

Growing

in

Grace

Six Lessons

For Every Disciple

by

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Before You Begin

“Think very carefully... your next step could cost you everything.”

This is the message of Jesus to the crowds who just wanted to follow Him around and be associated with Him. But Jesus was not interested in drawing a big crowd; He wanted to train disciples. He told the crowds, “Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33).

Right now you are holding this book in your hands because someone loved you enough to invite you to follow Jesus together. The process of discipleship involves a lot of time, effort and energy, and your friend is actually making a kind and gracious offer; but it’s an offer with associated costs. Now is a good time to consider whether you are willing to pay the price that Jesus demands of those who will follow him.

When you placed your faith in the Lord Jesus, He forgave you every sin you have ever committed and every failure that’s still in your future, and He did it all for free. You were dead in your sins, and He paid the full price to give you new life—you paid nothing. You were born again, born into the family of God, born not by your own effort or anyone else’s effort, but born of God (John 1:12-13). You are His child through faith in Christ Jesus! This new life is yours for free, a gift of grace that cost you nothing, but cost Jesus everything.

Now you must determine to move on to maturity as a disciple of Jesus and maturity is costly. Jesus requires that you place your commitment to Him ahead of every other relationship (Luke 14:26). You will have to deny yourself and your personal ambitions (27). Jesus is calling on you to count the cost of being a true disciple, so you won’t falter when the going gets tough (28-32); and if you are having a hard time calculating the cost Jesus makes it simple: “Forsake everything and be my disciple” (33).

I started on this path of discipleship to Jesus more than 25 years ago now, years that have been full of excitement and eternal purpose. But it is true, I had to deny myself every ambition and relationship that made me feel important and all the stuff that made me feel secure, so that I could cast myself entirely upon Him. This is what I can tell you: everything I used to think was so important, I really don’t miss it anymore. Now I am living for His ambitions and enjoying new relationships in Him. I found out that discipleship to Jesus costs you everything, but you don’t miss it—He is so much better!

I hope that you will accept your friend’s offer and that you will make living for Christ your highest priority.

Every joy in Jesus,

Colin McDougall

Lesson 1: *How to Recognize True Authority and Submit to It*

All authority begins with God and is given by God. We will never be happy in Him until we learn from Jesus how to submit to God's authority.

Lesson 2: *How to Respond to Abused Authority*

When we submit to the authorities God has put in place over us we are really submitting to Him, even if the persons in authority are behaving wickedly.

Lesson 3: *How to Receive True Authority and Exercise It*

When we recognize that the authority we have is a stewardship from God and when we use that authority for the benefit of Jesus' servants, we will be rewarded with even greater authority.

Lesson 4: *How to be a Steward of the things of God*

A good steward must faithfully manage the good things God entrusts to him for the benefit and increase of God's kingdom.

Lesson 5: *Enjoying Fellowship with God's Family*

Your fellowship with other Christians will deepen as you learn to live in obedience and right relationship with God.

Lesson 6: *Restoring Fellowship That Has Been Broken*

Jesus intensely desires to have unbroken fellowship with us and to heal the relationships that are broken.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE TRUE AUTHORITY AND SUBMIT TO IT

Lesson 1

OVERVIEW

- ◆ God is the ultimate authority
- ◆ Jesus is your model for submission
- ◆ God ordained all authority in your life
- ◆ God ordains authority in your church

GOD IS THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY

Most of us have grown up thinking of the words "authority" and "submission" as control words, words that hem us in and limit our freedom. The Bible teaches a different view of authority and submission. In the Bible these are not control words but grace words, words that originate from the God of love.

You have experienced submission to authority many times during your life.

- * **When you consider the words "authority" and "submission" what picture from your past comes to mind? _____**

- * **Do you normally associate authority with grace? _____**

GOD IS THE PERFECT PICTURE OF GRACE IN AUTHORITY

In the Bible we learn that God is our Father and that everything He brings into our lives is for a good purpose. Can you picture a good father who truly loves his child? If the father truly loves his child won't he set boundaries and rules to protect the little one? Will he not carefully discipline that child with the goal of maturity and a better life in view?

For a child growing up in a loving home, submission just makes good sense. If you know that your father's rules and discipline are always for your benefit, and if you really trust your father's love, it makes perfect sense to obey him. Obeying him will always be good for you; disobeying will always be bad.

With this view of God as your loving Father in mind, let's begin to study where real authority comes from and how it can be an expression of love and grace rather than control and manipulation.

Read Psalm 100:2-3

- * **From these verses, what are three ways that God is greater than we are?**

A word about grace:

"Grace" means a free favor given from a loving heart. God's authority in our lives is a demonstration of His loving heart. He gives it to us freely for our good!

Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands! Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before His presence with singing. Know that the Lord, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

—Psalm 100:2, 3

How does God's greatness make the writer of Psalm 100 feel? _____

HOW WE REACT TO GOD'S GRACE MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Obviously, only people who trust God's love for them can really be happy when they think of God's power. It is easy to rejoice in God's greatness when you think of yourself as His child.

Psalm 100 was written for people who could recognize the grace of God and were happy to submit to Him. But 200 years later, the people in Isaiah's day bristled at the idea of authority. The facts of God's grace and love were the same as ever, but the response of the people had changed.

Read Isaiah 64:8-9 several times and identify two reasons in these verses why God has a right to exercise authority over us.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____

* How does God's right of authority make Isaiah feel? _____

When the psalm writer considered that God is his Maker, he rejoiced; but Isaiah was gripped with fear.

* What is the reason for the difference in emotion between Psalm 100 and Isaiah? _____

What about you? Which of these passages most describes your feelings about God's authority in your life right now, Psalm 100 or Isaiah 64?

Verse to Memorize

***Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.
For there is no authority except from God, and the
authorities that exist are appointed by God.***

Romans 13:1

Verse to Memorize → →

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

— Ephesians 2:10

Something you should know:

Your leader cares deeply about your progress as a disciple of Jesus. If you have problems with this study or a personal need, call your leader to pray with you.

My leader's phone number is:

In Ephesians 2:10 we are called God's *workmanship*:

* Do you think that your Creator has a right to determine your purpose in life? Yes ___ No ___

The second half of this verse tells us that God also specially crafted specific good works for you to do.

* How do you feel when you think that your Creator has also tailored a responsible position in His universe for you to fill? _____

You see, God's grace toward you has never wavered, and His authority in your life has always been for your good; but a lot depends on your response to Him! Let's take a look at one Person who has never doubted the graciousness of God's authority in His life.

JESUS IS YOUR MODEL FOR SUBMISSION

Of all the people who have ever lived, Jesus had the least need for control. Think about it! We are all glad that there are governing authorities in the world because we can imagine what a chaotic place it would be without some supervision. Mostly, we are glad for authorities to keep "the other people" from getting out of hand. One thing we can be pretty sure of: Jesus did not need a supervisor to keep Him from getting out of hand!

Even though Jesus did not need supervision, God placed Him under authority, and in Luke 2:51, we read that even Jesus submitted to the authority God had placed in His life.

When Jesus was 12 years old He traveled with His parents to Jerusalem for the Passover. On the way home to Nazareth they discovered that Jesus was missing from the caravan and had to return to Jerusalem the next day to look for Him. When they finally found Him in the Temple they were quite upset and rebuked Him. Jesus gave a very gracious answer to His parents and continued in subjection (obedience) to them.

JESUS DID NOT FEEL THAT SUBMISSION MEANT INFERIORITY

Jesus was clear about His mission even from childhood and could confound the greatest thinkers of His time.

* According to Luke 2:51, even though He was superior in every way to Mary and Joseph, how did Jesus behave toward them? _____

What role did Mary and Joseph have in Jesus' life? _____

Who put them in that role? _____

The Apostle Paul wrote in one of his letters about a time when Jesus will triumph over all authorities and rulers, and that Jesus will reign as King forever.

Read I Corinthians 15:22-28 three times and write in your own words the steps in God's plan for the end of the world.

1. Christ shall be made alive as the first fruit _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

* Even when Jesus rules the entire world, will there ever be a time when He is not subject to God the Father's authority (verse 28)? _____

Now read John 10:24-30 and answer the following questions:

* What do you think Jesus meant by His final statement in verse 30? _____

Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart.

—Luke 2:51

A little help...

The first step in God's plan for the world has already been accomplished! God did that when He raised Jesus from the dead. All of the rest of the steps follow naturally from the first Resurrection Day.

A word about the Trinity:

The Bible teaches that God is One and that there is only one God. God is a trinity of three Persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit. Though it is hard to comprehend, these three Persons are one God.

A word about Jesus' nature:

Jesus has existed eternally as the Son of God. But when He was conceived and born in Bethlehem, He took upon Himself the nature of a man. He is properly called both "Son of God" and "Son of Man," and He is the only person who is a union of both. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man.

"Equality is a quantitative term and therefore love often knows nothing of it. Authority exercised with humility and obedience accepted with delight are the very lines along which our spirits live."

— C. S. Lewis

Who gave Jesus His authority over the sheep? _____

By His own admission, who has greater authority than Jesus? _____

JESUS DID NOT FEEL THAT HUMILITY MEANT INFERIORITY

In Philippians 2:5-11, we have the definitive passage on Jesus' submission to the Father. Read the passage and consider these questions:

*** Was Jesus inferior to God in any way? _____**

Even though Christ Jesus is God, what lines of authority and submission do you discern in these verses? _____

How do you think Jesus felt about His Father sending Him to die on a cross? _____

Regardless of His feelings, how did Jesus respond to this very difficult assignment? _____

Let's pause for a moment and reflect on the most perfect love that has ever existed: the love between God the Father and God the Son. Don't you find it instructive that the grace and love of the Father is expressed through authority and that the love of the Son is expressed in submission? If this is the pattern for grace in the most perfect love relationship possible, it stands to reason that when God shares this grace with us, it will also be expressed through authority and submission.

We will now begin to look at how God extends this same grace to you and me in our daily lives.

GOD ORDAINED ALL AUTHORITY IN YOUR LIFE

Why do you think God instituted so many authority relationships in the world?

Most people think of authority as a necessary defense to keep selfish people from hurting others. But when we took a long look at Jesus' relationship to authority in His life, we discovered that Jesus was under an authority structure even within the God-head. He is completely unselfish, and yet there has never been a time nor will there ever be when He is not under the Father's authority.

Read John 15:14. If we read this verse out of context we may find ourselves disagreeing with it. We tend to think true friendship is not about one friend obeying the other friend's commands. But what if authority is not primarily about controlling people? God graciously instituted authority, not for control, but as a structure for demonstrating love!

Now read the whole context of John 15:9-14. Notice how Jesus kept His Father's commands in order to demonstrate love and how we keep Jesus' commands to demonstrate our love for Him. Imagine what it would be like if Jesus' love was flowing both directions through every authority relationship in our lives.... Now you're getting the idea!

GOVERNMENTAL LEADERS ARE A GIFT OF GOD'S GRACE

You might at first think that government authority has nothing to do with demonstrating love and grace. Perhaps you are thinking about government in an impersonal way. God's perspective on government is not impersonal at all!

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-4

* **What act of love and grace should Christians show toward their government leaders?** _____

Do you think this grace is for government as an impersonal force or for individual government leaders? _____

What good thing should we pray for every one of our leaders (read verse 4 again)? _____

Look at Romans 13:1-7.

* **According to verses 1 & 2 who puts leaders in charge over us?** _____

There is a saying, "Nothing is sure except death and taxes." We know that death came into the world because of sin, but whose idea was taxes? Look thoughtfully at verses 6-7. Many people think of government as a necessary evil, but what does the

You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

— John 15:14

A little help...

The phrase "he does not bear the sword in vain" in Romans 13:4 is talking about armed law enforcement. Even the use of deadly force in law enforcement is part of the ministry God has entrusted to our government.

Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor, Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

—Romans 13:7, 8

Bible say?

* Does the Bible call government authority an evil or a good thing? _____

Can you think of a time in your life when you rebelled against government authority? What was the result? _____

Now go back and read Romans 13, this time verses 1-8. Notice how Paul emphasizes the grace in authority in verse 8. The authority structures were all instituted as a way to demonstrate love, and when we love one another we have fulfilled the Law.

PARENTS ARE A GIFT OF GOD'S GRACE

Ephesians 6:1-3 gives us insight into the biblical view of parental authority.

* What two responses does God expect children to make toward their parents?

1. _____

2. _____

Whose idea was fatherhood? _____

Not only did God create fatherhood, He created it to reflect an essential part of His character and nature. God was the father of Jesus even before He created people. Earthly fathers should be a picture of God's love and nurture. In the same way we should honor our parents as a picture of the way we respect our heavenly Father.

