

INTRODUCTION

Bad habits and attitudes are easy to get and hard to get rid of! In these next seven lessons you will be challenged to bring every action and attitude under the direct control of the Lord. Each lesson begins with a Bible Study and is followed by several pages of reading. Before you begin, ask the Lord to speak to you and then be willing to transform. God bless you.

1. In Romans 12:2, the Lord challenges us not to _____ to the world, but to be _____ by the renewing of our _____ .
2. Paul says in Philippians 2:13 that God is at work in us both to _____ and to _____ for (*in order to fulfill*) His good pleasure.
3. According to Hebrews 4:12, the Word of God is able to divide between soul and _____. And is able to _____ our thoughts and motives.

Psalm 62:11 says that all power belongs to God and that He has placed this power in His Word. Consider Jeremiah 23:29, *Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?* This week we will be looking at the power of the Word of God to transform our lives.

4. Read the following Scripture references and match them to the power of the Word revealed in each.

• Acts 2:37	Power to Protect
• Romans 10:17	Power to Give Wisdom
• Psalm 119:9	Power to Build Character
• 1 Peter 2:2; Acts 20:32	Power to Cleanse
• James 1:5-9; Psalm 119:130	Power to Produce Faith
• 2 Timothy 3:13-15	Power to Convict
5. Each lesson you will be challenged to apply to your own life what you have studied.
6. **Before you do Lesson 2**
 - *Can you make this your commitment?*

CHALLENGE

It is the desire of my heart to be transformed into the image of Christ. I will read the Word of God each day and submit myself to its transforming power.

Signed _____

- Read Pages 2-5
- Read Acts 1
- Memorize Hebrews 4:12

INTRODUCTION

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. Romans 12:2

Like any habit a bad attitude is easy to get, and very hard to get rid of! Romans 12:2 challenges us to a life of transformation. The very idea of need for change implies that something is not quite right. Behind every action is a controlling attitude, and it is these controlling attitudes that we will be discovering and transforming. I hope you enjoy the journey.

For many Christians the transformation is slow and discouraging because they never deal with the underlying attitudes that produce the undesirable actions in their lives. The Lord never expects us to *only* modify our behavior. He intends for our attitudes to be changed. Listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:21-22,

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Jesus was not saying that it was perfectly fine to kill as long as you don't get angry. He was telling His audience that God requires *more* than changed actions of those in His Kingdom. He expects their hearts to be changed as well. If you never get angry, you will never murder. His focus was on a person's attitude of heart. Those in the Kingdom have the opportunity to have transformed hearts by the power of the Kingdom in them.

1 John 4:4

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

Since you are of God, the power of God resides in you and you can be an overcomer. It will require faith and discipline to experience transformation. Just remember, it is God who does the transforming. Listen to Paul's words from Philippians 2:13,

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

"Both to will and to do" means that God will give you two necessary ingredients to accomplish the transformation of your life. First He will give you the **desire** to be changed. Without the working of God's Spirit in your spirit you would not even desire the right things. Romans 3:11,

There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

Second, along with the desire, God will give you the **ability** to transform. Never think that this means you have the power yourself! ***The Christian life is not a series of resolutions followed by hard work.*** It is a life of cooperation and faith. We cooperate with Him by being obedient, and trusting Him to do the transforming work in us.

Zechariah 4:6b states,

Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.

It is still God who will do the work. But He will be doing it in cooperation with our faith and discipline.

The Word of God and the Holy Spirit are the agents of change in our lives. The first two lessons will focus our attention on the power available to us through each.

LESSON ONE: THE POWER OF THE WORD OF GOD

*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.
Hebrews 4:12*

Dave was a very angry young man. His wife had just left him for her lesbian lover; his church had blamed him for their separation, and his boss was cheating him on his pay. He was lonely, confused, and desperate for a change in his life. He wandered into our Wednesday night service asking if we could pray for him. We were more than happy, not knowing that this would be the beginning of a year-long transformation in which God would prove himself both willing and capable.

After several hours of prayer and some real forgiveness and healing that night Dave decided to commit himself to study God's Word and believe God to transform him. Later he informed me that he had failed the psychological test to become a state trooper. They told him that if they gave him a gun he would shoot someone! I asked him if he would like the Lord to transform him so that he could pass that test the next year since it was only given once per year. He took up the challenge.

Every Wednesday night we studied together, reading the Word and other books. There was not a question he was afraid to ask and God was giving him all the answers he needed. On Sunday you could always find him in the worship service letting God transform him inside and out. When his boss directed him to lie to the state about his pay he refused and felt the full fury of a sinner's anger. But Dave had changed! He no longer could sin without remorse. The Word was beginning to make its changes in Him.

The time came for him to take his psychological test. He passed! Praise God. But God was not finished—Dave passed every step towards becoming a state trooper with excellence. I'll never forget the day he called and told me he finished his training and had ended up **first** in his class! Our God is an awesome God! Dave is now remarried with

three wonderful children and is a testimony to the transforming power of the Word of God.

Hebrews 4:12 is a powerful expression of the ability of God's Word to transform us. What other book is able to help us know our motives and intentions? When we submit to the Word we are transformed into the character of Christ. In this study we are going to see six different ways that the Bible is able to transform us.

Psalm 62:11 says that all power belongs to God and that He has placed this power in His Word. Consider Jeremiah 23:29,

Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?

