke to Peter, one of his closest disciples. Three times, Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love Me?” Each time, Peter answered in the affirmative. Each time, the Lord would either tell him to feed his lamb, tend his sheep, or feed them.

Jesus often compared Himself to a shepherd. As was recorded in the gospel of John, Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep” (Jn 10:11). Time and again, Jesus saw Himself as a shepherd. For example, the Bible tells us that, one day, when Jesus saw a great multitude milling about, he was “moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd (Mk 6:34). Then, when his death was imminent, Jesus quoted Scripture written about five hundred years earlier to reflect that when a shepherd is struck, his sheep will be scattered (Mk 14:27; Zech 13:7).

Still, no good shepherd leaves his sheep unattended for long; neither will he not make provisions for them if he had to leave them for a while. Such was the case when Jesus had accomplished his earthly mission and was due to return to heaven, where he must remain until it was time for him to come back for his flock (Jn 14:1-3). But sheep, by their very nature, depend on a good shepherd for their well-being. Who could fill that void when Jesus had to leave? Who would lead the flock out to pasture and shield them from thieves and robbers? Who would return them to the safety of the pen and, if need be, lay down his life for the flock?

Jesus picked Peter. It is true that Peter did, at a time of weakness, denied Jesus (Lk 22:54-62). But Jesus had known that would happen. That’s why he prayed for Peter’s faith to prevail (Lk 22:32). And as you will discover in Acts, and I and II Peter, this apostle did live up to Jesus’ expectations.

But what bearing does this teaching have on our own discipleship today? How can we become like good shepherds who will bring the sheep out to pasture? If we are like shepherds, who is our flock? Will we have the courage to walk

ahead of our flock to shield them from thieves and robbers? Or would we run away in the face of danger? In this lesson, we shall study what all this means to you in the family of Christ.

### **Some Basic Principles**

**Do It with God's Love.** When you care for your brothers- and sisters-in-Christ, you need to love God and have God's love abide in you (Ps 8:4; Jn 15:9-13; 21:15-17; 1 Jn 4:21). Without love, all the sacrifices you put into teaching, encouraging, and ministering becomes meaningless (1 Cor 13:1-13).

**From Unselfish Motives.** (Acts 20:33-35; 1 Pet 5:2). God freely redeemed you with his blood so you could become part of the church body, so you shouldn't expect anything in return when you care for other members.

**Sacrifice Yourself.** Give up your selfish desires and comforts—for the sake of carrying out your pastoral ministry (Jn 21:18). Fully surrendering to God's will is vital to the success of your pastoral ministry and God's abidance with your work.

**Show the Way to God.** When you teach or pastor other members, show them the way to God (Acts 20:32). People easily get turned off to a self-serving message, because people can often see through the façades put forth by self-serving people. People want to seek and see God, not you. Your duty as a pastor is to humbly show the way to Jesus Christ, like John the Baptist who said, "[Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 1:23; 3:30).

**Be Willing and Eager.** "Shepherd the flock of God," Peter told the elders, "...willingly ... and eagerly (1 Pet 5:2). Peter was with Jesus for three years and saw what it was to serve willingly and eagerly. For instance, one day, a leper came to Jesus and begged our Lord to heal him. He said, "If you are willing, You can make me clean." The Bible tells us that our Lord didn't have to think twice. Jesus was filled with compassion for the man. He reached out his hand and touched the leper, saying "I am willing; be cleansed" (Mk 1:40-42).

### **Suggested Guidelines**

**Draw From Your Own Experience.** When you were a young lamb in the faith, who was your shepherd and how did he or she care for you? Was he a brother-in-Christ who introduced you to Jesus and showed you by his example how to get to know Jesus a little better every day? Today, could you do something similar? Could you perhaps make time to be your lamb's prayer-buddy after Sabbath services or meet him for a weekly Bible study over coffee? Or was she a sister-in-Christ who, at a critical time in your life, showed you by her example that when you trust and obey God, your faith grows? Today, could you do the same for someone who is struggling with life's difficult issues. Could you perhaps make time to fast and pray with her and give some practical help?