Read Hebrews 12:7-10 and reflect on the way God intends parenthood to be a demonstration of gracious authority.

* How should we respond to earthly fathers when they correct us? _____

Something you should know:

"Head" is an authority word indicating spiritual leadership.

A word about submission:

Submission means bringing ourselves into line with the will of someone in authority, not in a robotic way but in a way that shows true love. This kind of submission requires us to find appropriate ways to express our whole heart, including objections and misgivings.

THE HEAD OF OUR HOME IS A GOOD GIFT OF GOD'S GRACE

After reading 1 Corinthians 11:3, describe in your own words the line of authority that God created for mankind.

Remember that we read in Philippians 2 that even though Christ Jesus was equal with God, He still submitted and obeyed Him. When the Bible teaches that "the head of woman is man," does this mean that women are inferior? No. This is simply God's line of authority.

Jesus was unquestionably superior to Mary and Joseph, but because of their authority role in His life "he was subject to them."

* **How does it make you feel when you are under the authority of people who are not as qualified as you are?** _____

Now read Ephesians 5:22-33. What is the "bottom line" for the husband-wife re-relationship in verse 33? _____

In verses 22 and 23, what is the reason why wives should submit to their husbands? _____

Remembering that Jesus loved the church in spite of her disobedience to Him, how do you think God would have a Christian husband respond to an unsupportive wife?

Do you think that a wife should submit to her husband only when she thinks he is right? Yes ____ No ____

What about in her relationship with Jesus, should she submit only to Jesus' words that she agrees with? Yes ____ No ____

* **How do you think a godly wife should respond to her husband when she is convinced that he is wrong?** _____

In every area of our lives there are authority relationships that God intends as channels for us to demonstrate love to one another. Now let's look specifically at the ways we should relate in the family of God.

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body."

— Ephesians 5: 22, 23

GOD ORDAINS THE AUTHORITY IN YOUR CHURCH

A word about the church:

The church was founded by Jesus Christ, paid for by Jesus' blood, and set apart as Jesus' Bride. For these reasons Jesus has absolute authority over the church. The church is composed of everyone since the time of Jesus who has put his faith in Him, and knows Him as Savior. This is called the universal church.

The universal church has existed for 2000 years and has millions of members, but these members have been incorporated into thousands of local churches. You joined the universal church when you put your faith in Jesus, but you also need to participate in a local church near you. Each local church has its own method of incorporating new members—just ask them how to join!

In I Timothy 3:15 the Bible talks about proper conduct "in the house of God, which is the church of the living God." You would think that since the church is the household of God, the authority relationships in the church should be especially gracious. And since Jesus is its perfect leader, you would think that obedience to Him would be easy; but we have all seen many instances when the church was not obedient to Jesus Christ.

- * After reading Ephesians 5:22-32, why do you think the Bible says in verse 24 that "the church is subject to Christ"? _____

THE CHURCH IS JESUS' SPECIAL LOVE

Jesus demonstrates His authority over the church by continuing to care for her. List in your own words the ways in which Jesus loves and cares for the church. Look at verses 25-27 for ideas.

- * What does Ephesians 5:27 say about Jesus' plan for the church? _____

When Jesus left the earth. He gave His twelve disciples the responsibility to make disciples to Him from all the nations and to teach them to obey Jesus' commands. For twenty centuries Jesus has been building His church in just this way: by using His faithful followers to make new disciples and to teach them to obey His commands.

JESUS HAS A SPECIAL PLAN FOR HIS CHURCH

Even today, the churches that truly belong to Jesus continue to be built up in the same way: followers of Jesus teach others to obey His commands and to be His disciples. Some of the mature disciples in every church have been given leadership responsibility to pastor and to teach the churches. You also have an important part to play in a local church. You need to find a church where the leaders can truly say, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Those leaders will have the authority to shape you as a disciple of Christ Jesus, so make sure that they themselves are following Christ—that is who their authority comes from.

Now look at Hebrews 13:7 and 17.

- * Who will church leaders have to give account to? _____

When you realize that your church leaders will be held accountable for their stewardship, does this help you as a follower? _____

Ephesians 1:22 says that Jesus Christ is head over all things in the church. If church leaders have to give account to Jesus Christ who is head of all things to the church, then who do you think gave them their responsibility? _____

Have you ever had to give account to your boss when your area of responsibility was in a mess? How did you feel just before that meeting? The verses you just read in Hebrews 13 are another reminder that God has not given us authority relationships for the purpose of control but as a script for showing love. Leaders show love by teaching and opening up their lives to be an example. The rest of us show love to them by cooperating with them, so that they will succeed in the task that Jesus has given them.

*** What are some ways you can think of to encourage the leaders in your church? _____**

JESUS WANTS HIS ATTITUDE TO CHARACTERIZE HIS CHURCH

In Luke 22:25-27, Jesus says that authority in His kingdom is exercised by different principles than in the world. Fill in the chart to show how powerful people in the world use their authority and how Christian leaders use theirs.

How Worldly Rulers Treat Others	How Disciples of Jesus Lead
1. They exercise lordship	1. They serve
2.	2.
3.	3.

From what you know of Jesus' life on earth,

*** What are some ways that Jesus served His disciples? _____**

Turn now to Acts 14:23.

*** How did the early Christian leaders receive their authority? _____**

Did they run for office in a political campaign or work hard to earn their authority? _____

Now look back at Luke 22:28-30

*** How did the Apostles get their place of authority in the Kingdom? _____**

And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church.

—Ephesians 1:22

Read Luke 22:24-30.

Something you should know:

Jesus is the Christ, the Jewish Messiah that God promised to send to be King of the Jews. One of the frequently-repeated prophecies about the Christ was that He would be a Servant-King (Isaiah 42:1 and 49:5-7). It was the servanthood of Jesus Christ that made it so difficult for His countrymen to believe on Him.

Something you should know:

I Timothy 1:12 is an important verse about how the apostles received authority: "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry..."

RECOGNIZING TRUE AUTHORITY AND SUBMITTING TO IT

Central Truth of Lesson One:

All authority begins with God and is given by God. We will never be happy in Him until we learn from Jesus how to submit to God's authority.

Read the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22:1-17. Abraham had to be in complete submission to God in order to obey His command to sacrifice Isaac. Do you think that your submission could extend that far? Isaac was young and strong enough to run away from Abraham who was an old man at the time.

- * Do you think you would have been willing to obey your father if he wanted to tie you to an altar? _____

What impact do you think that this experience had on the father-son relationship between Abraham and Isaac? _____

Something you should know:

Abraham fully intended to sacrifice Isaac on the altar, but he was expecting God to raise him up from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). We can identify with the emotions of Abraham and Isaac in this passage, but God wants us to realize how He felt when His Son was sacrificed on the cross.

God has clearly used the story of Abraham as a picture to teach us His grace toward us and of Jesus' obedient love.

- * Does it seem fair to you that God would be willing to put Abraham and Isaac through so much pain for our benefit? _____

What about suffering in your life right now? If God intends to accomplish His purposes through your suffering, do you think that is fair?

- * Are there any authorities in your life right now that you are not submitting to? _____

What will you need to do in order to follow Jesus' example of submission? _____

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

— Hebrews 11:17-19

TALKING TO GOD: Find a quiet place where you can talk with God about the authorities in your life. Tell Him why it is hard for you to submit. Ask Him for grace to follow the example of Jesus.

Next Time:

Lesson Number _____ Pages _____ to _____

Memory Verse _____

We will meet at _____ (time) on _____ (day) _____ (place)

HOW TO RESPOND TO ABUSED AUTHORITY

Lesson 2

OVERVIEW

- ◆ Even abused authority originates with God
- ◆ When you submit to authority you are honoring God
- ◆ When you submit to authority your burden grows lighter
- ◆ Someday you may have to disobey men

EVEN ABUSED AUTHORITY ORIGINATES WITH GOD

Our modern society places a high value on individual rights, and we are quick to make loud objections whenever one of our rights is violated. The unfortunate fact is that all of our relationships involve some pain because of sin, and our authority relationships are often especially painful. Jesus has a few words of instruction about how to relate to someone who is abusing his authority in your life.

Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 23:1-4, even the religious rulers who rejected Jesus deserved obedience—but He did not call the disciples to blind obedience. Read carefully verse 4.

* **Were the scribes and Pharisees good examples of holy living?** _____

In what ways were the scribes and Pharisees abusing their spiritual authority? _____

To what extent did Jesus instruct His disciples to submit to these abusers of authority (verse 3)? _____

In Acts 23:1-3, the Bible tells us that even wicked rulers are to be honored. Paul felt that his rights had been violated when a police officer hit him in the mouth. Since he had not broken any laws he felt free to assert his rights. Would you agree with him? Now read verses 4 and 5. Paul abruptly stopped his tirade against the religious council when he was told that the chairman of the council was Ananias, the high priest.

* **What made Paul change his tune?** _____

Thinking back to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 23 we can see that both Jesus and Paul recognized that God put the rulers in authority. Even when those rulers abused their authority, they were to be obeyed. We can obey even wicked men, but we must never follow their wicked ways.

Later on in this lesson we will review a few cases where disobedience was necessary. You can probably imagine a scenario where you believe disobedience to authority is the proper response—please be patient because we will discuss these situations very soon.

"Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers."

—Matthew 23:1-4

A little help . . .

Paul had never met this high priest Ananias in person and did not recognize him until he was informed by some of the bystanders. Paul recognized that his need to obey God's appointed priest was greater than his need to assert his rights.

* But for you, right now, is there any unbearable persecution in your life from any authority? _____

Are you presently under the authority of anyone that you think God did not establish over you? _____

Do you think that any of the authority in your life is more wicked than the authorities Jesus and Paul had to deal with? _____

Verse to memorize → →

Memory Verse:

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

1 Peter 5:6, 7

WHEN YOU SUBMIT TO AUTHORITY YOU ARE HONORING GOD

All of our study for this section comes from Peter's first letter to the churches. Before we look at what Peter has to teach us about submitting to authority, it is good for us to see how Jesus taught this lesson to him. Read about it in Matthew 17:24-27.

It seems that Peter was cornered by some tax collectors who were putting pressure on him to pay his share of the temple tax. Peter knew that Jesus didn't have money to pay and so he put the tax collectors on "hold" and went to get directions from Jesus. He learned an important lesson on liberty and submission that stayed with him for the rest of his life.

Jesus pointed out since God owns all things and we are His children, we have a right to freedom from taxation and submission to men. As far as our self-concept is concerned, we know we are children of God and free men, but because we are children of God we also respect the authorities that God has established and try never to offend them.

Jesus gave Peter an object lesson that he never forgot. Peter the fisherman was sent to the sea where he cast in a line and pulled in a fish. When he cleaned the fish, he found a *stater* inside, the very coin he needed to pay the tax for himself and for Jesus. God established the authorities, so God enabled His children to pay the tax in support of those very authorities. It all came from God.

1. GOD WANTS US TO OBEY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS—I PETER 2:13-17

* In what way is our submission to the government a service "for the Lord's sake"? _____

What is God's intention or purpose in establishing government? _____

Read carefully verse 16.

* How can you be both free and submissive to the government? _____

Who are you really obeying when you submit to the government? _____

Peter wants us to learn the surprising freedom that comes from submitting to God. Before we became Christians we were not free in our submission to the government—we obeyed because we had to. But now we are free. We submit to the government, not because we are afraid of their punishment, but because we love God and want to bring glory to Him. Now look back to verse 12.

* How will your submitting to the government glorify God? _____

Something you should know:

Peter was the disciple Jesus appointed to lead the early church. First Peter is a letter Peter wrote to the Jewish believers who had been forced out of Jerusalem and Rome during Emperor Claudius' persecution of the Jews. You might think that the believers would rebel against such a tyrannical ruler, but Peter repeats Jesus' surprising teaching of obedience.

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.

— 1 Peter 2:15, 16

Something you should know:

Isaiah 53 is the prophecy of how Jesus would suffer for us on the cross. It is the most overwhelming proof that Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah. Peter explains in 1 Peter 2:21-25 that Jesus was able to endure injustice and persecution because He knew that God would approve Him.

A special word to wives of abuse:

Submission does not mean covering up for an abusive husband. After completing the section of this lesson called "Someday You May Have to Disobey" make a note to talk with your leader or with one of the spiritual leaders in your church if you feel you are in danger at home.

2. GOD WANTS US TO OBEY UNJUST BOSSES—1 PETER 2:18-25

In Peter's day there were no labor unions or OSHA standards. If your boss was cruel or unjust, you couldn't go over his head to a supervisor or quit and look for a better job.

