

Spiritual Disciplines For Spiritual Growth – Week 1

Bible Reading and Application

Psalm 19:7-14: *The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward. ¹² Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. ¹³ Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer*

I. A description of the Word of God - Verses 7-9

1. _____ – Verse 7a: *The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul*

It is without blemish, and is complete, lacking nothing. We don't need another testimony, as the Mormons would try and tell us. We don't need a watered down witness, like that which the liberals have set forth. God's word is perfect.

2. _____ – Verse 7b: *The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple*

The NIV says that the statutes of the Lord are "Trustworthy." We can rely upon them. When all around us there are conflicting messages as to what truth is, God's word does not change, it is sure and it is trustworthy.

The word "simple" in the Hebrew refers to one who is lacking in knowledge.

3. _____ – Verse 8a: *The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart*

A precept is a directive that, if followed, will lead one to the goal of faithful living. God's directions, His precepts or statutes are always right. They never mislead, they never take us down a dead end, and they are never out of date.

4. _____ – Verse 8b: *The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes*

The word pure here, is often used to describe the purity and radiance of sunlight. In fact, the NIV translates this "*The commands of the Lord are Radiant, giving light to the eyes.*"

Psalm 119:105: *Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.*

Proverbs 6:23: *For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light.*

John 1:4-5: *In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

God's word sheds light on an otherwise dark pathway. It enlightens, illuminates or gives light to the eyes of our understanding.

5. _____ – Verse 9a: *The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever*

The fear of the Lord has a purifying effect on us and it endures forever. It doesn't change.

1 Peter 1:24-25: *All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever. And this word is the good news that was preached to you.*

6. _____ – Verse 9b: *The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether*

The word judgment here speaks to what God says ought to be. It is His judgment, His decision, His declaration about what should be and what should not be.

II. A Desire for the Word of God - Verse 10

Verse 10: *More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.*

Psalm 119:72: *The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.*

Proverbs 8:10-11: *Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold, ¹¹ for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.*

1. What Is Your Greatest _____?

2. What is Your Greatest _____?

III. The Discernment of the Word of God – Verses 11-13

Verses 11-13: *Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward. ¹² Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. ¹³ Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression.*

1. It _____ us

It warns us against sins that we commit inadvertently and of sins that we commit willfully and rewards us when we read it by helping us avoid falling into sin.

Verse 12 speaks of hidden faults, or those that we have a hard time discerning.

2. It _____

Verse 13 says that God's word reveals to us, or keeps us back, from presumptuous sins.

These two areas, hidden faults and presumptuous sins, are two areas that set us back in our spiritual journey. Only by regularly and intentionally reading God's word can we hope to gain the victory in these areas.

Hebrews 4:12: *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

IV. The Devotion of the child of God

Verse 14: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer

These verses speak to the attitude we should possess as we read the word of God. As we allow it to speak to our hearts, to direct us, to discern and show us our sins, our hearts desire should be that we are kept from sin and that we are pleasing in God's sight.

Psalms 119:9-11: *How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. ¹⁰ With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! ¹¹ I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.*

V. Five practical steps to bible intake:

1. _____ it

Get a plan, a through the bible in a year plan

Get a schedule - read it regularly

Get a version you understand - get a translation which is easy for you to read

2. _____ upon it

Meditation means thinking about what God's word says, perhaps writing it down on a card so that you can go over it throughout the day will help you.

3. _____ it

If you hid it in your heart, no one can take it from you and it will be there when you need it. God will bring it to your remembrance.

4. _____ it

Share it with someone. Tell others what God is saying to you through His word. You'd be amazed how hungry people are for spiritual truth. Share what you've learned with others.

5. _____ to it

Simply put, do it. Don't just be a hearer of the word, be a doer.

Spiritual Disciplines For Spiritual Growth – Week 2

Prayer

Colossians 4:2-4: *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.* ³ *At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—* ⁴ *that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

F.B. Meyer, the author of the great little book, the **Secret of Guidance** said, "*The great tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer.*"

I. Seven Things We Are Called To Do With Respect To Prayer

1. Pray _____ – Verse 2a "Continue steadfastly in prayer."

"Continue steadfastly" means, "persist in, adhere firmly to, or remain devoted to or to give unremitting care to" and carries with it the idea of dedication.