Is it any wonder that so many Christians have difficulty studying the Word of God? The devil knows the power that resides there and is committed to keeping us from it! He uses every tactic at his disposal to thwart our efforts. He knows that the more we study the Word, the more it will transform us, and the stronger we will become. Our weakness is His strength!

POWER TO CONVICT

The Word of God is able to convict people of sin. No matter how hard we try, we are unable to make people see their sin. In his book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell recounts a discussion with an unbeliever who he was challenging about the resurrection of Jesus. Mr. McDowell asked if the young man would believe in the resurrection of Jesus if it could be proven by the evidence. The man said, "No!" Reason does not bring conviction!

Remember reading about the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2? A great many people were under conviction and Luke records them crying out in Acts 2:37, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* They had just heard the Word of God preached to them. Peter had given them a detailed summary of the working of God with

Israel up to the resurrection of Jesus and they were pricked in their hearts and minds. The natural response to the Holy Spirit convicting us through the Word is to cry out for help!

POWER TO PRODUCE FAITH

The Church is full of people living sub-Christian lives. They were saved by faith but have been living by works. Colossians 2:6 says,

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:

They have forgotten to walk by faith and have reverted to the only means they know—sight. What you see is what you get! Faith has only been applied to their regeneration experience, their beginning step, but not their ongoing walk. Romans 10:17 gives us a clear expression of where we can obtain faith.

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

It always amazes me how we seem to do all the wrong things when our faith is weak! We do everything to keep it weak, making it even weaker! We retreat from worship and involvement with other Christians. Sermons seem condemning rather than uplifting. And the Word is a distant friend.

Some years ago a member of my church shared that he had been told he had cancer and he was terrified. Who wouldn't be at the prospects of an early death? Nothing seemed to help until we began to claim the truths in the Word of God for him. God flooded his heart with hope because His Word was filled with hope. The young man left with the peace that only God can give and remains that way even today!

POWER TO CLEANSE

Sustained times in the study of the Word can cleanse us without our even knowing what God is doing. There is power in the Word that works when we are unaware. Ephesians 5:25-26,

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.

R. A. Torrey in *How To Obtain Fullness of Power* states, “The Word of God has the power not only to take impurities out of the heart, but to cleanse the outward life as well.”

Psalm 119:9

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.

Only through the daily washings of the Word will we be able to clean the pollution of the world off our lives. Many years ago I had the privilege of performing in the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, for a Forth of July celebration. Our music group, representing John Brown University, a small Christian college, was to perform several numbers for the packed stadium. I was thrilled and ready to do my best. Just as our leader started the count I took a deep breath to play my trombone and began coughing. The pollution was so thick and heavy it had invaded my lungs and I was unable to play! After several drinks of water and many small breaths I finally joined the rest of the group!

It is impossible to live in this world without the pollution entering our lives. The decadence is everywhere—in movies, television programs, radio, music, school locker rooms, in the workplace, even in our churches! I remember cancelling a church bowling league because of the ungodliness! Only the Word of God is able to wash us clean. Read it every day.

POWER TO BUILD CHARACTER

The source of our growth in Christ is the Word of God. Have you ever heard the phrase, “*You are what you eat*”? Well, if you eat the Word of God, getting it into your spirit through continual reading, memorizing, and obeying, you will become just like it!

Consider 1 Peter 2:2.

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.

In Acts 20:32 Paul says,

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

The Word of God is able to build us up. Can you think of any other spiritual food that is as well-balanced as God's Word. There are some who only listen to their favorite preacher, or

evangelist. While hearing sermons will help you grow, they can not do the work like the Word of God. Al Metsker, the great leader of Youth for Christ in Kansas City, was dogmatic about this issue. More than once I heard him tell our teenagers, “*The Word of God does the work of God!*” I can still hear him shouting it at the top of his lungs so you would not forget it.

It is impossible to sustain spiritual growth without the study of God’s Word. You will not be able to identify God’s voice without His Word to give you a guide. As you read the stories of God’s workings with individuals you will be able to understand His activities in your own life. Consider David. As Saul and most of Israel searched for him in order to end his life, David refused to complain. He knew that God had spoken to Him; he had eaten the Word of God and it had made him strong in faith! He wrote these words:

Psalm 11:7

The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.

Psalm 119:11

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Psalm 119:16

I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.

The Word of God had built him up so that he could stand even under extreme circumstances.

POWER TO GIVE WISDOM

James 1:5 says, *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

But how does God give wisdom? Too often we wait for some answer to come out of the air, hoping God will just speak His Word to us directly. While God does give us direction in our spirit, His clearest and most used way to impart wisdom is through His written Word.

When I was struggling over whether or not I should quit my job, take my wife and three children and go to seminary, I needed wisdom

from the Lord. I prayed. I talked to my pastor, and to other believers seeking God’s wisdom on the matter. One night while I was deep in prayer, with great heaviness of heart over this decision the Lord gave such clear wisdom to me through the Word. It was as if the verses were written just for me—and God made them spring out of the page at me. He spoke so clearly these words from Proverbs 4:11-12,

I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.

He said that if I would pursue wisdom I would be successful. I quit my job, enrolled in seminary, moved my family and have never looked back!

The Word of God has the power to give wisdom. Read Psalm 119:130 very carefully,

The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.

Wisdom follows the one who digs deeply into the Word of God.