* **What are the reasons most people try to get along with a bad-tempered boss?** _____

What are the reasons that Peter mentions? _____

Under today's labor laws, you do not have to stay in an oppressive situation. However, if you do decide to stay in the situation, here are a couple of things to consider:

* **What attitude should you adopt?** _____

What problems do you foresee if you follow Jesus' example? _____

What benefits can you expect to receive? _____

3. GOD WANTS US TO OBEY UNGODLY HUSBANDS—1 PETER 3:1-6

We read in Lesson One about the proper relationship between a husband and his wife from Ephesians 5. But that was describing a home where both husband and wife are believers. First Peter 3 is teaching wives how to behave toward a husband who is unwilling to obey the Bible.

* **What attitude and conduct should a Christian woman have toward such a husband?** _____

Notice the word "likewise" in verse 1. Look back to the end of chapter two to find the example for our conduct.

* **Whose example are wives following when they submit to disobedient husbands?** _____

Another example of submission that wives should follow are "the holy women in former times." Sarah is a good example of submission because she obeyed Abraham in many difficult situations. Abraham was getting direct guidance from God, but Sarah was having to simply take Abraham's word for it. Sarah obeyed Abraham when he left their home town for a new country. Sarah obeyed when she moved out of her comfortable home and lived in a tent for the rest of her life. Twice she obeyed Abraham when he allowed her to be taken into the royal harem. You must admit, Sarah obeyed Abraham during some very difficult times.

But Peter is thinking of another time when Sarah obeyed. He is referring in I Peter 3:6 to the time when Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him "my lord." You can read that story in Genesis 18:1-13. Abraham met some special travelers and invited them to dinner without consulting with Sarah. He just told her to make three very large loaves of bread for dinner—the grinding, sifting and baking would take her most of the afternoon over a wood fire. Abraham knew that these three visitors included two angels and the Lord Himself, but it seems Abraham forgot to mention this to Sarah. She did not even get to participate in the conversation except to listen to bits and pieces through the side of the tent.

* **Of all the hard times when Sarah had to submit to Abraham, why do you think Peter thought this was such a good example?** _____

In verse 6, wives are told to submit without being afraid.

* **What is so scary about submission?** _____

Read Genesis 18:1-13

A word about sex:

Sarah called Abraham "my lord" in Genesis 18:12. The verse indicates that this married couple were old enough that they were not having regular sexual relations any more. Sarah realized that in order to have a baby they would need to restore their sexual relationship.

WHEN YOU SUBMIT TO AUTHORITY YOUR BURDEN GROWS LIGHTER

Matthew 11:27-30 says, "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Jesus knew His true authority, and the freedom in submission.

JESUS UNDERSTANDS THE FREEDOM OF SUBMISSION TO GOD

* Who did Jesus identify as His authority? _____

Who gave Jesus all the authority that He has? _____

A yoke is a heavy beam that joins two oxen together to allow them to pull an even heavier plow.

* Why would Jesus recommend that weary people should come into His yoke? _____

It seems illogical that when you become tired of carrying the burden of life, you can take up Jesus' yoke and find it easy and light. But this is the secret of submission. Notice in verse 29 how Jesus describes His attributes that make submission easy for those who learn from Him.

* What are Jesus' two character qualities that will enable you to rest easy even during severe hardship? _____

How did He exhibit gentleness when He suffered abuse? _____

What kinds of suffering are you experiencing right now in your life? _____

What does Jesus want you to do about your suffering? _____

How would submitting to Jesus make your life easier? _____

WHEN SUBMISSION SEEMS HEAVY, YOU CAN CAST THE BURDEN UPON HIM

Turn to I Peter 5:5-7 and read it several times.

* In a church, whose authority should we submit to? _____

Something you should know:

The word "gentle" in verse 29 can also be translated "meek"! Its best definition is "strength under control." Although He was gentle and meek, no one could ever describe Jesus as a weak man.

It is especially hard to submit to spiritual leaders who act in a prideful manner who refuse to listen to advice or who never admit their mistakes. But if we will humble ourselves and submit to our leaders, God has given us a great promise.

* **What is God's promise to us?** _____

God promises to exalt us at the appropriate time and to give us grace in the meantime. It is a fact of the Christian life, however that the meantime can stretch out to be a long time!

* **What action does verse 7 tell you to take while you are suffering under a bad leader?** _____

SOMEDAY YOU MAY HAVE TO DISOBEY MEN

A little help . . .

Read Daniel 3:16-18 and Acts 4:19 & 5:29 for more information on this concept.

Something you should know:

Rahab's action was so courageous that she is mentioned in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 as an outstanding woman of faith.

A little help...

At the time when Abigail met David, he was living in exile while King Saul hunted him to kill him. Abigail knew that God had promised to make David the next king, and she believed God's promise. She was loyal to David as God's anointed servant.

Situations where a Christian should disobey a person in authority are extremely rare but they do occur. Here are six clear cases from the Bible. As you read them try to discern a common theme.

1. MIDWIVES FOR LIFE

Read Exodus 1:15-17. Now read verse 17 again, very carefully. State in your own words the reason why the midwives disobeyed the authority of the king. _____

Now look at verse 20 and see whether you agree that the midwives did the right thing.

The midwives disobeyed Pharaoh to save _____.

They disobeyed Pharaoh because they feared _____.

2. A PROSTITUTE'S COURAGE

In Joshua 2:1-14 we read the story of Rahab another woman who found herself in a situation where she felt she had to disobey the king. Read verses 11-13 carefully and notice the two reasons Rahab disobeyed the king.

Rahab disobeyed the king to save _____.

Rahab disobeyed the king because she feared _____.

3. A WIFE TO THE RESCUE

Abigail was another woman who was faced with a life-and-death situation (1 Samuel 25). She took drastic action that she knew her husband would not want her to take, but she did it to save the lives of her household. Besides rescuing her family, Abigail stated another reason for disobeying her husband. Read verses 1-31.

Abigail disobeyed her husband to save _____.

Abigail disobeyed her husband because she _____.

4. THREE MEN IN THE HOT SEAT

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were three Jewish men who had been promoted to high positions in Nebuchadnezzar's government (Daniel 3:16-18). Now go back and look at verse 14.

* What do you think was the reason the Jews were refusing to obey the king? _____

Do you think that the answer of these three officers was disrespectful to the king? _____

These three men disobeyed _____ at the risk of their lives because they were determined to obey _____.

5. LION-TAMING FAITH

Many years later Daniel himself disobeyed a royal decree when King Darius made a law forbidding prayer. The Bible says that when Daniel knew that the decree had been signed into law, he still kept praying three times a day just as he had always done. You can read this story in Daniel 6:10-23. Daniel obediently served three different kings during his career, but he would not obey Darius' command to quit praying.

Daniel disobeyed _____ at the risk of his life because he was determined to obey _____.

It was not just during the Old Testament times that people were called upon to disobey. Peter, a disciple and close follower of Jesus, found himself in just this kind of situation.

6. AN APOSTLE GOES TO JAIL

Peter has a lot to say about submitting to authority. One day Peter healed a lame man in the temple and got into trouble for it. Read Acts 4:13-20 and 5:29 and see where Peter drew the line on submission.

Look carefully at Acts 4:18.

* **What was the command that Peter realized he could never obey? ____**

Now look at Peter's answer in verses 19-20. We might have been tempted to try to pacify the angry rulers with soft words and polite promises. Write Peter's bold answer in your own words. _____

Peter's obedience to Jesus' commands kept getting him into trouble and landed him back in jail. In fact Peter was imprisoned three times in the book of Acts. The command of the rulers was not to preach anymore in Jesus' name, but now look at Acts 5:19-20.

* **Who else was giving Peter orders, and what was His command? ____**

Obviously the rulers were correct in thinking that Peter had disobeyed them.

* **What was Peter's reasoning when he answered them in 5:29? ____**

Situations that require disobedience are very rare. In fact you have now read almost all of the cases in the Bible. From the things we have read, consider the following questions:

* **When do you think it would be right for you to disobey in your home?**

Something you should know:

Peter was arrested and imprisoned three times in the Book of Acts. He was on death row at least twice, all because of preaching Jesus.

The Great Commission:

Jesus has given to every Christian the responsibility to go and make disciples who will obey His commands (Matthew 28:18-20). If Peter was in any doubt about this, God sent an angel to confirm the importance of speaking the word of life.

in your church? _____

to disobey elected officials? _____

Have you ever encountered a situation like this? _____

RESPONDING TO AUTHORITY THAT IS BEING ABUSED

CENTRAL TRUTH OF LESSON TWO:

When we submit to the authorities God has put in place over us we are really submitting to Him, even if the persons in authority are behaving wickedly.

One day while David was still in training to become king of Israel, wicked King Saul came hunting him to kill him. Read the amazing story of David's gracious response to the wicked king in I Samuel 24:1-15.

* **What do you think it was about Saul that kept David from killing him?** _____

Even though David was willing to tell King Saul the truth about Saul's sin, notice the respectful terms he used to speak to him. Look carefully at verse 8 and verse 11.

* **What titles does he use to address Saul?** _____

What titles does he use to describe himself in verse 14? _____

TALKING TO GOD: Find a quiet place to be alone with God. Be very honest with Him about any authorities in your life that you feel are behaving abusively or who are not acting for your best interest. If you have come to recognize that God put these authorities in your life, tell Him that you are willing to submit to them only because you want to submit to Him. Ask Him to change the abusive behavior of your leaders or else change your leaders. Then ask Him for patience to treat the abusive leader respectfully until God chooses to remove him.

* **My thoughts about the authorities in my life** _____

My feelings when I think about obeying people in my life that have hurt me

My questions about when it is right to disobey _____

Next Week:

Lesson Number _____ Pages _____ to _____

Memory Verse _____

We will meet at _____ (time) on _____ (day) _____ (place)

Three truths David understood about authority:

- *The Lord appoints those who are in authority over us.*
- *Rebellion is a sin against God.*
- *The Lord will judge and punish those who abuse their authority over us.*

HOW TO RECEIVE TRUE AUTHORITY AND EXERCISE IT

Lesson 3

OVERVIEW

- ◆ You were made to rule
- ◆ God has given you high authority
- ◆ To use your authority wisely you must learn to discern God's will
- ◆ All authority you receive is a stewardship from God

YOU WERE MADE TO RULE

Wouldn't it be great if you could have a job that was of truly world-changing significance and you were truly equipped to do it? What if your job description was tailor-made to suit you? What if your immediate supervisor was behind you 100 per cent and was committed to helping you succeed? How fulfilling that work would be! Right at the beginning of the Bible we discover that this is what God intended for mankind. You were made to exercise the authority that He has delegated to you.

GOD CREATED MAN AND WOMAN TO RULE THE WORLD

- * According to Genesis 1:26-28, what was the work that man was originally made to do? _____

Look carefully at verses 27 and 28.

- * Was only the man given dominion over the earth or was it both the woman and the man? _____

Do you think that God intended Adam and Eve to succeed? _____

The authority that God gave Adam was real authority. Read Genesis 2:19.

- * How did God show respect for Adam? _____

How did He show that He really intended for Adam to be in charge over His creation? _____

Unfortunately, mankind failed in his first assignment from God. Adam and Eve tried to second-guess the wisdom of God in the garden (Genesis 3) and through selfish choices plunged the whole world into the chaos of sin. But in Christ Jesus man is no longer bound to continue in those selfish and power-hungry ways. Jesus is the example of true authority as God intended it to be, a means of serving others.

JESUS IS OUR EXAMPLE FOR HOW TO RULE

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:28, 29

A little help . . .

To "have dominion" is another authority word. It means to "rule" or "administrate".

←←Verses to Memorize

And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me...

— Luke 22:29

A word to wise leaders:

"I am speaking of a leadership in which power is constantly abandoned in favor of love. It is true spiritual leadership. Powerlessness and humility in the spiritual life do not refer to people who have no spine and who let everyone else make decisions for them [but] to people who are so deeply in love with Jesus that they are ready to follow Him wherever He guides...."

— Henri Nouwen

In Luke 22:24-30 we see that Jesus needed to teach his men an important lesson about exercising authority without using physical, financial or political power. They would not get their authority the way the world's political leaders do, and Jesus did not intend for them to exercise the authority in worldly ways. The powerful people in the world campaign for office, bribe others, undermine their opponents and reward their allies. Disciples of Jesus should not think about authority in terms of personal power but as a gift of Jesus' grace by which they can serve others.

Look carefully at verse 22:29.

*** How did Jesus get His great authority? _____**

Write in your own words the difference between the way Jesus exercises authority and the way the leaders of this world use their authority.

You really were made to rule. This is frightening for some Christians because they find the responsibility of leadership very stressful. But God has created you to succeed and has committed Himself to help you successfully exercise the authority that He gives you. What He requires of you is that you be faithful as a steward over everything He puts in your charge.