1 Thessalonians 5:17: *Pray without ceasing.*

Persistence in prayer is not an option for the believer; in fact, it is an order command from the Lord.

Two of the most instructive parables Jesus ever told on prayer, one in **Luke 11** and the other in **Luke 18**, both have to do with being persistent and not giving up in prayer.

Luke 11:9 Amplified: *So I say to you, Ask and keep on asking and it shall be given you; seek and keep on seeking and you shall find; knock and keep on knocking and the door shall be opened to you.*

Luke 18:1: *And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.*

2. Pray _____ – Verse 2b - *being watchful in it with thanksgiving*

Paul says we should be vigilant or be watchful; it is the opposite of slothfulness. This describes passionate prayer. Jesus was passionate about His prayer life.

Every time we see Jesus praying He was praying with passion.

- In **Luke 3:1** at His Baptism – while He was praying the heaven was opened. Passionate prayer opens heaven.
- In **Luke 6:12** before He called His disciples – He spent the whole night in prayer. Passionate prayer opens the door for God's direction.
- In **Luke 9:29** at His transfiguration – And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming.

Passionate prayer ushers us into the throne room of heaven and enables us to experience the glory of God.

- In **John 17** He prayed for all of those who would follow Him, that we would be kept from the evil one and that we would be sanctified by the truth, which is His word. Passionate prayer expresses the deepest desires of our hearts and reveals our love for others.
- In **Luke 22:44**, where Jesus is praying through the night in the garden of Gethsemane, the bible says, "And being in agony, He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground." Passionate prayer enables us to be totally honest with God, even in the midst of the most trying circumstances.
- In **Luke 23:24** as He hung on the cross. Passionate prayer is a portal to God's power. It strengthens us internally and is often a conduit for God's grace upon us.

Jesus always prayed with passion, because He knew who it was He was talking to and He knew that access to the Father is a powerful thing and not something to take lightly.

Prayer from the heart is what passionate prayer is.

Matthew 6:7: *When you pray, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do.*

James 5:16: *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

3. Pray _____ - Pray with Thanksgiving - Verse 2

A constant theme that should run through our prayers is that of gratitude. Paul never fails to mention it.

- **Ephesians 5:20:** *Give thanks always for all things* - tells us that thanksgiving is the natural result of being filled with and walking under the influence of the Holy Spirit.
- **Philippians 4:6** tells us to be anxious for nothing but in everything we should pray, giving thanks as we make our petitions known to God.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:18** tells us to give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for us in Christ Jesus.
- **Colossians 3:17** says that whatever we do in word or deed should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus as we give thanks to God the Father.
- **1 Timothy 4:4** says that everything created by God is good and should be received with thanksgiving and gratitude.

Expressing gratitude as we pray accomplishes several things:

1. It articulates _____
2. It generates _____

Micah 6:8: *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

Proverbs 22:4: *By humility and the fear of the LORD Are riches and honor and life.*

3. It demonstrates _____

Gratitude in prayer comes from knowing that He is our Father and that we are His children. As His children we know He loves us and has provided for us out of that love.

4. Pray _____ - We Must Pray For Others - Verse 3

Intercessory prayer is basically praying for others, it is praying for God's will to be done in the lives of other people.

Intercessory prayers characterized the prayer life of Jesus:

- **Isaiah 53:12:** *And He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*
- **Luke 22:32:** *I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail.*
- **Luke 23:34:** *Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.*
- **John 14:15** *Jesus interceded for us, asking the Father to send the Holy Spirit*
- **John 17:9:** *And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.*
- **Romans 8:34** tells us that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for us.
- **Hebrews 7:25:** *Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*

One of the most misunderstood realities of discipleship is that it is never a selfish thing.