POWER TO PROTECT

In such a dangerous world where the devil is so actively fighting the cause of Christ, even in our homes and churches, the protection of the Word of God is a necessity. The Word of God will protect us from error and sin—those things that will destroy us. Listen to Paul in 2 Timothy 3:13-15,

But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation...

As you constantly feed on the Word of God you will be protected from committing errors. Silliness and foolishness are wrapped up in the heart of the believer who has neglected the Word and remains immature in his walk.

In order to have our attitudes transformed we must saturate our lives with the Word of God. That is the beginning—not the end!

LESSON TWO: THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

1. As you read over the notes from Lesson One, what sticks out in your mind as significant?

2. According to Romans 15:13, through whom does God empower us?

3. According to Ephesians 6:17, What is the Word of God?

4. Read the following Scripture references and match them to the power of the Spirit revealed in each.

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| • John 16:8-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:5 | Power to Renew |
| • Titus 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 2 Timothy 3:5;
Isaiah 40:31; John 15:4; Psalm 6:6; Galatians 6:9 | Power for Service |
| • John 16:13; Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:22-23
Luke 16:10; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14;
Psalms 119:18 | Power to Convict |
| • 1 Corinthians 12:11; Acts 1:8;
Philippians 3:10; Acts 4:31 | Power to Guide |

5. Challenge for this week.

CHALLENGE

Follow the Six Steps to the Spirit's Empowering on page 13.

6. **Before you do Lesson 3**

- Read Pages 7-13
- Memorize Romans 15:13

LESSON TWO: THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

Phyllis was at the altar again, like so many other Sunday nights, pouring her heart out to the Lord. She had rededicated her life so often it just seemed silly to do it again, she thought. How could she ever get over her continuing problems? They loomed so large and foreboding that she was on the verge of giving up completely. She had tried every formula, prayer, and action possible, yet without any significant change inside. Her eyes were fixed on her troubles and her sense of hope was nearly gone.

The children of Israel had a similar problem as Phyllis. They seemed in a hopeless situation, having been told the Promised Land was theirs for the taking, they sent in twelve spies to investigate their options. For a detailed account of this story read Deuteronomy 1 and Numbers 13.

Of the twelve spies only two, Caleb and Joshua, gave a good report. The other ten were filled with fear and discouraged the people from taking the land. It is amazing how easy it is to dissuade people from believing God. The loss of hope can consume a person in a matter of minutes!

Several times in my ministry I have felt this sense of hopelessness. Numbers 13:33 had become my momentary verse, *And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.*

The problems I faced were giants and I was a mere grasshopper. One of those situations involved finances. Have you ever felt that your financial giant was about to crush you like a grasshopper? I was a seminary student with a wife and three young children. I was working two jobs, keeping a full load of classes, and getting farther behind financially each week. If God did not work a miracle, I was done!

After finishing a day of classes and one of my jobs, I returned home to a dark and cold house. Our electricity had been turned off! The giant

had just crushed me under his enormous foot. How would we ever manage? I did the only thing I knew to do. I went directly to the source of all power—the Lord. As I wept and prayed God began to speak and bring hope back into my heart. First He spoke a word of encouragement. He said, *“I will always meet your needs, trust me.”* And then a neighbor brought us a small Coleman lantern so that I could study in the evenings. We weren’t sure how he even knew we were in need! The Lord was true to His promise and brought us through. That was thirty years ago and He still remains faithful.

When you are consumed by fear, discouraged, and without hope, you need power from outside yourself. Romans 15:13 states, *Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit.* It is the power of the Holy Spirit that will bring us hope. The Holy Spirit will bring transformation! He is full of dynamite power to explode our old nature apart and rebuild us anew with the new nature of God.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE WORD

Much of the power we ascribed in the first lesson to the Word of God also applies to the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 6:17 says that the Word of God is *“the sword of the Spirit”*. The Word of God is the instrument through which the Holy Spirit does His work in our lives. It would be fruitless to have one without the other. The Word without the Spirit would cause us to be orthodox, but dead! The Spirit without the Word would result in emotional highs, without understanding them, leading to dangerous heresies and fanaticism! Transformation will occur as we combine the use of the Word of God and the power of the Spirit of God. In this lesson we will study four of His transforming powers.

THE SPIRIT'S POWER TO CONVICT

Joe's knuckles were white from grasping the pew in front of him and I could hear him mumbling behind me with teeth clenched and eyes firmly shut, "*I will not go. I will not go. I will not go.*" The convicting power of the Holy Spirit was everywhere and most especially on this former *Hell's Angel!* It was just a matter of time till either he bolted out of the room or he ran to the altar to find lasting peace.

Finally the pastor stepped over to him and asked him if he would like to give his life to Christ. Joe burst out of his seat, and ran to the altar where he found his Savior with arms wide open! Only the Holy Spirit can touch a man's heart in such a powerful way.

Paul describes this same convicting power in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, *For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much conviction.*

The presence of the Spirit had been so powerful it transformed these Thessalonians into power-packed witnesses. Later in the chapter Paul recounts how everyone in Asia Minor knew of their conversion and he was proud of their strong faith.

In John 16:8-11 we read these words from the mouth of Jesus, *And when he is come, he will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*

Reason cannot bring a sinner to repentance because his spiritual eyes are blinded. Only after the Holy Spirit opens his eyes to see the truth of his sinfulness and hopelessness is the sinner ready to repent and find forgiveness.