GOD HAS GIVEN YOU HIGH AUTHORITY

Do you ever feel that nobody listens to you or that you don't have very much real clout? As we discovered in our reading of Genesis, we were made to rule. Besides the regular exercise of the authority God gave us over His created world, He has given expanded authority to His children—those who have put their faith in Jesus.

EVERY DISCIPLE OF JESUS HAS CONSIDERABLE AUTHORITY TODAY

Read the following Scriptures and write in your own words the authority that the Bible says you already have in Jesus.

John 1:12 _____

John 16:23-24 _____

Matthew 28:18-20 _____

The authority to become a child of God includes the authority to make requisitions in Jesus' name. To be able to make requisitions under the king's signature is very significant authority. It is like receiving a company credit card. You can only charge purchases that are for the increase of the kingdom, but other than that, there is no credit limit. Do you see how Jesus reserves greater authority to make requisitions and to make disciples for those who are faithfully following Him?

But there is even greater authority in store for those who are wise in their use of the authority they have already received.

FAITHFUL DISCIPLES CAN EXPECT INCREASED AUTHORITY IN THE FUTURE

Read Revelation 2:26-27 and Revelation 3:21. According to these verses in Revelation, in His coming kingdom Jesus will delegate authority over the nations of this world.

* Who gave Jesus this authority? _____

What is the requirement for a Christian to receive this future authority?

In Luke 19:12-26 we read the parable of the servants and the minas. A mina is a considerable amount of money, worth about \$10,000 in today's currency. By wisely investing their master's money, the good servants brought additional wealth to the kingdom. Notice carefully verses 17 and 19.

* What was the appropriate reward for the good servants? _____

What was the characteristic of these servants that most pleased the master? _____

How does it make you feel when you think about exercising authority in Jesus' heavenly kingdom? _____

Something you should know:

In John 1:12 to "receive" Jesus means to welcome Him. Only those who welcome Jesus and believe in Him (put their trust in Him) have the right to become children of God. If you have never expressed to Jesus that you welcome Him and trust in Him, please call your leader immediately and tell him/her that you want to put your trust in Jesus.

A word about overcoming:

Each of the seven letters in Revelation 2-3 concludes with a promise from Jesus for those who overcome. Overcomers are those Christians who love Jesus enough to faithfully follow Him. Jesus gives His faithful followers power to overcome the evil world around them, and He promises them authority in His eternal Kingdom

We will consider this parable in greater depth in Lesson Four, but even from our study up to this point it is clear that Jesus wants to share His great authority with us, and that He will share more and more of it with us as a reward for faithfulness. By now you may be starting to realize that you have some attitudes that will need to change, so that Jesus can give you His reward.

* **Some attitudes I need to change are:** _____

It would be stressful and scary to be placed in authority over ten cities if we had no help. Jesus does not delegate authority to make us fearful but to reward faithfulness. When we are ruling cities in His heavenly kingdom we will be in constant communication with Him and will know His perfect plan in each situation. But what about the stress of exercising authority today?

One of the joys of being a disciple of Jesus is that throughout your life on earth you can be in constant communication with the Lord, and He will be constantly revealing to you the next step. We don't have to wait for heaven to have this kind of close fellowship with Jesus! He does not intend for His gracious gift of authority to be a stress to you--it can be and should be a joy. We will find out how to discern the Lord's plan in the next section.

TO USE YOUR AUTHORITY WISELY, YOU MUST LEARN TO DISCERN GOD'S WILL

One of the obvious facts about Jesus' life is that He prayed a lot. Jesus knew all there was to know about God and yet He felt it necessary to pray.

* Why do you think He prayed? _____

There are several reasons why Jesus prayed: to receive direction from His Father; to give an example to His disciples, etc. But one reason we should not forget is that Jesus loved His Father and enjoyed every opportunity for fellowship with Him.

WE CAN PARTICIPATE IN GOD'S WILL BY PRAYER

Read carefully Matthew 6:9-10. Jesus does not mean that we should recite these words, but rather that we should continually pray in this way, especially for God's will to be accomplished.

* To what extent is God's will accomplished every day in heaven? _____

What would it mean for God's perfect will to be done on earth to the same extent as it is in heaven? _____

When we pray the prayer of verse 10, we are asking God to extend His kingdom through us. Could a Christian really pray this prayer and continue to disobey God in his daily life? _____

GOD'S WILL IS ACCOMPLISHED BY GODLY WISDOM

Read carefully James 3:13-18.

* According to verse 13, what will characterize my conduct if I am using my authority wisely to accomplish God's will? _____

Fill in the chart to show the characteristics of "earthly wisdom" and of the "wisdom from above."

Earthly wisdom (James 3:14-16)	Wisdom from Above (James 3:17)
1. bitter envy	1. pure
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.

Something you should know:

God's kingdom is the realm in which His will is being perfectly accomplished.

In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

— Matthew 6:9, 10

A word about discerning God's will:

As children grow up in the world, they become more and more successful at using "earthly wisdom" to get what they want. Disciples of Jesus as they mature become more successful at using "wisdom from above" to get what God wants. This is what "discerning God's will" means. As you grow in Christ you should find the attitudes of God's wisdom more evident in your life.

This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.

—James 3:15

Something you should know:

It is not really a valid option for a Christian to continue living in the self-centered universe. Jesus died to deliver us from our self-centered life of sin, as the Bible says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Look carefully at verse 15.

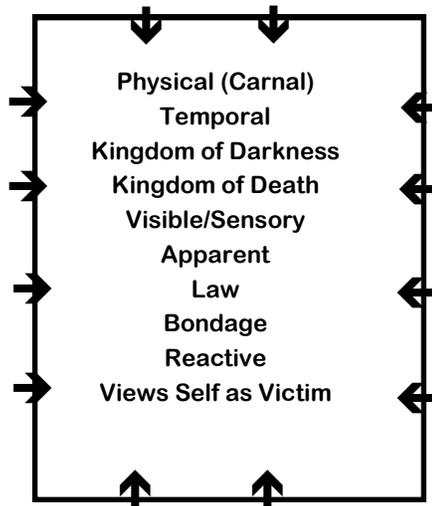
* Whose will is it that I use my authority selfishly? _____

Now look at the diagram below.

Universes of Value

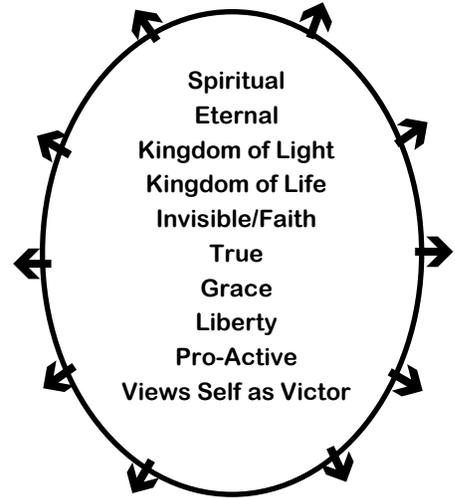
Self-Centered Universe

Isaiah 53:6; James 3:13-16



God-Centered Universe

Deuteronomy 6:1-7
II Corinthians 4:16-18



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The inward looking wisdom is all about me. The wisdom from above is all about others.

* Why do you think the Bible says it is wiser to use your God-given authority for the good of others than to use it for your own benefit? _____

ALL AUTHORITY YOU RECEIVE IS A GRACIOUS GIFT FROM GOD

Take a few minutes and list all of the areas of authority you are currently responsible for. Don't forget to include your level of authority at work, in your home, at church, at school or any other area of life.

* Though some of your authority was given to you by others, who is the ultimate source of all your authority? _____

GOD GAVE YOU AUTHORITY SO YOU WOULD TAKE CARE OF HIS PEOPLE

Read the parable in Luke 12:40-48 putting yourself in the place of the faithful and wise servant and Jesus in the place of the master.

* According to verse 42, why did Jesus put you in authority over some of His people? _____

Jesus intends for us to take care of His people for Him.

* What will be the reward for the steward who faithfully cares for Jesus' beloved servants? _____

The reward for faithful use of authority is increased authority, and God's purpose in graciously giving us this authority is to take care of His people.

In I Peter 5:1-4, "Shepherd the flock" is another way of saying "take care of Jesus' servants." List three wrong motivations for exercising authority.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Has there ever been a responsibility you were given that you fulfilled for one of these wrong motivations?

At the beginning of this section you listed out your areas of responsibility; now write the names of people whom you are responsible to take care of. These may be children or grandchildren, disciples, prayer partners, students or employees you manage. (If you can't think of anyone whom you are responsible for, write down the names of people you are praying for or whom you would like to introduce to faith in Jesus.) Then in the space next to each person's name write down your understanding of what Jesus wants you to do to care for each one.

"Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

—Luke 12:40

Something you should know:

Jesus used several master-servant parables to teach His disciples to watch expectantly for His return. This teaching is called "the imminent return of Christ." It means that Jesus will come back to earth when we least expect Him—perhaps today!

← Read 1 Peter 5:1-4

A word about crowns:

A crown in the Bible is a symbol of authority as well as a medal of honor for true soldiers. Jesus will give a "medal of honor" to everyone who loves Him enough to suffer (2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; Revelation 2:10).

Name

I need to shepherd them by

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

* Who is the Chief Shepherd? _____

What reward will Jesus give to faithful stewards? _____

RECEIVING TRUE AUTHORITY AND EXERCISING IT

CENTRAL TRUTH OF LESSON THREE:

When we recognize that the authority we have is a stewardship from God and when we use that authority for the benefit of Jesus' servants, we will be rewarded with even greater authority.

Jesus always uses His authority to lighten your load. His yoke is easy because He takes the weight on Himself, and He never asks you to do something that will be hurtful to you in the end (Matthew 11:28-30). The best way to exercise authority is to recognize that Jesus received it from His Father and has delegated it to you. Now you should exercise this God-given authority in the same way that Jesus does.

Take the weight.

Jesus is a true leader. True leaders serve their people by doing the most difficult tasks in order to free their people to live more productively. Think of two specific ways in which you could take on some of the hardship of a person you are responsible to lead. Something you could do to free them for more productive living. Write those two specific actions here. (If you have trouble thinking of people whom you are responsible to lead, think instead of people whom you want to introduce to the Lord Jesus — making new disciples is a very important responsibility!)

1. _____
2. _____

Act for the benefit of those in your care.

Jesus is a joy to follow, because everything He asks from us is really for our good. We always know He loves us, because He gave His life for us. Write two ways you could show love to those whom you are leading this week.

1. _____
2. _____

Be an example of meekness (strength under control).

Following Jesus is reasonable. He always submitted to the authority over Him and will always submit to God the Father. He is not asking me to do something He is unwilling to do. Write two ways you can model submission for those whom you are leading.

1. _____
2. _____

Remember that you will have to give an account.

All of your authority has been given to you as a stewardship from God. One day you will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ Jesus and He will review the way you used the authority entrusted to you. The only thing that will matter to you in that day is whether Jesus will be able to say to you: "Well done, My good and faithful servant."

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

— Matthew 11:28-30

- Jesus' disciples lead by doing the hard things.
- Jesus' disciples are a joy to follow.
- Jesus' disciples are strong but never use intimidation.

A word to stewards:

"Christ's servants have the spiritual power to use the name of Jesus only insofar as they yield themselves to live only for the interests and work of the Master. The use of the name always supposes the surrender of our interests to Him whom we represent."

—Andrew Murray

TALKING TO GOD: Take some time alone with God to go over your accounts with Him. Thank Him for trusting you with the level of authority He has given you. Talk with Him about each of the people He has put under your authority and be very honest in reporting to Him how you feel you are doing. Are you being a faithful steward of His authority? Are you serving those He has put under your care? Now ask Him to help you put into practice the authority lessons you have learned from His Son Jesus.

If you are not aware of anyone under your authority, talk to God about the people you would like to introduce to the Lord Jesus. Ask Him for opportunities to speak about Jesus and tell Him very honestly how you feel you are doing in your stewardship of the opportunities He is already giving you.

Next Week:

Lesson Number _____ Pages _____ to _____

Memory Verse _____

We will meet at _____ (time) on _____ (day) _____ (place)

When a wise ruler delegates authority and responsibility, he also provides all of the other resources necessary for his managers to succeed. God is the wisest and most generous of all rulers. Not only has He given you responsibility and the authority that goes with it, but He has also graciously provided everything you need to accomplish your task in life. We will be considering this provision in the next lesson on how to be a steward.