**Begin at Home.** If you are a parent, your children would be your flock. You have provided them with basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter since the day they were born. But it is God's will that parents attend to their children's spiritual needs as well. We see this as early as in the first book of the Bible when God said that he wanted Abraham to teach his children to do what was right and just (Gen 18:19). We see this again when God commanded Moses to tell the parents under his charge to teach their children about God's commandments from the time they woke up until the time they went to bed each day (Deut 6:4-7). The apostle Paul also told parents of the early church to raise their children "in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). And when you begin at home, don't forget that as in the days of Genesis, the Lord means for you to include other people in your "household" as well (Gen 18:19).

**Know God's Word.** The source of nourishment for God's flock is his word. God's word gives life and revives the soul (Jn 6:63; Ps 19:7). It is the basis of all pastoral work. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2Tim 3:16). For those who are in suffering, we need to lift them up with God's promises. For those who are drifting away from the truth, we need to show them the correct path according to the teachings of the Bible. Therefore, in order to effectively encourage and counsel others, we must be well-versed in the Scriptures and have a solid understanding of God's word.

**Teach by Example.** Peter was careful to tell the elders to be "examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:3) and not lord it over them. Peter understood that elders must make a conscientious effort to do more than tell believers what they must do and what they must not do. Rather, he wanted the elders to remember that their behavior affected the believers in a negative or positive manner. What choices, for instance, would the elders make when they were confronted with matters of right and wrong? Would they give in to the pressures of society at large? Or would they stand by an unpopular decision because it was what Jesus would have done? Peter knew from experience that it was one thing for a man to profess undying love for Jesus but it was another thing for a man to actually die for the love of Christ.

**Intercede for Those You Care for.** Intercessory prayer has a twofold benefit in pastoral work. First, you edify and strengthen the member you're interceding for. Second, the one you intercede for can in turn edify and strengthen others (Lk 22:32). There's a beneficial "snowball effect" to effective intercessory prayer. Jesus' prayer for Peter is a perfect testimony (Lk 22:32). Whom have you led to Christ? Remember your work does not end with the person's baptism. It is true that you no longer have to persuade the person to believe in Jesus. However, you do want the person to, as Paul counseled the believers at Philippi, to continue to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12) so their whole spirit, soul, and body may be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1Thess 5:23).

**Do Your Best.** God provides for you to minister and pastor. While you have to realize God gives the increase and effect to your pastoral ministry, the building up of the church doesn't happen spontaneously. God works through his disciples, so you need to actively engage the opportunities God has left open for you to minister. The apostles often counseled the believers through letters. If the need arises, could you counsel the person or persons you brought to Christ in this manner? Could you keep in touch with them over the telephone or via e-mail if you are online? Could you get together for breakfast, lunch or dinner on a regular basis or every once in a while?

**Be Firm and Gentle.** Sheep by nature get lost easily. They need a lot of guidance. That is why sometimes the shepherd has to use his staff to bring back the straying ones. But sheep also startle easily and scatter on impulse. Sometimes, they get lost in the commotion and may be lost forever. In the same way, we need to stand firm on the truth in order to guide others on the right course. Paul's attitude toward the church had always been firm but gentle. Paul considered himself a father to the believers who firmly guided them in the truth (1Co 4:14-15). But he also compared himself to a mother, saying, "we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children" (1Thess 2:7). It is with this firm but gentle attitude that we care for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Pray for Knowledge and Understanding.** We learn from the Old Testament that God's sheep often wandered away. But the Lord said there would come a time when they would stop straying and return to the pen. He promised he would give them shepherds after his own heart, who would feed them with knowledge and understanding (Jer 3:15). To be good shepherds, we need to feed God's flock with knowledge and understanding. But where can we find such knowledge and understanding? We need to turn to the Chief Shepherd—Jesus Christ. It is the Lord who ultimately cares for and feeds his sheep. If we learn to always depend on him, he will give us the wisdom and ability to carry out our responsibility.

Write down other guidelines that have worked for you.

Write down new ideas that could work for you.



## Questions

1. Memorize Lk 22:32 and write it down.

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2. In order to care effectively, we must be like \_\_\_\_\_ who said, “And I lay down My life for the sheep” (Jn 10:15).
3. We should not care for others if we have to suffer and make sacrifices. T/F
4. Being a shepherd to the flock is a way to look good and effectively make a political run for the church council. T/F
5. Having a heart to care for one another is important for having a strong and unified church. T/F
6. Intercessory prayer is a very effective way to care for the brothers- and sisters-in-Christ. T/F
7. Jesus was a shepherd who led by example. What did he do? How can you shepherd by example?