John 20:21: *As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*

II. Three Things You Need To Examine As You pPray:

1. Your heart _____

2. Your _____

3. Your _____

Spiritual Disciplines For Spiritual Growth – Week 3

Worship

John 4:23-24: *But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

As we get into this subject of worship, I think it is important for us to understand how broad the subject of worship is. Sadly some people think worship is an event that happens on Sunday or a style of music. While worship is big enough to include both of those things, it is, in reality, so much bigger and broader than just an event or a style of music. In some regard, worship is all of life, every aspect of it, connected to God or disconnected from God.

I. Three Important Questions About Worship

1. Where Does Worship _____?

Worship originates in God Himself – within the Trinity. According to the Bible there is one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Spirit – co-equal, co-eternal in every way. The community of God is perfect in love, in joy, and in unity. God has worship within His own essence. The Father, Son, and Spirit, from eternity past through eternity future continually, unceasingly pour themselves out in love, in praise, in communication, and in joy.

When God created man, He created him in the image and likeness of God, which means in part we were made as worshipers. As an image bearer of God, worship is not merely an aspect of our being, but the essence of our being. We ceaselessly pour ourselves out.

When man fell in the Garden, sin nature entered into man and his fallen nature affected his worship. Because of sin our worship tends to be directed toward things or people other than God, the result being that we continue to worship but we worship wrongly.

When Jesus went to the cross and suffered and died, in my place for my sins, He conquered our enemies - Satan, sin, and death. He also reconciled our relationship with God so that we might again participate in the love, the joy, the praise, and the adoration that the Trinitarian God has with Himself. The redeemed are invited into relationship with that God to not just worship, but worship rightly, in a way that gives God glory and gives us joy.

2. What Is _____?

Romans 11:36–12:1: *For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. ¹ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that*

you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service (your spiritual act of worship).

Paul tells us that worship is glory and sacrifice. Glory means weightiness, heaviness, prominence, and preeminence. Whoever or whatever is in the position of glory in your life is that person or thing that centers your existence. It's the treasure that you cherish most deeply. It's where your passion, your longing, your yearning, your desires, and enthusiasm reside. Who or what is in the position of glory?

Since we are finite, created beings, we only have limited resources; so much time, so much money, so much energy. We cannot divest ourselves of these resources unendingly, so we make decisions. We make these kinds of decisions all the time, and they are worship decisions. Our life is about not doing something so that we can do other things that we find to be more glorious.

Paul says, "*This is our spiritual act of worship.*" Someone or something is in a place of glory. We sacrifice for the glory of that person or thing. That is, by definition, worship. This is a definition of worship that works for Christians and non-Christians alike. It includes everyone.

3. What is _____?

The opposite of worship is idolatry. We are all unceasing worshipers going after someone, or something, pouring ourselves out. If it's not God, it's not that we cease to worship, it's that rather we misdirect our worship towards someone or something other than God. That's idolatry.

Romans 1:25: *Who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

Those who commit idolatry worship someone or something other than God.

This happens in two ways:

We either worship what God has made or we worship things we have made.

II. How Can I _____ My idols?

1 *John 5:21:* *Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.*

Keeping ourselves from idols is the way we really get to the root. Most of the outward symptoms caused by the things we call habits or addictions are only the fruit of those things. We must not focus on the fruit, but on the root. Idolatry is always the issue.

Questions too Consider:

- **Who or what are your external idols?** The stuff out there that is God to you?
- **Who or what is Lord that rules over your life?** Who calls the shots?
- **Where do you give your first fruits – your first money?** Jesus says, “Where your treasure is, there is where your heart is also”.
- **What do you plan and pray for?** That may be indicative of where your heart and your idol is.
- **Who or what are your internal idols?** What false beliefs do you hold about God?
- **What Scriptures do you deeply doubt or even disbelieve?**

1 Timothy 3:16-17: All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- **Who or what do you love, treasure, long for the most?** The center of your heart, the center of your life – who are you going after? What are you going after?
- **Who or what mediates between you and God?** In 1 Timothy 2:5. Paul says there’s one mediator between God and us, the man Christ Jesus. Who mediates for you other than Jesus?
- **Who or what other than Jesus do you use to get closer to God?**
- **Who or what, if taken from your life, would cause you to not walk faithfully with God?**
- **Where is your functional heaven?** Some of you say, “I believe in heaven. I read the Bible.” We each have in our mind our proverbial functional heaven. When you are daydreaming about escaping this life, what does your functional heaven look like?
- **Who is your or what is your functional savior?** If you have a picture of hell and you have a picture of heaven, you need a functional savior to get you out of hell, to get you to heaven.
- **What good thing has become a God thing?**