HOW TO BE A STEWARD OF THE THINGS OF GOD

Lesson 4

OVERVIEW

- ◆ Your role as a steward
- ◆ You can be a good steward of the money God gives you
- ◆ You can be a good steward of God's better gifts
- ◆ You can be a good steward of the people God places in your life

YOUR ROLE AS A STEWARD

Memory Verse:

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

1 Corinthians 4:1, 2

Spiritual authority is just one of the many resources that God has given to you as a steward. "Steward" is not a word we hear often in modern English, but it is an important concept in the Bible, because every Christian is called to be a steward. A steward manages resources that belong to someone else.

If you are a Christian then everything you have has been given to you by God and belongs to Him. He has given all of these good gifts to you for you to manage them.

* **How are managers evaluated? Is the best manager the one who makes the most profit for himself or is the best manager the one who looks out for the interest of his master?** _____

When Christ evaluates your years on earth, the primary measure He will use to determine whether you were a good servant will be whether you brought profit to His kingdom or whether you were only concerned about your own temporary advantage. This week we will be looking carefully at the way God intends for us to use His resources for the profit of His kingdom.

THE TRUE STORY OF A GOOD STEWARD

In Genesis 39:1-6 we have a passage from the remarkable story of a young man named Joseph. Joseph's brothers envied him so much that they kidnapped him and sold him into slavery. Potiphar was a high-ranking Egyptian official who bought Joseph and made him to be his steward. We read that the Egyptian made Joseph "the overseer of his house" and that "he left all that he had in Joseph's hand."

* **What do think this means?** _____

←←← Verses to memorize

• **A steward is someone who manages resources that belong to someone else.**

• **Everything you have has been given to you by God!**

← **Read Genesis 39:1-6**

He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'"

—Luke 16:1, 2

* Have you ever had a coworker or a friend that you could trust to that extent? Describe your relationship with that faithful person _____

Why do you think that Potiphar prospered while Joseph worked for him?

In Luke 16:1-2, Jesus told the story of another steward who was not as trustworthy as Joseph—in fact, Jesus called him an “unjust steward.”

JESUS TELLS A STORY ABOUT A BAD STEWARD

In verses 1-2 the master discovered that his steward was crooked. Notice carefully verse 1.

* For what reason did the master dismiss his steward? _____

* How would you feel if you discovered that someone you entrusted with your money, wasted it? _____

Read carefully Luke 16:5-7. The unjust steward knew he was about to be fired, and he realized no one else would give him a management position; so he began to contact his boss's customers with another crooked scheme. Describe in your own words the steward's last scam.

* How was the steward planning to profit from this scam? _____

We will study this parable more carefully in the next section, but for now we can all agree that we would prefer to have a manager like Joseph than one like the unjust steward. When we hear about crooks who embezzle money from government programs, pension plans or mutual funds, we can become quite indignant. Jesus makes it clear that He is also looking for faithful stewards. As you begin to memorize I Corinthians 4:1-2 let the truth sink deeply into you that “it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.”

YOU CAN BE A GOOD STEWARD OF THE MONEY GOD GIVES YOU

There is another parable recorded in Luke 19:12-26. We read this parable before in Lesson Three about authority. In this parable Jesus is speaking of wise management of physical resources like money. The prince gave each of his three stewards the same amount of working capital (one mina was equal to about three months' salary).

* Who do you think is represented by the prince in this parable? _____

YOU COULD RECEIVE A PROMOTION FROM JESUS

In the modern business world, a boss might allow a good manager to keep a percentage of the profits he generated as an incentive for good stewardship. But Jesus rewards faithfulness over a few thousand dollars with administration over whole cities.

* Do you find this kind of reward motivating or intimidating? Why? _____

The Master in the parable rewards good management with greater management responsibility.

* How does the Master feel about the passive management style of the third steward? _____

How does He punish laziness or unfaithfulness? _____

The Master in the parable reduces the management responsibility for the lazy and unfaithful steward. He doesn't mince words either—he calls the unfaithful steward a "wicked servant."

* What are the material resources (the mina) God has given you? _____

GOOD STEWARDSHIP WILL COST YOU EVERYTHING--BUT YOU WON'T MISS IT

In Luke 14 Jesus tells a couple of parables to illustrate the fact that His disciples must give up everything that they have. Read Luke 14:25-33.

* If following Jesus requires that you forsake everything that you have on this earth, do you think it is worthwhile to be a disciple of Jesus? _____

Is it a good investment decision? _____

A little help...

The three stewards represent Christians whose stewardship will be evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Stewards (even bad ones) are not in danger of condemnation, but bad stewards will suffer deep and lasting shame when Jesus rebukes their laziness and unfaithfulness.

A little help...

To forsake everything means that you stop considering yourself to be the owner of these resources and you begin to steward them for the Lord Jesus.

So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

—Luke 14:33

Remember:

Not all Christians are true disciples of Jesus. A Christian is anyone who places his trust in Jesus to rescue Him from the penalty of sin. Disciples are those who are Jesus' true friends, those who follow Him and obey His commands. Disciples of Jesus live their lives as stewards to manage Jesus' resources.

No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

— Luke 16:13

Jesus on money:

Jesus taught more lessons on the proper attitude toward money than He taught about heaven and hell. He knows that we need to learn faithfulness in this resource before we can be faithful in the big things.

* **If disciples of Jesus continue to earn money, what should their attitude be toward that money?** _____

Whose money is it? _____

Re-read the parable about the unjust steward in Luke 16:1-13. Verses 10-13 describe the basis upon which Jesus is going to evaluate your life of service for Him if you are a Christian.

* **What is the primary word used to describe the servant Jesus rewards?**

When your boss is about to evaluate your job performance, it is always helpful to know in advance what the criteria and standards of evaluation are going to be. Draw lines to connect the attitudes on the left with the way Jesus evaluates those attitudes on the right.

Attitudes

Jesus' Evaluation

Faithful in the small things

Not to be trusted with true riches

Unfaithful in the small things

Not to be trusted with ownership

Unfaithful in mammon [material wealth]

Faithful in big things

Unfaithful in stewardship

Unfaithful in big things

Read carefully verse 13 two more times (remember mammon means material wealth). Think of a situation in your life where you had to choose between serving God and accumulating personal wealth.

* **Did you try to hold on to both godliness and wealth at first?** _____

What eventually happened? _____

Why is it so hard to trust God in these situations? _____

Now consider Jesus' question in verses 10 and 11. He is not merely saying that you need to be faithful in small amounts of money in order to be trusted with large amounts of money. He is saying that money itself is the least of the resources in God's kingdom.

* **If money is the least significant resource in the kingdom, what would you say would be the "true riches"?** _____

What are two specific changes you will need to make in your priorities so that Jesus can judge you to be a faithful steward?

1. _____

2. _____

YOU CAN BE A GOOD STEWARD OF GOD'S BETTER GIFTS

As you review your memory verses in 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2, consider verse 1 carefully to identify one of the things God gave Paul to steward.

Paul is not the only Christian who is a steward of the mysteries of God. In John 15:15 Jesus tells His disciples that they are His true friends, because He has revealed to them deep and important truths from His Father. If you are a disciple of Jesus, He has taught you too.

ARE YOU BEING FAITHFUL AS A STEWARD OF GOD'S TRUTH?

The "mysteries of God" is another way to describe deep spiritual truth that is hidden from most people but is revealed in the Bible. Some of the mysteries of God that are revealed in the Bible include the fact that there will be a rapture of believers who will go to heaven without dying when Jesus returns (I Corinthians 15:51) that Jews and Gentiles will equally inherit the promise of God (Ephesians 3:3-6) and that the Church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:30-32).

* If you were one of just a few people who understood these truths, what would you do? _____

How could you be a good steward of hidden spiritual facts? _____

Now read verse 2.

* What is the most important qualification for stewards? _____

Refresh your memory by re-reading Luke 16:10-12 about the standard of evaluation for stewards.

* What is the most important word to describe the steward Jesus rewards? _____

List some of the spiritual truth that you know that most people in the world do not understand. Remember that most people in the world have never read a Bible in their own language.

* What will you need to do with the knowledge of God that you already have in order to be a faithful steward? _____

List five people that God has put in your life who need to know God as you already know Him.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

— 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2

A little help . . .

"Mystery" means a deep spiritual truth that is only revealed in the Bible.

Something you should know:

The best way to begin to be a faithful steward of the knowledge of God is to pray for your friends who do not know Him. Show your leader this list of people who need to know God so you can pray together for them.

Definition:

"To minister" means to act as a servant.

Faithful stewards ...

- Speak accurately
- Serve selflessly
- Pray powerfully

Definition:

"To repent" means to turn toward fellowship with God.

...Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. "Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full..."

—John 16:23b-24

ARE YOU BEING FAITHFUL AS A STEWARD OF GOD'S GRACE?

Turn to 1 Peter 4:10-11 and read about another great resource that God has given you to manage. Verse 10 says that you are a "steward of the grace of God"! This is an awesome responsibility, but Peter makes it simple: a good steward should use his or her gift to minister to others. The word "minister" means to act as a servant. Verse 11 describes the way a believer who is gifted to speak the words of God can speak as a servant and the power that a believer who is gifted to serve in practical ways should rely upon.

*** Do you feel that you are more gifted to speak to people about God or to do the work of service?** _____

What special ability has God given to you? _____

How can you use that gift to serve others? _____

Besides our stewardship of speaking the words of God and doing His works, we have been given special power in prayer. Read 1 John 5:14-17, and attempt to identify the particular kind of prayer that God wants to answer for you.

*** Who does He especially want you to pray for?** _____

Is it according to God's will for a believer who is sinning to return to fellowship with Him? _____

How confident can you be that repentance is according to God's will? _____

Now review verses 14 and 15.

*** Can you be confident that God will answer your prayer for a fellow Christian to repent and return to fellowship with God?** _____

Sometimes believers harden themselves against God to such an extent that they become determined to live a life of rebellion—the Bible says you should not pray blessings upon them while they are in rebellion! Write down the names of two Christians who you know need to repent and return to fellowship with God. Your leader will want to pray with you for their repentance.

1. _____

2. _____

Read John 16:23, 24 to discover Jesus' amazing promise regarding our prayers. Asking in Jesus' name means that you are making requests with Jesus' authorization. Explain in your own words how this power of prayer is a stewardship.

Look at I Samuel 12:23. Explain why it would have been a sin for Samuel to stop praying for the people of God. _____

According to I Samuel 12:23, what other responsibility do we have toward the people of God that we are praying for? _____

When you think of the power you have for good in the lives of God's children through praying for them, how does that change the way you view their troubles and their sinful attitudes? _____

Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way.

— 1 Samuel 12:23

Remember:

Never, never, never give up praying for God's children.

YOU CAN BE A GOOD STEWARD OF THE PEOPLE GOD PLACES IN YOUR LIFE

Remember:

A steward must be faithful to Christ Jesus.

In 1 Peter 5:1-4, Peter is writing instructions for church elders, but these principles apply to you also if God has given you people to take care of. Read verses 2 and 3 carefully two more times. Now look at the list below and circle those phrases which describe a good and faithful steward. Draw an "X" through those phrases which describe an unjust steward.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Shepherding the flock of God | Serving |
| Overseeing | Because people coerce you |
| Willingly | Because you get paid |
| Eagerly | Because you are a big shot |
| Because you like to be in charge | Setting a good example |

"Shepherding" refers to your responsibility to take care of the needs of people entrusted to you. "Overseeing" refers to your responsibility to give direction to the people who are following you. Try to think of the names of two people whom you are responsible to shepherd and two others whom you are responsible to lead. Write their names.

Shepherding

Overseeing

1. _____
2. _____

1. _____
2. _____

ARE YOU GROWING IN THE QUALITIES OF AN OVERSEER?

Paul sent his friend Titus to the island of Crete in order to organize the believers. Turn to Titus 1:5-9. He reminds Titus of his job description in Titus 1:5. In verse 7 he describes the overseer function of being a steward. You may never be called upon to be an elder or overseer in the church, but you should still be a steward in the way Paul describes.

*** What are some of the words used to describe a good steward of God in verses 7 and 8?** _____

Of all the descriptions of a good steward what are three qualities that come easy to you?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What are two qualities in these verses that you find difficult?

1. _____
2. _____

For a bishop [an overseer] must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled.

— Titus 1:7, 8

ARE YOU GROWING IN THE FAITHFULNESS OF A SHEPHERD?

Now look at Luke 12:40-47. Part of your stewardship has to do with leading and another part has to do with feeding. Feeding is the shepherding function of stewardship. In Luke 12 Jesus is reminding his disciples to be watchful and alert, so that when He comes back, He will find them working in the business of His kingdom.

Read verses 40-43 again. Peter was asking Jesus whether it was just him and the other apostles that needed to be on the alert for Jesus' return. Write Jesus' thought-provoking response in your own words. _____

The ones who most need to be watchful are those who have been made "rulers" for the purpose of feeding the other servants. Jesus is not just speaking of a ministry of cooking and serving food (though He may have had this in mind!) Write down some ways in which you have been given authority to "feed" the servants of Jesus. _____

Now look at verse 44.