Without the convicting power of the Holy Spirit the Christian will remain in a sinful lifestyle. Legalism is the flesh's response to a powerless life. Rules are a poor substitute for the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Holiness becomes a futile pursuit bringing condemnation and frustration. Rededication follows rededication until the Holy Spirit smashes through the pride and the hard work of the flesh, bringing deep conviction to the heart!

Oh dear Christian, pray for the convicting power of the Holy Spirit in your life!

Sometimes the Holy Spirit is convicting us and we just don't want to hear it. A very bright young man once challenged my position on smoking cigarettes. He was convinced that the Holy Spirit was not convicting him of his need to quit. I asked him what the Lord would have to do to get his attention. Would he have to get lung cancer? He was shocked and replied that that was a little severe. The Holy Spirit had already told him of the physical dangers, of the expense involved, and of the social problems with smoking. Within just a few months he quit smoking!

The conviction of the Holy Spirit comes through various means. For some it is a clear voice in their own spirit that brings a sense of guilt and shame. For others the conviction comes through a message preached, or even a song sung. Many times the Holy Spirit will use Bible study to do His work. I can't count the times I have delayed reading my Bible because the Holy Spirit was shouting "*Repent!*" for some known sin I was committing.

Worship can be excruciatingly painful for the believer. There was a man who attended our services who just hated worship choruses! "*Just sing a couple of hymns and get to the sermon!*" he would demand. It was much later that I realized why he hated real spirit-worship. He was under conviction about the lack of a love relationship for the Lord. Worship made him uncomfortable!

I have sensed the Holy Spirit's convicting power as I have listened to or read of the testimonies of other Christians. What God was doing in their lives only revealed the emptiness in my own life. It was not the great feats of faith, or the exciting things experienced—it was the sin in my heart and its attending slothfulness that the Holy Spirit used to bring conviction. While comparing ourselves to others should never be our work, the Holy Spirit does use His acts with and through others to spur us on.

The Holy Spirit has only one goal in convicting us of sin—**transformation!**

THE SPIRIT'S POWER TO RENEW

Paul writes these encouraging words in Titus 3:5, *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit.* The word 'renew' means to make a complete change for the better. Isn't that exciting? The Holy Spirit has the power to change us completely!

2 Corinthians 5:17 is so very clear about the Spirit's power to renew us, *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

Can there be any doubt about our transformation? Oh yes! Just take a survey of any church and see how many members appear to be identical to the unbelievers they work with, go to school with, or even live with. The similarities in goals, character qualities, ambitions, and even levels of happiness, all are very striking.

The church was so excited! They had been able to secure a loan for their new building and were thrilled with the good interest rate the Lord had provided. It never occurred to them that the local liquor dealer had received the same interest rate from the same bank! Were they any different than he? What was so transforming about them if the world operated in the same manner and with the same level of success?

"I'll never hire another Christian!" exclaimed the angry business owner. *"They don't work as hard. They take more breaks than they are allowed. And they expect me to treat them better than the unbelievers!"* This owner was the chairman of my deacons! He had had his fill of so-called Christians who were not demonstrating any level of character transformation and had become more than a disappointment to all of us. But this is not an isolated issue. All over our country Christians are living far below the character of Christ to which they have been called!

In order for the transformation of character to occur the Holy Spirit must do a work in our hearts first in regenerating us, and then in sanctifying us. Is it any wonder that we have so many pastoral firings and business meeting battles? Our churches are full of, at best, carnal Christians, or at worst, unregenerate unbelievers

posing as Christians! These wolves in sheep's clothing will live lives of either shame or legalism. On the one hand, sin will be their moment by moment companion. On the other, they will obey all the rules and regulations of Christianity, but without its supernatural power. Consider 2 Timothy 3:5, *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.* Look at your own heart. Have you truly been regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit? Are you pursuing holiness as a work of the Holy Spirit in you? Are you cooperating with Him in ridding yourself of all the trappings of sin?

There is another level of renewal that the Holy Spirit will work in a believer's life. Sometimes the struggles of life become so heavy all joy dissolves into tears. David expresses this so well in Psalm 6:6, *I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears.*

Have you found yourself just soaking your pillow with tears of sorrow? Your heart is so heavy and God seems so far! At this point we are in need of spiritual renewal. A new awareness of God's presence and power can only come through the Holy Spirit. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as *Paraclete* because Jesus knew that we would need someone to be with us. *Paraclete* is made up of two Greek words, one *para*, meaning *alongside*, as in parachurch organizations that work alongside the Church. The other is from the Greek verb *kaletō* meaning called or summoned. The Holy Spirit has been **summoned to come alongside** us to encourage and sustain us. He renews our spirit by His presence with us!

Service to the Lord can become wearisome and hard. Galatians 6:9, *And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not;* and Jesus' words, *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light,* in Matthew 11:30 highlight the discrepancy between how life should be and how we are living. A renewing of the spirit by the Holy Spirit is essential.

Isaiah 40:31. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Service can be joyful and exciting again only as the Holy Spirit renews our spirit through

abiding in Him. Jesus said in John 15:4, *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.* This abiding in or waiting on God gives the Holy Spirit the opportunity to renew.