III. How Can I Nurture My Worship?

1. _____ Renewal - This is you loving Jesus
2. _____ Renewal – This is you love others.
3. _____ Renewal - Sharing Jesus
4. _____ Renewal - Fall in love with your church
5. _____ Renewal - Reevaluating how and why we do church

Spiritual Disciplines For Spiritual Growth – Week 4

The Stewardship of Life

1 Peter 4:10-11: *As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.¹¹ If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

I. What Does The New Testament Teach About Wealth?

1. It Warns Us Against A _____ To Be Rich

1 Timothy 6:9-10: *But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

2. For Those Who Are Rich There Are _____ Obligations

1 Timothy 6:17-19: *Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. ¹⁸ Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, ¹⁹ storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

3. God Blesses Us To Be A _____

Ephesians 4:28: *Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.*

II. Who _____ Everything?

How we answer this question, answers every other question. It's an issue of ownership.

Deuteronomy 8:17-18: *then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.'¹⁸ "And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.*

Psalms 50:10: *For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.*

Haggai 2:8: *The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of Hosts.*

James 1:16-18: *Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every*

perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. ¹⁸ Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

III. What Is Stewardship?

Stewardship - It all belongs to God and He's put some of it - some time, some talent, some treasures - into my hands to be a steward over. A steward is someone who manages the assets of someone else.

Stewardship - the management of my God-given resources for His glory and the good of others.

FOUR MODELS OF A STEWARD: (Two good and two bad)

1. The Person Who Does _____ With Much

Luke 12:16-21: Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷ And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' ¹⁸ So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.'¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry."²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' ²¹ "So *is* he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

2. Person Who Does _____ With Little.

Like 16:10: *He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.*

John 6:5-14 - The feeding of the 5,000.

3. The Person Who Does _____ With Little.

Matthew 25:24-30: *Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.'²⁵ And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' ²⁶ "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. ²⁷ So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. ²⁸ Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. ²⁹ 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

4. The Person Who Does _____ With Much.

Matthew 25:19-23: *After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' ²¹ His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' ²² He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' ²³ His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'*

The Difference between good stewardship models and bad stewardship models:

1. _____ - Good stewards understand God is the owner, bad stewards think they are the owner.
2. _____ - Good stewards could trust God with their resources, bad stewards would not.
3. _____ - Good stewards have good attitudes about God, self, others, and life, but a bad steward has a selfish attitude

IV. The Stewardship Of Time

Ephesians 5:15-16: *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.*

It is foolish for us to think that God could be concerned about how we spend money but not concerned about how we spend time. Time is infinitely more valuable than money. Time can make you money but money cannot buy you time. Each of us are allotted only 24 hours a day and each of us may spend it wisely or we may waste it, but you can never get it back and you can never get more than has been allotted to you.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2: *To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: ² A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted*

We are not to waste away our days doing things that have no eternal value. Rather we should spend the time God has given us in ways that will make the greatest eternal impact.

Spiritual Disciplines For Spiritual Growth – Week 5
Evangelism – Part 1 – Owning the Mission

John 20:19-23: *Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.”²⁰ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.²¹ So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”²² And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”*

I. The Mission

1. He _____ Us

V. 19: *Peace be with you.*

The disciples were afraid. The word “fear” in verse 19 carries with it the idea of “flight.” The disciples were so alarmed and frightened that they wanted to bolt. Now, contrast this with the word, “peace,” (Shalom) which is defined as “putting together that which is broken, nothing missing, nothing broken.” Jesus knows they are afraid so He says “Shalom” to them.

This is the message that Jesus offers all of us. He doesn’t ignore our past. The Savior offers YOU peace today, even if you feel you don’t deserve it. God’s peace and forgiveness is extended to us by His grace.

As it relates to our mission, the world needs to know that there is peace available to them; that our Savior loves them and offers forgiveness to them – no longer counting their sins to against them.