* **What is Jesus' over-the-top reward for stewards who faithfully pursue the ministry of "feeding" other believers?** _____

Have you ever doubted whether anyone was really responding to your leadership? Timothy was often afraid to lead the people of God because he felt that he did not have their respect (1 Timothy 4:12-13). Can you identify with those feelings?

* **In verse 12 what does Paul tell Timothy to do for those who seem to despise him?** _____

Spiritual leadership is very difficult even for those who have been Christians for many years. Even the most experienced leaders go through periods of dryness and doubt. The crucial truth to remember is that Jesus does not plan to evaluate you on your outstanding performance or achievement of goals—Jesus' criterion for evaluating your leadership is faithful stewardship.

In verse 13 what are three activities in which we should lead by example?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Something to think about:

Sheep eat whatever they find to graze on. The shepherd's job is to lead them into the healthiest pastures for their grazing.

Jesus' scale of reward:

Faithful shepherds who care for the household of God will rule with Jesus in His Kingdom.

- *It is always appropriate to live your life as an example to others, even if they don't seem to notice or to follow.*

Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

— I Timothy 4:12, 13

A little help . . .

Doctrine means teaching. To “give attention to reading” means to make time to read the Bible with the people you are responsible for.

Those you are leading may be your children or new believers in your area who do not know the Bible yet. Is there anyone in your life who needs to be hearing the word of God from you on a regular basis? _____

Exhortation means to encourage others by reminding them of God’s will for them. We all know people who exhort us in a way that demeans us or patronizes us, but we have also been encouraged by Christians who remind us of the will of God and the reward for obeying Him. This part of your stewardship is primarily with your friends and fellow Christians.

Please write down the names of three people that you feel God wants you to encourage and exhort this week.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

FINDING TRUE PROSPERITY IN THE THINGS OF GOD

CENTRAL TRUTH OF LESSON FOUR:

A good steward must faithfully manage the good things God entrusts to him for the benefit and increase of God's kingdom.

Solomon was a young man who had inherited his father's kingdom during a time of rebellion and upheaval. Solomon loved God and wanted to serve Him well as a good steward of His people, but he realized that spiritual leadership of a whole nation was too difficult for him. He wanted God's blessing and unashamedly prayed for it. Read the story of King Solomon's request in I Kings 3:4-15.

* What was Solomon's request that pleased the Lord? _____

Read carefully verses 8-9 over again.

* Whose kingdom was it? _____

Whose people was Solomon judging? _____

Who would profit from Solomon's wisdom? _____

What selfish requests could Solomon have made according to verse 11?

In reality, even though Solomon was a king, he still recognized that he was merely a steward of the things of God.

* If God allowed you to make one request, what request do you think would please Him the most? _____

TALKING TO GOD:

Find a quiet place where you can discuss with God the stewardship that He has given you in His kingdom. Discuss with Him what you most need in order to be a good steward of the things and people God has given you to manage. Tell God that the reason for your request is to increase and expand His kingdom.

Discuss this request with your leader and agree in prayer to ask God for one specific resource that will help you manage and increase His kingdom.

Next Week:

Lesson Number _____ Pages _____ to _____

Memory Verse _____

We will meet at _____ (time) on _____ (day) _____ (place)

And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?

— I Kings 3:8-9

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

— Jim Elliot

ENJOYING FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD'S FAMILY

Lesson 5

OVERVIEW

- ◆ True fellowship begins with God
- ◆ God wants you to wear a new style of relating
- ◆ God wants you to love with His love
- ◆ God has given you something essential to contribute
- ◆ As you grow, your fellowship deepens

TRUE FELLOWSHIP BEGINS WITH GOD

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ...And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 4:30 & 32

We all know from personal experience what it feels like to be in a home where one member of the family is in conflict with the head of the household. Until the conflict is resolved, everyone is uptight and conversations seem to die almost before they begin. Family fellowship is impossible when rebellion is brewing just under the surface.

In the same way, you cannot have fellowship with the family of God while you are rebelling against God. God is our Father and He wants to shower you with His love and friendship, but God is also light and cannot approve or tolerate darkness. He invites you to walk with Him in light, and as long as you are willing to walk with Him in light, you will have fellowship and warm relationship not only with Him but with all of the family of God.

Before you placed your faith in Jesus and became born again into God's family, you probably felt uncomfortable around Christians. But now that you are part of the family you should be enjoying deeper and deeper fellowship with God and with your brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. As each member of the family continues in close relationship with the Head, we will grow in unity and love for one another.

GOD TOOK THE INITIATIVE TO LOVE THE UNLOVELY

Read Romans 5:6-10 slowly allowing the truth to sink into your heart that Jesus loved you even when there was nothing lovely about you.

* How does it make you feel about Him that He pursued a relationship with you even when you did not care about Him? _____

Since He sacrificed His life for a fellowship relationship with you, is there anything you could do to make Him reject you now? Consider the promises in verses 9 and 10 before you write your answer. _____

— Growing in Grace —

←←← Verses to memorize

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

— Romans 5:7, 8

- God loved us when we were still sinners
- Christ died for us when we were ungodly
- God sent His Son to reconcile us when we were His enemies

Something you should know:

"Regeneration" means to be born again. When you first placed your trust in Jesus, God gave you His Holy Spirit to entirely re-create you from the inside out. Now you have a new life, Jesus' eternal life within you.

"Grace" means a gift we did nothing to deserve. There was no way you could earn God's mercy, you received it because of His kindness and love.

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.

— 1 John 1:6, 7

Read Titus 3:3-7, then go back and carefully consider verse 3.

* **In what ways does this description fit the way you were before you were saved?** _____

Now study carefully verses 4-6.

* **Who took the initiative in establishing your relationship with God?** _____

What was the Father's part? _____

What was Jesus' part? _____

What was the Holy Spirit's part? _____

Now look at verse 8.

* **What was your part when you first turned to God?** _____

What is your part now? _____

NOW, CLOSE FELLOWSHIP IS AVAILABLE EVERYDAY

Read 1 John 1:3-7 two or three times paying special attention to what they are saying about fellowship. Now re-read verses 5 and 6.

* **Is it possible to have fellowship with God while you continue to walk in the darkness of sin?** _____

Why not? _____

When we decide to walk in darkness we are really walking away from God. He will patiently wait for us to come back but He does not extend fellowship to us meanwhile. Now carefully consider verse 3 and verse 7 about our fellowship with brothers and sisters in the family of God.

* **If a believer is in true fellowship with God, how will he relate to a brother or sister who is walking in darkness?** _____

Have you ever had a Christian friend who was walking in darkness? _____

Did your friend draw away from fellowship with you while he was in darkness? _____

How did your friend try to get you to affirm his dark life choices? _____

How did you feel about your friendship while your friend was walking in darkness? _____

Write in your own words what verse 7 is saying to you about our fellowship with God and with one another.

GOD WANTS YOU TO WEAR A NEW STYLE OF RELATING

Did you notice as you read 1 John 1 how a right relationship with God was described? John said it was like walking in the light! John made it clear that we have to decide to walk in the light if we want to walk with God; because there is no compromise with Him. We have all entered a dark room and observed what happens when the lights are turned on—the darkness disappears. According to 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, light and darkness cannot exist together in the same room. There is no place for compromise.

GOD DESIRES INTEGRITY IN OUR FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM

Read verses 14-15 and notice how adamant the Bible is about not partnering with unbelievers. Notice that it does not say we should not be friends with unbelievers, but that we should not be “unequally yoked together” in a partnership.

* **What are some problems that a mixed partnership between a believer and an unbeliever might encounter?** _____

Read carefully verses 16-18 and try to identify at least five promises that God makes that should motivate us to separate ourselves from the goals of unbelievers.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Are you currently bound by any partnership with an unbeliever? Make a note of it here to remind you to discuss the details with your leader next time you meet.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:12-13 and identify the one partnership that Christians should not try to break, even if it is with an unbeliever.

The Bible makes it very clear that Christians should not be the ones to initiate a divorce even if their marriage partner is an unbeliever. Sometimes the unbelieving partner sues for divorce and the Christian cannot prevent the breakup of their marriage—in such cases, the Christian should allow the unbeliever to depart in peace (1 Corinthians 7:15). But the Bible mentions at least one important reason for a Christian to stay in the marriage as long as the unbeliever is willing.

Now look down to verse 16.

* **What is the outcome that we can always pray for while we stay in a difficult marriage with an unbeliever?** _____

Something you should know:

Unequally yoked is a Bible expression for being bound together in a common purpose. It comes from the days when fields were plowed by two oxen in one harness or “yoke.” In Deuteronomy 22:10, God prohibited the Israelites from harnessing an ox together with a donkey for plowing—that would be an unequal yoke.

A Little Help . . .

How do you know whether a specific relationship with an unbeliever is an “unequal yoke”? If you have to enter into a contract or commitment that obligates you to pursuing an ungodly person's goals, you will very likely find yourself unequally yoked together at some point.

For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

— 1 Corinthians 7:16

WE NEED TO CHANGE OUR STYLE OF RELATING

Ephesians 4:25-32 talks about putting on a new relational style. Every new believer comes to Jesus with a lifetime of bad habits of relating. But a right relationship with Jesus results in exchanging our bad habits for His holy ones.

A little help...

"Edification" is a Bible word that means to build someone up. One thing that all of Jesus' habits have in common is that they build other people up. The Bible says that everything we do in relation to others should be for edification (Romans 15:2).

Read verses 25-32 twice through looking for specific habits that Jesus wants to change in your life. Now look at the list below and connect each habit He wants you to get rid of with the habit He wants to put in its place.

Lying	Working hard at a job
Stealing	Kindness, tender-hearted forgiveness
Filthy (corrupt) talking	Speaking the truth
Bitterness, wrath, anger and malicious gossip	Gracious words that build up others

These are all habits of life that are hard to break.

Is there one of these new habits of relating that is especially difficult for you? Please make a note of it here, and your leader will pray with you for Jesus' help in changing.

Read Colossians 3:12-14 at least twice in different versions of the Bible. Allow it to sink into your soul how impossible it would be for you to live out these verses in your own strength without Jesus.

But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

— Colossians 3:14

Now look carefully at verse 14. "Bond of perfection" means in the Greek language "what fully binds [us] together".

* **What is it that fully binds us together in the family of God?** _____

The word "put on" in verse 12 and 14 describes wearing a new relational style in the same way you wear a new clothing style. We can all recall a time that we purposely changed our clothing style in order to fit into a new job or a new stage in life. It felt kind of strange at first.

* **How do you think it will feel to put on a new relational style?** _____

Verse 13 tells us who modeled our new style for us.

* **What were some things that Jesus did to model this new style of relating in love?** _____

IT'S NOT ABOUT BREAKING BAD HABITS--IT'S ABOUT PUTTING ON JESUS CHRIST!

Turn to Romans 13:12-14. Notice as you read these verses that your new style is not just like any kind of clothes—it is like body armor!

Read verse 13 again carefully. Some of the habits we need to put off are our old ways of abusing drugs, sex and other people but the Bible also mentions two habits that are less obvious, but could be devastating to the new relationships we are building.

* **What are these two bad habits of relating we need to put off?** _____

Verse 14 gives us the only method that really works for putting off old relational habits.

* **How can you “put on the Lord Jesus” as body armor?** _____

Just as we were powerless to earn God's mercy, in the same way we are powerless to reform our old habits. Thankfully, God was gracious and gave us the free gift of life in Christ Jesus. He actually gave us the Spirit of His Son Jesus to live with us and to live in us.

The idea of putting on the Lord Jesus seems strange at first, but we have experienced the changes that go along with close friendships. As you spend more time with a friend that you admire you begin to pick up some of his expressions and mannerisms—your accent may even begin to change as you take on some of his speech patterns.

Living with Jesus is like this. As you make a conscious decision to spend more time in His presence, you will find yourself learning more and more to love with His love, taking on His expressions of speech and kindness.

Not walking in strife:

"Strife" is an attitude that is looking for a fight. One of the attitudes the Bible tells us to change out of is this desire to argue and quarrel and try to get an advantage through our words.

Not walking in envy:

"Envy" begins by being dissatisfied with what God has given us; then we look around and wish we had what God has given to someone else; and finally we begin to hate the person who has the life or the things we desire. We need to replace envy with the gratitude and thanksgiving that is in Christ Jesus.

Are some sins worse than others?