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8. Memorize 2Tim 4:2 and write it down.

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9. When we entrust our brothers- and sisters-in-Christ to the Lord, we can care for them more effectively. T/F.
10. Read Acts 20:17-38. You may already be a shepherd to a sheep or even an entire flock. What have you learned from Paul that could help you become a better shepherd?

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## Case Studies

1. Tina has believed in Christ for about one full year now. One day, Julie, another believer, confided that she was on the verge of accepting her boyfriend's marriage proposal. Because Julie has been a believer all her life, Tina was surprised. Nevertheless, she gathered enough courage to suggest that Julie reconsider her marriage plans altogether, or consider it only after her fiance shared her beliefs. Now, it was Julie's turn to be surprised. "You know, I thought you were going to help me" screamed Julie. Tina thought to herself, I didn't make this one up. I know it's some where in the Bible. For the next several weeks, Tina and Julie avoided each other at church. Before long, Julie decides to stay away from church. Think about and discuss the problem in this situation. What do you think is the best way to resolve this type of situation? Have you ever found yourself pastoring in a similar situation?

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2. You've known Tom since high school. He was one of those boys who hung out at the neighborhood park as soon as the last bell rang. It was rumored that Tom and his pals were into drugs and alcohol. Like most students, you steered clear of Tom and his pals. Before long, the word on campus was that Tom had been expelled. Along with everyone else, you sighed with relief. But somehow, you bumped into Tom on the first day of college. "I'm clean now," he swore. "I'm here to get my life back on track."

You seized the opportunity to convert Tom, and you were not disappointed. When you invited him to join your Bible study group, he said yes. When you asked him to come to church, he said yes. When you asked him to receive water baptism, he said yes. But last week, when Tom failed to show up for Bible study or for church services, you went to his apartment to see if he had fallen ill. There you found him in a drunken stupor in the midst of a rowdy crowd. Enraged, you slammed the door.

In the past week, Tom has weighed heavily on your mind. Sometimes, you found yourself thinking that you want nothing to do with Tom – ever.

Other times, you found yourself struggling with the notion that here was a lost sheep waiting to be carried back to the fold.

When you woke up this morning, you resolved you would call Tom as soon as you got home from your last class. How would you prepare yourself in the meantime?

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If Tom promises that he definitely is going to put his life back on track this time around, how will you go about caring for him from now on? Use the basic principles in this lesson to guide you.

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### **Activity**

1. List out, on a sheet of paper, the names of at least five different church members you want to communicate your care and concern to over a few months. You can especially show your care and concern for those weak in the faith. Beside each name, list out how you plan to encourage or care for that member. Remember your care and concern could be as simple as offering up an intercessory prayer for those members who are weak in their faith. After you have accomplished all your pastoral goals, try to gauge how effective you think your pastoral work was. Do you think it was effective? Why or why not? Remember sometimes we don't see the effects of our pastoral work until much later. Do your very best to continue in your pastoral work until you feel that there is some effect. Don't hesitate to expand your operations if you feel you can take on the workload. God bless your work for him.

# Appendix A: Selected Reference Tools for Bible Study

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## Concordance

1. The NRSV Concordance Unabridged, ed. John R. Kohlenberger III. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991.
2. The NIV Exhaustive Concordance, ed. Edward W. Goodrick & John R. Kohlenberger III. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990.

## General Dictionary

3. The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 4 vols. & Supplementary, ed. George A. Buttrick. New York & Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962, 1976
4. The Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
5. The New Unger's Bible dictionary. Edited by M. F. Unger, R. K. Harrison. Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. (1988).