2. He _____ Us

V. 21: *Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*

He not only accepts them but He entrusts them with the message of the gospel. He believes in them and so He commissions them.

The first use of the word “peace” in verse 19 was given in order to quiet their hearts. This second “peace” was given in order to prepare them for a fresh statement of their purpose in verse 21.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;¹⁹ that is, in Christ*

God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Notice that Jesus sends us into the world in the same way the Father sent Him. We must take the initiative.

Luke 14:21-23: ²¹ *So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.'* ²² *And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.'* ²³ *Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.'*

We've been accepted so that we can live out our purpose - tell the world about Jesus.

3. He _____ Us

V. 22: *And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*

Jesus not only interests us with the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel, but He also equips us for the job. At this moment of greatest need the Savior promises to place His Spirit in each of us individually.

When the Holy Spirit is given room to work He will surprise us again and again by what He can do. We are not left alone! He has provided the help we need.

God doesn't call the equipped; He equips the called.

4. He _____ Us

V. 23: *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*

This text is difficult because we know that **Mark 2:7** says, "no one can forgive sins but God alone."

If you tell people about this forgiveness you are extending forgiveness to them. If they respond they are indeed forgiven. However, if you don't tell them, you are NOT extending forgiveness to them. Then their sins will not be forgiven.

Jesus accepts, He commissions, He equips, and He motivates us.

II. Living Out Our Responsibility

Now I want to focus on how to live out our responsibility. The starting point is to recognize and fully believe at least five truths.

1. People _____ to God

John 3:16: “God so loved the world...” We agree with this, but we don’t always own it.

2 Peter 3:9: *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*

It doesn’t matter how old they are, what color they are, what country they’re from, whether they have money, education, or a job. It doesn’t even matter how bad their sins are. They have great value in God’s eyes, and their repentance will bring “*rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God*” (**Luke 15:10**).

Psalm 139:13-18: *You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. ¹⁴ Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. ¹⁵ You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. ¹⁶ You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. ¹⁷ How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! ¹⁸ I can’t even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, you are still with me!*

Every person has worth and dignity because they’ve been created in the image of God.

2. People are _____ Lost

While people have tremendous value and worth to God, the Bible declares a second truth: *People are spiritually lost.*

Romans 3:10-12: *There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.*

3. People _____ Christ

The good news is that everyone matters to God. The bad news is that people are spiritually lost. The great news is that Jesus died for all people and has made full payment for our sins. Therefore, everyone needs Christ in order to be saved.

John 14:6: *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

Acts 4:12: *Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

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

People need to hear the message of the cross.

Romans 1:16: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”*

4. People Have _____

For the most part, people in our culture have **moved**. They have disengaged from biblical values and can no longer look over the edge and see the depth of their sins. In fact, for many people, they don't even recognize that there is a rift between them and God.

People are further away than we had originally thought – and they're continuing to move in the wrong direction. Whatever term we use: *secular, postmodern, or post-Christian*, the fact is that people don't think the way they used to think or believe the things they used to believe. People have taken steps away from Christian beliefs, values and morals.

Barna Study:

The study was conducted among 16- to 29-year-olds and shows that a new generation is more skeptical of and resistant to Christianity than were people of the same age just a decade ago.

The study shows that 16- to 29-year-olds exhibit a greater degree of criticism toward Christianity than did previous generations when they were at the same stage of life.

For instance, a decade ago the vast majority of Americans outside the Christian faith, including young people, felt favorably toward Christianity's role in society. Currently, however, just 16% of non-Christians in their late teens and twenties said they have a "good impression" of Christianity.

The new study shows that only 3% of 16 - to 29-year-old non-Christians express favorable views of evangelicals. This means that today's young non-Christians are eight times less likely to experience positive associations toward evangelicals than were non-Christians of the Boomer generation (25%).

Common negative perceptions include that present-day Christianity is judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), old-fashioned (78%), and too involved in politics (75%) -

representing large proportions of young outsiders who attach these negative labels to Christians. The most common favorable perceptions were that Christianity teaches the same basic ideas as other religions (82%), has good values and principles (76%), is friendly (71%), and is a faith they respect (55%).