The Bible teaches us that all sin results in death, so in that sense all sin is equal. But in Proverbs 6:16-19, the Bible shows that some sins are especially ugly to God:

- *Pride*
- *Lying*
- *Murder*
- *Wicked plans*
- *Slander*
- *Someone who brings strife into His family*

GOD WANTS YOU TO LOVE WITH HIS LOVE

Seven ways to beat bitterness (from Romans 12):

- Bless those who persecute you
- Sympathize with the broken-hearted
- Don't overvalue your own opinions
- Don't repay evil for evil
- Leave room for God to judge
- If your enemy is hungry, feed him
- Overcome evil with good

Grace is the word the Bible uses to describe the way God loves. When we offend Him and sin against Him He keeps on loving us. Until we put our trust in Jesus Christ and were born again into His family, we could never extend true grace to anyone. Apart from Jesus we could never have understood grace, let alone share it with someone else!

There is a story in the Bible (2 Kings 6:17-23) about the prophet Elisha. He single-handedly captured an army of enemy soldiers, rounded them up and led them to Samaria where he delivered them to the wicked king of Israel. When the king saw his enemies helpless and captive he shouted to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" But Elisha told the king, "Don't kill them! Feed them and send them home."

The king obeyed this command and treated the enemy army to a feast before he released them. The enemies were so glad to be alive and so ashamed to make war against people who were gracious to them, that they went home and no longer came to make war in Israel.

★ **Do you think that the war would have ended if the king had killed his enemies like he wanted to at first?** _____

GRACE BEGINS WITH GOD IN CHRIST JESUS

If we try to love with our human power to love, we will not be able to extend grace. The good news is that God is teaching us His way of loving. The Scripture passages below will help you to reflect on Jesus' example of love. All He is asking is that you love others with the love He has already poured out on you.

Look at Philippians 2:3-5. These three verses talk about a new mindset, a mindset that comes from Jesus Christ. True love begins with a right mind, and the mind of Jesus involves valuing other people and caring about the things that matter to them. Read these verses again carefully and then write in your own words the kind of love God especially desires from His children.

Now read verses 5-8. Notice that these verses give more detail regarding the example of love that Jesus has given us.

★ **What was Jesus' example that we should follow?** _____

List some of the ways you can "look out for the interests of others".

Read the following instructions of Jesus and for each verse write down His example of love that He wants you to follow.

John 13:14 _____

John 13:34-35 _____

John 15:12-13 _____

GOD INTENDS FOR US TO EXTEND HIS GRACE TO OTHERS

Read the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21-35, and let it sink into your heart how much Jesus has forgiven you.

* **How do you think He feels when you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters?** _____

Can you think of anyone that you are holding a grudge against? Ask God to help you extend grace to them, and forgive the wrong they have done to you. Forgiveness means that you no longer require them to pay for the wrong they have done. Write down their name(s) and today's date if you have truly forgiven them.

Name _____ Date _____

Remember:

To forgive someone does not mean you completely forget what they did. Forgiveness means you choose to stop trying to make them pay for the wrong they have done.

GOD HAS GIVEN YOU SOMETHING ESSENTIAL TO CONTRIBUTE

We have already seen how Christians are like a family, but in many passages of the Bible we are described as a body. We are as important to one another as eyes and hands are to a body. Read 1Corinthians 12:12-31 through twice in two different translations to discover how important individuals are in the family of God. Notice carefully what verse 26 is saying. In the human body, a problem in even the least significant member affects all the rest. If you have ever had a broken toe or an abscessed tooth you know how miserable the whole body is when one little member suffers.

YOU ARE IMPORTANT TO THE WHOLE BODY

* How does it make you feel that your spiritual health is so important to the Body of Christ? _____

Now look back at verses 20-22. In the human body every joint and every organ has a job to do, and if any organ quits the whole body suffers.

* How does it make you feel to know that the individual part you play in the Body of Christ is absolutely essential to the rest of us? _____

Have you ever had the feeling that you are insignificant in the church?

Are there any members in your local church that you feel are not essential to the proper functioning of the Body of Christ? _____

What does this Scripture tell you about the importance of these seemingly insignificant members? _____

How do you think Jesus feels about these members of His Body that seem in-significant to you? _____

YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE BODY OF CHRIST EVERY DAY

After reading 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 two or three times, examine verse 11 for the three ways you can express brotherly love.

1. _____

But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

—1 Corinthians 12:20-22

2. _____

3. _____

To “mind your own business” is not a negative concept in the Bible but means “pay careful attention to your own area of responsibility.”

* **Why do you think paying attention to your own business is a means for showing brotherly love?** _____

The remarkable truth about the Christian life is that your everyday work and responsibilities at home are eternally significant in God’s eyes. List the three tasks that occupy a great deal of your time on a daily basis.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

* **How can fulfilling these tasks well demonstrate Christ’s love working through y o u ?**

YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE FAMILY OF GOD IS SIGNIFICANT

In the days before Social Security and pension plans, widows relied entirely upon their children for support. In his letter to Timothy, Paul explains how Christians should care for widows who believe in Jesus (1 Timothy 5:3-8). Read these verses looking for the answer to this question:

* **Whose responsibility is it to take care of a needy Christian?** _____

Now read back over verse 4. List the two levels of responsibility for taking care of a destitute believer:

If the believer has any _____, they should be first to take responsibility. Otherwise, _____ is responsible.

The local church should be actively helping to support destitute believers, but individual Christians have the primary responsibility. Look ahead to verse 16 and then back to verse 8. Is there anyone in your family that needs your financial or practical help? Write down one thing you could do to help a needy member of your family.

A Little Help. . .

Earning a living, paying your bills and generously helping other Christians not only builds up the Body of Christ but also gives outsiders a reason to respect Jesus. They might disrespect Him if they saw His disciples refusing to work for a living and failing to pay their bills.

But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God.

— 1 Timothy 5:4

Something you should know:

No matter what church you are part of, you will find Christians in financial need if you look carefully. Many serious Christians put aside some money on a regular basis to help meet these needs. This is called "benevolence" money. Your church probably has a benevolence fund already set up for you to contribute to, or you can look for ways to meet needs on your own. Always ask God to direct you to the people He wants you to help and remember these priorities from 1 Timothy 5:

1. Care for your family
2. Care for the family of God

AS YOU GROW IN DISCIPLESHIP, YOUR FELLOWSHIP WILL CONTINUE TO DEEPEN

Something you should know:

To confess your sins means to agree with God that what you have done is wrong. The opposite of confessing your sins is to say, "What I did was not wrong." The Bible says that when we refuse to confess our sins we are insulting God by calling Him a liar.

CENTRAL TRUTH OF LESSON FIVE:

Your fellowship with other Christians will deepen as you learn to live in obedience and right relationship with God.

Read 1 John 1:1-10 in two different versions of the Bible. Now read verses 6 and 7 again carefully.

* **What do we have to be doing in order to experience fellowship with other Christians?** _____

According to verse 9, what should we do if we are walking in the light and suddenly realize that we have sinned in some way? _____

What are some of the things that you have seen happen to Christians who refuse to confess and turn away from sin? _____

Can you think of anyone whom you know that is purposely walking in rebellion against God?

* **How do you think your friend feels about his or her relationships?** _____

What is the most important thing your friend needs to do to get into a right relationship with God? _____

How could you extend grace to him without pretending that his rebellion is okay? _____

Is there any sin or rebellion against God, anything that you know God is displeased with in your life?

TALKING TO GOD: Find a quiet place where you can be alone and undisturbed for at least fifteen minutes. Thank God for adopting you into His family by faith in Jesus. Ask Him to reveal to you anything that He is displeased with that He wants you to change. As He brings things to mind, confess, "Yes, it is true. What I have been doing is wrong. I am going to change with Your help." Write down any actions that God brings to your mind that He wants you to take.

When you get together for your next meeting, ask your leader to pray with you for God's help in making the changes He is bringing to your attention.

Next Week:

Lesson Number _____ Pages _____ to _____

Memory Verse _____

We will meet at _____ (time) on _____ (day) _____ (place)

RESTORING FELLOWSHIP THAT HAS BEEN BROKEN

Lesson 6

OVERVIEW

- ◆ You can be part of the healing and growth of the family
- ◆ Jesus' desire is to restore relationships in the family of God
- ◆ The best remedy for a relationship broken by sin is prayer
- ◆ You must be prepared to confront and to forgive
- ◆ Your fellowship with the saints will never end

YOU CAN BE PART OF THE HEALING AND GROWTH OF THE FAMILY

Have you noticed how your relationships with people need constant maintenance? When you operate a machine or a vehicle, it can go for a long time without any maintenance at all, just doing its job. But even the best of families cannot run for very long without some stress entering in. The stresses have to be confronted and resolved or else the family is headed for a crisis.

JESUS IS WELL AWARE OF OUR VULNERABILITY IN CRISIS

Jesus gave us a great example of how to deal with these crises in the family of God when He foretold Peter's denial. There was a lot of stress among the disciples because Peter was trying to be a big shot and boast of his special loyalty to Jesus. Jesus confronted Peter's pride but also restored health to his relationships. Read the Scriptures in this section to see how Jesus did this and how you can follow His example.

MEMORY VERSE:

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

James 5:16

According to Luke 22:31-32, Peter was prepared to fight the Roman army and the Jewish police, but he was totally unconcerned about his real enemy.

* **Who was it that was really attacking the disciples?** _____

Jesus had complete power to overcome Satan and his schemes.

* **How did Jesus go about rescuing Peter from Satan?** _____

What relational assignment did Jesus give to Peter? _____

Jesus assigned Peter the task of strengthening his brothers—the other disciples. Just a few minutes earlier (in verse 24) Peter and the other disciples had been disputing among themselves about which of them was the greatest. They were under attack by

←←← Verse to memorize

Something you should know:
Satan is described in the Bible as a personal spirit-being. He was created by God for service as an angel, but he rebelled and now wages war against the people of God. We would be helpless to defend ourselves against a spirit as powerful as Satan, but Jesus has absolute power to overcome him and Jesus is our Rescuer.

Satan and were about to be attacked by the Romans and the Jewish leaders, and they were squabbling about which of them was the greatest!

- * **How would Jesus' assignment (if Peter completely obeyed it) relieve the stress and envy among the disciples?** _____

Now read verses 33 and 34. Peter was still pretty sure of himself even after hearing Jesus' description of the spiritual battle surrounding him. Jesus had to be even more direct in His confrontation with Peter. Put yourself in Peter's place.

- * **How would you feel to hear a prediction like this from your best friend?**

Within hours of Jesus' prediction, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times (Luke 22:56-62). Think about how greatly deceived Peter was about himself and his sinfulness.

- * **Have you ever been shocked by your own ability to fall into temptation? Describe one occasion.** _____

How would you want your best friend to respond to you if he was an eye witness of your sin? _____

JESUS DEMONSTRATES HOW TO HEAL A RELATIONSHIP

Read John 21:15-17 two or three times and feel the intensity of this interchange between Jesus and Peter. This is their first extended conversation since Peter denied Him three times. Knowing how much Jesus loved Peter,

- * **Why do you think He kept after him, asking him these painful questions three times?** _____

Look at the assignment Jesus repeats at the end of each verse.

- * **How is this assignment related to the one He gave Peter in Luke 22:32?**

Jesus repeated Peter's assignment as a way of reassuring him that he was still important in the family of God—that he had not lost his former place. Have you ever been confronted or rebuked in a way that helped you?

- * **How did the person who confronted you also give you reassurance?** _____

Aren't you glad that Jesus doesn't just ignore sin? Aren't you glad He doesn't give up on sinners?

JESUS' DESIRE IS TO RESTORE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FAMILY OF GOD

In Matthew 18:11-14, Jesus explained to His disciples how important it is to seek out brothers who are sinning and to confront them and restore them. He used the example of a shepherd who goes out looking for a lost sheep. As you read His teaching be thinking about the ways Christians behave like sheep.

JESUS TAKES THE INITIATIVE IN RESTORATION

Some people might be satisfied with the 99 sheep that were still at home, but a good shepherd is always concerned for the one sheep who is out on the mountain. Think of what would likely happen to a sheep who spent a night alone on the mountain.

* In what ways is Jesus like a good shepherd? _____

Why does He seem more concerned about the one lost sheep than about the 99 who are safe at home? _____

Do you share His concern? _____

Turn to Matthew 18:15-22. Read carefully verses 15-17 and try to identify four steps to be taken in trying to confront and restore a believer who is sinning.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

JESUS IS ALWAYS READY TO FORGIVE

When Jesus takes the Christian who refuses to listen to reproof and compares him to a "heathen and a tax collector," He is using very strong words. He means that you need to disassociate with a believer who is sinning and refusing to repent. He did not mean that we should ever give up on a brother who is sinning, but it seems as though Peter got the wrong idea from Jesus' strong words. Read verses 21 and 22.