## Archaeology and Geography

6. Aharoni, Yohanon. The Archaeology of the Land of Israel. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982.
7. Aharoni, Y. & Avi-Yonah. The Macmillan Bible Atlas. New York: Macmillan, 1968.
8. Baly, Denis. The Geography of the Bible. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.
9. Shanks, Hershel & Dan P. Cole, ed. Archaeology and the Bible, 2 vols. Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1990.
10. May, Herbert G., ed. Oxford Bible Atlas. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.
11. Bimson, John J., ed. Baker Encyclopedia of Bible Atlas. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995.
12. The Zondervan pictorial encyclopedia of the Bible. Edited by M. C. Tenney. Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation. (1975).
13. Nelson's illustrated encyclopedia of Bible facts. Edited by J. I. Packer, M. C. Tenney, W. White, Jr. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc. (1985).

## Old Testament

14. Pritchard, James. Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969.
15. Bright, John. A History of Israel. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981.
16. Rad, Gerhard von. Old Testament Theology, 2 vols. New York: Harper & Row, 1962, 1965.
17. Boadt, Lawrence. Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction. New York: Paulist Press, 1984.
18. Anderson, B. W.. Understanding the Old Testament. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1985.
19. Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period 450 BCE to 600 CE, ed. Jacob Neusner. New York: Macmillan Library Reference USA and Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996.
20. The Encyclopedia of Judaism, ed. Geoffrey Wigoder. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989.

## New Testament

21. Duling, Dennis C. & Norman Perrin. The New Testament: Proclamation and Paranesis, Myth and History. Forth Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1994.
22. Barrett, C. K., ed. The New Testament Background: Writings from Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire That Illustrate Christian Origins. SF: Harper & Row San Francisco, 1989.

23. Kee, Howard Clark. *Understanding the New Testament*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997.
24. *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*, ed. Kurt Aland. United Bible Society, 1985.
25. Koester, Helmut. *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1: History, Culture and Religion of the Hellenistic Age. NY: Walter dy Gruyter, 1995.
26. Harrington, Daniel J.. *Interpreting the New Testament*. Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1979.
27. Stephens, William H.. *The New Testament World in Pictures*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987.
28. *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2 vols, ed. Everett Ferguson. NY and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.

### **Bible Software**

CD-ROM versions are available for some of the titles listed above. Visit the CBD web site at <http://www.christianbook.com>

For a powerful yet inexpensive piece of Bible software on CD-ROM, consider the Online Bible, available for Windows and Mac. Visit <http://www.davepohl.com>



# Help us improve this workbook by sending in this survey. We'd love to hear from you!

## 1. Which topics do you think were most useful and relevant to your needs?

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> All of the topics                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Studying God's Word                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding God's Words          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Applying God's Word                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Prayer Is A Constant                        | <input type="checkbox"/> What to Pray About                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What Makes an Effective Prayer               | <input type="checkbox"/> Grow in the Grace and Knowledge of Our Lord | <input type="checkbox"/> Overcoming Temptations and Sin     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Repentance                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Be Watchful                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Overcoming Trials and Tribulations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rejoicing in the Lord                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Be A Living Sacrifice                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Seek and Do God's Will             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your Role in the Body of Christ              | <input type="checkbox"/> Carrying Your Cross                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Share the Gospel, Near and Far     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Care for Your Brothers and Sisters in Christ |  |   |

## 2. What other topics should be included in this workbook?

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## 3. What do you think of the length of the lessons?

- Just right       Too long       Too short

## 4. What do you think of the principles and guidelines?

- Very Practical       Too theoretical       Too simplistic

## 5. How useful were the case studies?

- Very useful       Not very useful       Some of them were useful

## 6. How useful were the activities?

- Very useful       Not very useful       Some of them were useful

## 7. How long did it take you to finish the entire workbook?

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## 8. Do you have any other suggestions on how we could improve the workbook?

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## 9. Did you attend class for new believers at church?

- All the time       Sometimes       Never       No class is offered       I live far from church

## 10. Were the classes helpful?

- Very helpful       Not very helpful       Some of them were useful

Please explain why the classes were/weren't helpful

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11. How can the church better help you in your journey of faith?

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. As a new believer, what would you like to learn more about next? (You may choose more than one)

- Introduction to the Bible       How to study the Bible       More Christian living topics
- How to preach the gospel       How to help in church work
- Others: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
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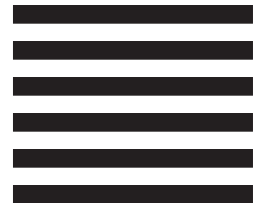


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