When young people were asked to identify their impressions of Christianity, one of the common themes was "Christianity is changed from what it used to be" and "Christianity in today's society no longer looks like Jesus." These comments were the most frequent unprompted images that young people called to mind, mentioned by one-quarter of both young non-Christians (23%) and born again Christians (22%).

5. People Need _____

If we want to help move others toward Christ, we need to proactively address their issues and show that the Christian life is the best way to live and the only way to die. People today require more than to merely having the gospel declared to them – they must also have it demonstrated. And if they are going to really listen, then they will need to be disarmed.

You can't communicate what you don't know. You must know what you believe and why you believe it. Our beliefs must be founded in solid biblical teaching and sound doctrine. That is why we offer discipleship for those interested in growing in Christ.

1 Peter 3:13-16: *And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.*

Spiritual Disciplines For Spiritual Growth – Week 6 Community

I. What Is The Church?

Matthew 16:13-20: *When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”¹⁴ So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”¹⁶ Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.¹⁸ And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.¹⁹ And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”²⁰ Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.*

1. The church is _____ by Christ

Church - ekklesia - it is a compound word in the Greek that means the called out ones.

Any group of people who are not standing on the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, that He fulfilled the messianic prophecies, and that he is the Messiah and rose from the dead, is not a church by Biblical definition.

2. God wants the church to be _____ and not divided.

Ephesians 4:1-4: *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling*

Verses 11-12: *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,*

3. The _____ of the church

1 Peter 5:1-4: *The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:² Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;*

³ nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; ⁴ and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

Elders oversee the church by leading them, guiding them, training them, and setting vision for them. They shepherd God's people under the direction and leadership of the Chief Shepherd.

4. The Body of Christ is raised up to employ their _____ for the service of one another.

1 Peter 4:10-11: *As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

II. Why is church attendance / going to church important?

1. The Bible tells us we need to attend church so we can worship God with other believers and be taught His Word for our spiritual growth.

The early church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (**Acts 2:42**). They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (**Acts 2:46**).

- 2 Church attendance is not just a “good suggestion”; it is God’s _____ for believers.

Hebrews 10:24-25: *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

III. What does the Bible say about church attendance?

1. Believers meet together to _____ one another.

Hebrews 10:25: *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

The church is the place where we come together to encourage one another as members of Christ's body. Together we fulfill an important purpose on the Earth.

2. As members of the body of Christ, we _____ to each other.

Romans 12:5: *so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another*

We need each other to grow up in the faith, to learn to serve, to love one another, and to practice forgiveness. Though we are individuals, we still belong to one another.

3. Christ's body is made of many parts, yet it is still one _____ entity.

1 Corinthians 12:12: *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.*

1 Corinthians 12:14-23: *For in fact the body is not one member but many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? ¹⁸ But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. ¹⁹ And if they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰ But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ 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." ²² No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. ²³ And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty,*

1 Corinthians 12:27: *Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*

Unity in the body of Christ does not mean total conformity and uniformity. Although maintaining unity in the body is very important, it is also vital to value the unique qualities that make each of us an individual "part" of the body. Both aspects, unity and individuality, deserve emphasis and appreciation.

4. We develop the _____ of Christ through bearing with one another in the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:2: *with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,*

We learn humility, gentleness and patience, developing the character of Christ as we relate within the body of Christ.

5. In the body of Christ we exercise our spiritual _____ to serve and minister to one another.

1 Peter 4:10: *As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

1 Thessalonians 5:11: *Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.*

James 5:16: *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.*

6. Our leaders in the body of Christ offer _____ protection.

1 Peter 5:1-4: *The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ² Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³ nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; ⁴ and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*

Hebrews 13:17: *Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*

7. Accountability

Romans 12:5 Amplified: *So we, numerous as we are, are one body in Christ (the Messiah) and individually we are parts one of another [mutually dependent on one another].*

God never intended for us to live alone. We need one another if we are going to succeed in life and grow spiritually.

God didn't create us to be an island, but to live our life in community. We all need discipleship and discipleship occurs in community.