* How ready should we be to forgive a sinning brother? _____

Do you find it difficult to balance these two truths: you should always forgive a believer who repents of his sin; and you should disassociate from a believer who continues in sin and refuses to repent?

* Which of these two directions from Jesus is more difficult for you? _____

A little help...

"To sin" means to fall short of God's standard of character. We are sinning not only when we break one of His laws, but also when we harbor ungodly thoughts and attitudes in our hearts. When we persist in sin we break the fellowship God wants to enjoy with us.

Something you should know:

Disassociation is Jesus' command of last resort for believers who continue in sin and refuse to repent. When Paul expands on this command in I Corinthians 5:9-13 he makes it clear that we are only to disassociate ourselves from "anyone who calls himself a brother." We are not to disassociate from sinners who continue in sin—otherwise we might as well enter a monastery!

Why do you think this is hard for you? _____

Some Christians today use Jesus' instructions in Matthew 18 as a sort of legal "due process" for getting rid of brothers they can't get along with. That attitude is far from the grace that Jesus intends for us to pour out on those who are opposing us, even if they have fallen under the influence of Satan himself.

Read 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

*** What should your attitude be toward someone who opposes your leadership?** _____

If you ever get to the place in your relationship with a believer who continues in sin that you have to disassociate with him,

*** What should be your constant prayer for him?** _____

THE BEST REMEDY FOR A RELATIONSHIP BROKEN BY SIN IS TO PRAY

Read James 5:16 in two different translations. To “confess your trespasses to one another” means to admit to your fellow believers that you have committed a particular sin and that you recognize that you acted in sin. This does not mean that you should tell everyone all your sins, nor does it mean that you need to find a particularly holy person to hear your confession on a regular basis. Look back at verses 14 and 15 and write in your own words the situation where confession is especially appropriate.

GOD LOVES IT WHEN WE PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

Look more closely at end of verse 16. Fill in the blanks with the two important qualities of the prayer that heals.

“The _____, fervent prayer of a _____ person avails much [is very powerful].”

* **Why do you think it is necessary that a believer who is continuing in sin must confess his sin in order to be healed?** _____

If Christians were serious about following the commands of James 5:16 how would our fellowship be transformed? _____

Do you wish you had the kind of mutual relationship with a mature Christian where you could safely admit your sins to him and he would always pray for your healing and restoration?

Read 1 John 5:16, 17 in two versions of the Bible.

* **What do these verses tell us to do for believers who are sinning?** _____

If you are praying for a believer who is continuing in sin and refuses to repent no matter what discipline God brings into his life, these verses tell you what to expect to happen to him.

* **Does there ever come a time when a believer should stop praying for a sinning brother or sister?** _____

We should never give up hope or stop praying for a sinning believer to repent, but verse 16 makes it clear that if they are hardening themselves against God, we must stop asking God to spare their lives. Can you think of any believers that are in danger, who need you to pray for their repentance? Write their first names here and your leader will pray with you for them when you meet next time. _____

Something you should know:

The Bible does not say that believers should confess their sins to a priest or to a professional, but it does say that they should confess to one another. You should use godly wisdom to identify a Christian friend who is in close fellowship with Jesus. You need to confess your sin to someone whom you know you can trust to have your spiritual growth always in view.

A word about confession:

To “confess” means to agree together. When you confess your sins to God, you are agreeing with Him that you have done wrong. When you confess your sins to another believer, you are agreeing together that your action was wrong and that you need God’s help to change.

Remember:

There are many causes of illness and the Bible encourages Christians to use medicine when they are sick. But when God brings sickness into a Christian’s life as a rebuke against sin, the Christian will know it.

A word about repentance:

To "repent" means that you begin to hate the sin that has led you away from God and that you return to abiding in Jesus.

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

— James 5:19, 20

Something you should know:

In I Kings 17:20-22 Elijah had already had experience with persevering prayer. He had to pray three times for the widow's son before he was restored to life. It seems as though God kept giving Elijah tests of faith that were progressively more challenging.

Meanwhile you can begin praying right now that your friends will begin to hate the sin that has them deceived and that they will turn from it and return to abiding in Jesus.

Now that you have read the passage in I John the verses in James 5 may become clearer. Try reading James 5: 16-20 while you allow your mind to dwell on the high standard for brotherly love in the Bible.

* **What are some ways that a believer can turn a sinning Christian back to Christ?** _____

In your experience, what works and what doesn't? _____

Read carefully verses 19 and 20. These verses are speaking about a Christian who wanders away from the truth. To "save a soul from death" in the New Testament almost always means to "save someone's physical life." Notice that the believer who persists in sin and rebellion against God is in danger of death, not in danger of condemnation. This is because God will not heal the sickness until the sinning believer turns back to Him.

* **If you are willing to pay the price of fervent prayer and fearless confrontation, what reward can you expect?** _____

James 5:20 includes a promise for believers who are willing to risk prayer and confrontation. This promise was first given in Daniel 12:3. Read the promise to Daniel and then write in your own words what the reward will be for those who are willing to turn people toward righteousness. _____

WE CAN PERSIST IN PRAYER—GOD DOESN'T GET TIRED OF LISTENING

James refers back to Elijah's example of a righteous person who prayed an effectual, fervent prayer. Read the story in I Kings 18:20-45 looking for Elijah's prayers. Notice the fervency of Elijah's praying in verses 42-43.

* **How many times did he pray before God answered him?** _____

How sure was Elijah that God was going to do what he asked? _____

Refer to verses 41 and 44 for an indication.

Notice verse 37.

* **What had to happen before God could begin to heal the people?** _____

Before Elijah prayed for rain and healing for the land, he took a number of bold actions to confront the people with their sin of going after other gods and believing false prophets. See if you can identify at least four bold steps that Elijah took to confront sin in verses 20-40.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

* **Are there any believers in your life that you know are wandering from the Lord?** _____

Can you think of any appropriate action you could take to call them back?

YOU MUST BE PREPARED TO CONFRONT AND TO FORGIVE

Something you should know:

"The circumcision" is one of the Bible's names for orthodox Jews who continued to keep all of the Old Testament laws. Peter and Paul and the other apostles recognized that they were saved by faith in Jesus alone and that they were not more accepted by God if they kept the Jewish laws.

Without a doubt, two of the most godly men who have ever lived were the apostles, Peter and Paul. Read Galatians 2:11-13 and try to identify what Peter was doing that was wrong. _____

EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO BE LOVINGLY CONFRONTED AT TIMES

Look carefully at Galatians 2:11.

* **What action did Paul take when he recognized that Peter was sinning?** ____

Now read Paul's words of rebuke in verse 14.

* **Do you think that Paul was being judgmental when he directly confronted Peter?** _____

Next turn to 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. These verses come from Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church. In his first letter Paul had told the believers to gather together to discipline a man who was committing adultery with his stepmother. (You can read Paul's instructions to them in 1 Corinthians 5.) The discipline that the church brought against the adulterous man seems to have brought him to the point of repentance, so now Paul urges the believers to begin the restoration process. Read this passage two times looking for how the Bible tells you to respond to someone who is truly sorry for sin. _____

Some people nowadays think that adultery is a private sin that only hurts the people directly involved. Read verse 5 again.

* **Who does the Bible say got hurt ("grieved") by one man's adultery?** ____

What was the "punishment" referred to in verse 6? _____

Read verses 7 and 8. Notice that church discipline is motivated by love and for the purpose of restoration. Discipline is painful for the whole church because we love the one who is sinning so much. But the pain is worth it because it makes true restoration possible. Does the whole idea of church discipline seem unloving and contrary to grace? According to your understanding of the Bible what reason could there possibly be for not having fellowship with another person?

A little help . .

Look back to 1 Corinthians 5:11 and 5:13 for clues.

EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO EXPERIENCE FORGIVENESS

When one of the members of the church at Corinth entered into an adulterous relationship, the other members were instructed to discipline him by breaking their fellowship with him until he repented; but after he repented they were told to forgive him.

Jesus has hard words for the people who wanted to follow Him in Matthew 6:14, 15. Read these two verses and write Jesus' warning in your own words.

These two verses are Jesus' conclusion based on the way He taught His disciples to pray. Look back at verse 12 in the middle of the Lord's Prayer. Does a believer have a right to ask God to forgive him for his sins while he continues to hold a grudge against someone else?

Galatians 6:1 and 2 speak most clearly to restoration of fellowship. Notice that discipline is always gentle and caring. As you read these verses, think about what it would feel like to have friends who cared about you enough to restore you to fellowship like this.

* **What do these verses say about the attitude of the brothers and sisters who restore a sinning brother?** _____

What could you do to help bear the burden of a believer who has been caught by sin? _____

Now read verse 1 again.

* **What is one very excellent reason why we should be gentle and kind when dealing with a believer who is caught by sin?** _____

As you review the Scriptural process for restoration, which part is the most difficult for you, confronting the sin and rebuking it, or gently and patiently restoring the sinner?

* **Why is it necessary for Christians to do both?** _____

Something you should know:

Discipline is also sometimes called "chastening" in the Bible. It is one of God's characteristics as a loving Father that He constantly trains and disciplines His children (see Hebrews 12:4-11). He loves us too much to allow us to continue in sin and rebellion, so He uses discipline to bring us back. Jesus commanded His disciples to cooperate with God in this by loving confrontation and discipline.

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

— Galatians 6:1, 2

A little help . . .

The "law of Christ" refers to Jesus' commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself."

The Holy Spirit--

Before Jesus rose from the dead, His disciples did not have the Holy Spirit living in them. On Jesus' last night before His death on the cross, He promised that He would send the Holy Spirit to be their Comforter and Helper. Jesus kept His promise, and now everyone who trusts in Jesus also receives the promised Helper.

YOUR FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SAINTS WILL NEVER END

CENTRAL TRUTH OF LESSON SIX:

Jesus intensely desires to have unbroken fellowship with us and to heal the relationships that are broken.

Jesus does not want you to ever have to doubt His love for you (John 14:25-27). Read these three verses and write in your own words the reasons why your heart never has to worry.

Look back to John 14:3 and notice how much Jesus desires to have you with Him.

*** How does it make you feel when you think about Jesus preparing a place to receive you? _____**

John 17:22-24 comes from the prayer Jesus prayed just before He was arrested and crucified.

*** What do you think you would be praying about if you knew you had only a few hours to live? _____**

Write in your own words Jesus' three main prayer requests from these three verses:

Verse 22, "Let my disciples be _____"

Verse 23, "Let the world know _____"

Verse 24, "Let my disciples be _____"

*** From these verses how do you think Jesus feels about the fact that He has not yet gathered all of His disciples into His Father's house? _____**

What do you think the celebration is going to be like when Jesus finally welcomes us to the "Open House" He has planned? _____

Read Revelation 22:1-5 and then look through the list below, circling the things we will experience in the City of God (New Jerusalem in heaven) and crossing out the things that will not be there.

- | | | |
|--------------|------------|------------------|
| Pure water | Night | Work |
| A boulevard | Government | Food |
| Street lamps | Sunshine | The curse of sin |

“The Lamb” is one of the Bible’s names for Jesus.

* **From these verses what are some of the things about our fellowship with God that will be different in heaven?** _____

What changes do you think will come to our fellowship with other Christians in heaven when we begin to have face-to-face fellowship with God?

Why do you think there is a “tree for healing” in the City of God? _____

One thing that has been true consistently throughout your life is that Jesus loves you and desires close and intimate fellowship with you. He is looking forward to the day when you will be with Him in the City of God, participating in His Kingdom.

Something you may not have realized is that ever since you became a Christian, Jesus has deliberately put you together with other Christians that He has chosen. His great desire has been that you would learn to have fellowship with those brothers and sisters and to experience with them the same kind of unity that He experiences every day with the Father. In heaven we will finally have this unity in full—why not ask God to begin fostering this kind of love in your relationships right now?

TALKING TO GOD: Find a quiet place where you can be alone with God for at least twenty minutes. Ask Him to show you if there are relationships in your life that need healing. Write down the first names of the people that He brings to your mind. Ask Him to begin to heal those relationships, and ask Him if there are steps you need to take to make peace and bring healing.

Growing in Grace: Review Sheet

1. Subject:	4. Subject:
Memory Verse:	Memory Verse:
Central Truth:	Central Truth:
2. Subject:	5. Subject:
Memory Verse:	Memory Verse:
Central Truth:	Central Truth:
3. Subject:	6. Subject:
Memory Verse:	Memory Verse:
Central Truth:	Central Truth:

PRAYER SHEET

Prayer Requests/Date	God's Answer/Date

For information on using *Growing in Grace* personally or in your church, call
1-888-COD-7610 or email us at: info@churchoftheopendoor.com