In such a noisy world, abiding and waiting have become lost arts. Dallas Willard in his book, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, makes a strong case for the necessity of quietness and solitude in our lives. The demands of work, family, church, and friends all scream louder than the Holy Spirit. Every believer should set aside time each day to listen to God. The quality of our service to the Lord is proportional to the quality of the time spent in solitude with the Lord wherein He renews us! Plan to spend time every day with the Lord so your spirit can be renewed. It is the your relationship with Him that will sustain you.

Like every minister, I have experienced times of deep sorrow over the life of our church. At one point I remember being under attack on a daily basis, not knowing what to do, or to whom to turn for help. The stronger and more personal the attack, the more I wanted to give up. Quitting seemed the only way to relieve the pain of rejection and yet the Lord would not allow it! Once I quit complaining, forgave those attacking me, and looked to the Lord I found real peace. In the midst of the storm the Holy Spirit brought such peace and joy. I could feel His gentle hand patting me on the back as His words rang in my ears, *“I love you. I’m with you. I will take care of you.”* Those reassuring words were like a beautiful symphony playing over and over in my heart. The Holy Spirit renewed my spirit and I could smile again. My heart was renewed and I could anticipate great things from God. I had learned that my relationship with the Lord can sustain me through any storm.

THE SPIRIT’S POWER TO GUIDE

As a sojourner in a foreign land, the Christian needs a guide to successfully navigate his way through the treacherous waters of life. Every sea captain has charts marking all known hindrances in the channel. Many Christians live like the old deists who believed that God set everything in motion and took a long lunch break, leaving them to fend for itself!

In responding to the disciple’s concerns about His leaving, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to be their guide. Jesus gives these words of hope in John 16:13, *Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.* Jesus knew that we would need guidance and had already made provision for it in the Holy Spirit. Paul, in Romans 8:14 clearly says, *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.* The Spirit of God has the power to lead us through this life.

The Spirit will lead us into a life of Christlikeness. This transforming power is seen in Galatians 5:22-23, *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.* Note that the character qualities listed by Paul are entitled the *fruit (singular)* of the Spirit. Being singular implies that it is a total package. The believer, after years of walking in the Spirit, will exemplify these characteristics. Only God can do this transforming.

This Christ-life is not natural to us, and is not attainable by any effort of the flesh. While it is possible to counterfeit these qualities in one’s life, it is *not* possible to do it consistently over a long period of time. Anyone can be joyful while things are going well—but only one who has the character of Christ as their own will be able to be joyful when the situation is at its worst!

It has been said that character is developed through the little choices of life. The Holy Spirit’s work of transforming our character is a long process that involves many small steps of change. Jesus said it like this in Luke 16:10, *He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.* Being faithful in the minor choices will develop the character of faithfulness in us so that we will also be faithful in the major issues. Look for the Holy Spirit’s guidance in the little decisions—He will develop the character of Christ in you through them.

The Holy Spirit also guides the Christian into truth. Today everything is relative. People are disinterested in a God who is as dogmatic about life as Jesus—they just don’t want to submit to Him. They want their freedom to sin, even if it means suffering the consequences.

I have had the privilege of teaching a New Testament Survey class at Southwest Baptist

University Extension on several occasions. The classes were made up mostly of married women between twenty and thirty-five, interspersed with several single men and women and the occasional married man. Inevitably the issues of marriage and divorce would come up. *Did Jesus allow for divorce? Why did Paul hate women? Should a woman stay in a relationship when she's being mistreated? What about living together before marriage?* Very few liked Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:32, *But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.* Jesus appeared too harsh.

Truth was less the goal as getting what one wanted! In fact, truth did not even seem to be the issue at all. Most in the class had determined that personal pleasure, whether in the form of happiness or lack of hostility, had become all the truth they wanted. What God wanted did not really enter the equation—many of these class members claimed Jesus as Lord and Savior! The pursuit of truth must be the passion of every believer.

The Holy Spirit has the power to reveal mysteries to us. 1 Corinthians 2:10-14 begins with these words, *But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.* There are things that God reveals to the believer that the natural man cannot understand. Remember how silly the whole idea of knowing God seemed? I can't count how many people over the years have said that once they were saved things just made sense! That's the work of the Holy Spirit in revealing truth. Psalm 119:18 says, *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.* The Holy Spirit illumines our understanding and leads us to see the truth.

When I was a youth minister I had the privilege of teaching our teenagers about subjects that were important to them. Music was always a hot issue. What should a Christian teenager listen to? Is Rock really all that bad? We spent many weeks looking at the Scriptures and could find no mention of the group *The Rolling Stones!* The Holy Spirit did, however, lead us to some basic principles to help guide our decisions. The Holy Spirit led us to principle one: being wise about our choices, as stated in 1

Thessalonians 5:22, *Abstain from all appearance of evil.* Secondly, we found principle two: guard your ears because you become like what you listen to, found in Proverbs 4:23, *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.* And Galatians 6:8, *For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.* And then principle three, would I be proud for Jesus to be with me when listening, found in 1 John 2:28, *And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.* These principles helped the teens make their own decisions. The Holy Spirit can lead a believer into truth even about topics not taught directly in the Bible.

THE SPIRIT'S POWER FOR SERVICE

Burnout has been become an epidemic in the church today. Pastors resign, members quit, workers wear out, and the cause of Christ is hampered all because the flesh cannot sustain the work of the Kingdom. Earlier we looked at Jesus' words when He said His yoke was easy and His burden was light. Yet so often the work of service is tiring, heartbreaking and even demoralizing. There is a real need for supernatural power to complete the task of service to which God calls each of us.

In the flesh Peter was unable to stand up to even the slightest attack from the enemy. Full of fear he quickly renounced knowing Jesus after being questioned by a woman. But after Pentecost he preached this same Jesus to thousands! He stood before the Sanhedrin defiant, unwilling to stop preaching the truth about Jesus. What had brought such a change?

Lack of power is everywhere in the Church today just like in Peter's life. The Holy Spirit's empowering has become a non-existent presence because we have relied too much on our own abilities and talents! He will not share the glory with us.

The Lord has determined two ways in which He empowers us to service. First, He gives us spiritual gifts to do the work of service. 1 Corinthians 12:11 says, *But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.* The Holy Spirit gives each believer a spiritual gift as He, the

Spirit, determines. It is not the choice of the believer! For a listing of the gifts turn to Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; 28, and Ephesians 4:11.

These gifts are not natural talents. They are the special workings of the Spirit. God uses the believer to minister to an individual in a supernatural way. It might be a word of knowledge, a prophecy, a healing, an encouraging word, a helping hand, or a means of organizing people to accomplish a goal. All would be works of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of building up the Body.

The gifts are not for a special elite group of Christians. Paul makes it very clear in 1 Corinthians 12 that every believer has a spiritual gift. If you are in the Body of Christ, you have a gift to be used to build up others.

The gifts are not a sign of maturity. The demonstration of the character of Christ marks the maturity level of every believer. Remember that the Corinthians were operating in the gifts of the Spirit, but Paul called them carnal and infants. 1 Corinthians 3:1 states, *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.*

The gifts of the Spirit are not to be confused with the role of every believer. While some might have the gift of faith to believe great things of God, each Christian should walk by faith. Colossians 2:6 says, *As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.* We were saved by faith and we should live by faith even if faith is not our spiritual gift.

The second way in the Holy Spirit empowers us is by coming upon us in power. Acts 1:8 says, *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* The Holy Spirit empowers the believer for service. Note that Jesus said they *would* become witnesses, **not** they *might*! When the Holy Spirit comes upon someone power is released!

In the early Church the evidence of the power of God was their boldness. Peter was transformed into a power house of boldness. Paul spread the Gospel fearlessly, even under extreme persecution. James even died for the faith. Paul had laid out his goal in life in Philippians 3:10, *That I may know him, and the*

power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death. He wanted to know Christ and His accompanying power, fully aware that death to self and even physical death could and would result!

Empowered service is not for everyone, not because God does not wish it, but because many Christians will not allow it. When Paul was called to the ministry he was told he would suffer great things. Luke records this in Acts 9:16, *For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.* Would you follow Him if you knew how much you would suffer? Most of our evangelism, calls to holiness and service entail more enticement than truth! We lack the Spirit's coming upon us because we are more like Simon in Acts 8 than Paul in Acts 9. Simon wanted the power for his own benefit—not to glorify God. What are your motives?

The empowering only comes to those who are obedient. The Disciples were obeying Jesus as they waited in the upper room. Their hearts were pure—they simply wanted whatever God had for them in order to serve Him in the Kingdom. If we are to experience power to serve our motives must be right. It is the Kingdom that matters—nothing else!

The empowering only comes to those who wait on God. Many Christians have started out in the flesh and failed miserably. Wait for God's timing in serving Him. Now waiting does not involve fearing. To wait because you are afraid is as sinful as moving ahead of God! Waiting on God brings submission to the heart of the believer and prepares him for service.

The empowering only comes to those who die to their own desires. Jesus said, *Not My will, but Thy will be done.* That attitude must precede empowering.

Empowering for service is the response of God to those who ask. In Luke 11:13 Jesus says, *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?* Ask the Lord to empower your life with the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to come upon you in power so that you may serve Him and minister to others.

We receive this empowering of the Holy Spirit by faith. Don't look for a sign. Jesus was

continually being asked for a sign and He refused. When they mocked Him while suffering on the Cross, He would not oblige them. Faith does not need a sign it needs a Word from God. Paul explains this truth in Romans 10:17, *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* Believe that you have received what was promised because the Word says so! And then go out serve Him in His power.

It has been my experience that I must repeat this empowering often. Acts 4:31 recounts this idea, *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spake the word of God with boldness.* They had already experienced Pentecost in Acts 2, but they needed another “*filling*” in order to continue serving with power. Before I preach, witness, encourage, pray, or teach I ask for the empowering of the Holy Spirit. I can do a good job in the flesh—but only the Holy Spirit can do a supernatural work that will transform lives. I need His power every day!

SIX STEPS TO SPIRIT’S EMPOWERING

Take this week to do some real searching. Is there spiritual power in your life? Or are you operating in your own abilities?

Here is a simple process to follow to experience His empowering:

1. Ask the Lord to reveal any sin in your life. Be prepared to hurt and to repent. If He leads you to make restitution, do it.

2. Ask the Lord to reveal any wrong motives in your heart. Be willing to give them all up.

3. Tell the Lord your desire to be empowered for service. Be honest about your wishes and get ready for Him to meet you.

4. Ask the Lord to send the Holy Spirit to come upon you and empower you for service. Be prepared for God to answer the prayer.

5. Believe by faith that you have received what you asked for and thank Him. Begin to praise and worship Him.

6. Look for ways to serve others in the power of the Spirit. Ask the Lord to lead you in this.

*God bless you as you serve Him in the power of the Spirit.
Remember, the Holy Spirit will convict, renew, guide, and empower you.
You will never be the same.
You will be transformed!*

LESSON THREE: THE POWER TO CHOOSE

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.
 Joshua 24:15

1. As you read over the notes from Lesson Two, what sticks out in your mind as significant?

3. Why are we able to change?

- Romans 12:2

- Romans 8:37

- 1 John 4:4; Romans 6:14

3. How does God bring change? Genesis 32:24-30 (see notes on page 17-19)

1.

2.

3.

4. How can you affect change in your life?

- Isaiah 1:19 _____
- Psalm 139:23-24 _____
- 1 John 1:9 _____
- Ephesians 5:18 _____
- 1 Thessalonians 5:18 _____
- Psalm 37:5 _____
- 1 Peter 4:16 _____

5. Challenge for this week.

6. **For next week**

- Read Pages 16-19
- Memorize Joshua 24:15

CHALLENGE	<i>Follow the Seven Steps to Affecting Change on page 19.</i>
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LESSON THREE: THE POWER TO CHOOSE

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. *Joshua 24:15*

A fool is defined as a person who does the same thing over and over expecting a different result! Yet Christians, believing they are doomed to mediocrity, continue in the ruts of their lives hoping that things will change—but they do not!

Change comes about as a result of specific choices we make to transform ourselves or our situation. Proverbs says that if you want a change in the number of friends you have, you must first be a friend to others. *“A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly,”* Proverbs 18:24. In this lesson we will explore **why we are able to change, how God brings about change, and how to affect change in our lives.**

WHY WE ARE ABLE TO CHANGE

Have you ever felt like giving up on the Christian life? You’ve tried and tried and tried, but you remain just the same—with the identical flaws as last year? You say, *“I just can’t help myself. I have no power to resist temptation.”* Those New Year’s resolutions just keep piling up and piling up with no appreciable changes. A sense of hopelessness and despair have settled into the routine of your life. The unsaved seem much happier and content than you. Whatever happened to the abundant life that Jesus promised in John 10:10, *“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”*?

This faithless approach to the Christian life is an affront to the power of the Gospel and the character of God. Is He so impotent that He cannot change one of His own? Is He so short on power that His followers are unable to tap into His resources to live above the malaise of life? Is the Christian doomed to endless failures in the battle against sin and self, or has God provided a means to transform His people?

Christians are able to change first because, **the Word of God commands change.** Romans

12:2 states, *“Be ye transformed...”* This is not a request, nor is it a wish. It is a command! There are no options, no second and third wills of God. Paul states in another way in Ephesians 4:22, *That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.* The Bible makes it clear that change is required.

Second, **God expects change.** In fact, He wants us to be more than conquerors. Romans 8:37 says, *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.* Note that here Paul does not say that we *can* be more than conquerors. He says that we **are!** It is in God’s will that we be transformed. In writing to the Thessalonians, Paul tells them very clearly the expectation of the Lord. *For this is the will of God, even your sanctification,* 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

Sanctification is the divine process whereby the believer becomes like Christ in character. The mere fact that it is a process implies change. A Christian begins his new life in Christ as a justified sinner, yet unlike His Master in character. The transformation of character into Christlikeness will take an entire lifetime. But it will end with the goal God has determined. Philippians 1:6 gives us a hint at God’s expectation of the completion of this process. *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.* John concludes the same in 1 John 3:2, *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.* God expects each one who bears His Name to exemplify His character as well.

Third, **God provides the power to change.** Transformation is not the work of the flesh. It is the expressed work of the Holy Spirit to bring about this metamorphosis. Any attempt to

accomplish a changed character by oneself will lead to disappointment and frustration.

Brian was a bright young man. He was doing well in school, had many friends, even an occasional girlfriend. He was very active in his youth group, singing in the choir, going on mission trips, and even leading others in Bible study. Yet something was wrong with his life. He was continually frustrated over the power of sin over him. Rather than work in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, Brian decided to become a legalist, setting up rules and regulations to bring his flesh under his control. This process worked for awhile but was doomed for failure.

He left for college with his legalism in tow, expecting life to get better. It did not. Without his youth minister, his parents, and friends, his rules were powerless against the onslaught of the constant temptations to sin. He failed miserably, dropping out of school and riding broncos for a living! Several years passed before he sought out a minister who led him to find the power to transform, not in rules, but in a relationship. Brian finally found the power to change from within—the Holy Spirit. 1 John 4:4 has become his verse, *because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*

Paul makes a very definitive statement in Romans 6:14, *For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.* God has not provided a possibility, nor a wishful thought, for us to be transformed. He has stated unequivocally that we have all the power we need to be transformed. We have been freed from sin's power over us and therefor are free to choose to be changed. Chapters six through eight of Romans are a declaration of our responsibility and opportunity to choose to be transformed. We are free to under the transforming power of the Spirit of God.

HOW GOD BRINGS ABOUT CHANGE

God is actively involved in bringing about transformation in a believer's life. Philippians 2:13 states, *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* He is at work. It was never His plan to command you to change, expect you to change, and then make you do it on your own and in your own power. It has always been His goal to make every believer resemble Jesus. How does He do this? Let's consider Jacob for insight into how

God actually brings about change.

We pick up Jacob's story in Genesis 32:24-30. He has already stolen his brother Esau's birthright and cheated him out of his blessing as well. After years of running from Esau, Jacob has married, prospered financially, and desires to return to his homeland. But Esau will have to be faced. On the night before crossing the Jordon, Jacob wrestles with an angel. Until this point Jacob had lived up to his name. He was surely a schemer and cheater. His name actually means, *he who grabs the heel*. He had tripped up people his entire life, leaving Esau angry, and his father-in-law Laban bitter. Life was about to catch up to this supplanter!

God uses a CRISIS to get our attention in order to bring transformation. While waiting to meet Esau, Jacob wrestled with an angel sent by God. They fought all night with neither getting the advantage. Finally, just before dawn, the angel caused Jacob's thigh to be dislocated and asked to be released. Jacob refused until the angel blessed him. The angel then changed Jacob's name to Israel and blessed him. Jacob came out of that battle a changed man.

While our crisis might not take on the body of a man with whom we must do physical battle, it will come. Like the mother eagle who must stir up the eaglets to get them to fly, God stirs up our world to produce change. Hopefully a nudge is all we will need—but he will fling us out of the nest if necessary!

Sometimes the voice of the Lord brings a crisis demanding change. When Cain had failed to please God with his offering his mood was affected. Genesis 4:6 says, *And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?* God was attempting to bring change to Cain's heart, but he would not listen. He later murdered his brother and felt the full force of God's judgment. How often have you ignored that voice urging change?

I cannot count the times I have failed to listen to the Lord's prompting! One time however, I did listen. I had been attacked and ridiculed by a man in our church whose son was incorrigible. The boy had beaten his father and had even threatened me. The father was angry that I had advised him to leave the boy in jail for some of his misdeeds. The father was offended and lashed out at me. I, in turn, was hurt and unforgiving. While on my way home one

evening the Holy Spirit clearly told me to forgive the man and go make things right with him. I did not want to. Change was not on my agenda for the day! The Lord was relentless. He wanted me to change and to do it immediately. I decided to seek God's aid and to obey Him.

When I arrived at the man's home he was sitting on the veranda waiting for me! He was more than just a little glad that I had arrived and began talking about his son. We hugged, forgave each other, repented, and I left. It was the last time I talked with him. Four days later I was preaching his funeral and thanking God for His voice calling me to change!

A crisis of change can come in the form of a financial crunch, a marital spat, a moral lapse, a business failure, or even a death. While we react differently dependent upon our temperament and experiences, God knows which event to use as a force for change. Often our response to these crises will determine the change required. Trouble often affects our mood making us miserable, cranky, unhappy, discontent, uncomfortable, or angry. What we desire is release; what God wants is transformation.

God is looking for COMMITMENT from us. Let's return to the story of Jacob in Genesis 32. Jacob would not let go until the angel blessed him. Even after the angel injured Jacob's thigh he would not let go. Have you ever dislocated a finger? Every time you touch that finger pain runs like a lightning bolt up the arm and then lingers for minutes at a time. Imagine having your thigh dislocated and still wrestling! Jacob's thigh was so damaged that he walked with a limp after this altercation. And yet he would not release the angel. That is commitment.

Most Christians cry for God to relieve the pain of their crisis because they do not have the same goals as God. They want freedom from pain and suffering—He wants the character of Christ developed in them. If you are determined to be like Christ, then you will have to wrestle with your angel until he blesses you.

Wrestling with an angel is serious business. The stakes are as high as possible and God's purposes hang in the balance. When in the middle of a crisis you must remember several things to remain committed. First, **you must know what is in God's heart**. Jeremiah 29:11 says, *For I know the thoughts that I think toward*

you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. God's goal is for your good. In Deuteronomy 1:27 the Israelites said that God hated them. Does your crisis make you feel like God hates you? It is difficult to wrestle when you believe the worst is ahead!

Second, **you must expect God to bless you**. The great English preacher of the 19th century, Charles Hadden Spurgeon, was confronted by a young preacher boy who was not seeing the success from his ministry he wanted. Spurgeon asked him if he expected God to do something every time he preaches.

The young man responded, *"Well, not every time!"*

Spurgeon answered, *"That my boy, is why you do not see God moving!"*

The expectation of a blessing drove Jacob to hang on when the pain was excruciating. While most want to be like Jesus, few will pay the heavy cost of commitment to make it a reality. Have you ever noticed Paul's calling in Acts 9:16? listen to the words of the Lord, *For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.* God was going to show him how much **suffering** he would have! Christians today want nothing to do with suffering. Some even preach that suffering is not a part of the Christian life!

Here are the words of a person committed to seeing the character of Christ developed through a crisis: ***"I am 100 percent committed to staying in the situation until God turns it around for good. I will not expect anything less than the blessing of God on my life through this crisis."*** Can you make that statement?

God is waiting for our CONFESSION. It is no small thing that the angel asked Jacob for his name in Genesis 32:27. He was reminding Jacob of his character: Jacob the supplanter, the cheat, the schemer, the one who trips people up. While God knew Jacob would carry His line, Jacob had used devious means to obtain both the birthright and the blessing. He needed changing!

The Israelites angered God by their constant murmuring. Numbers 14:27 details God's displeasure, *How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me.* This complaining spirit infects many Christians now.

The least little discomfort and immediate accusations are made against the Lord.

The children of Israel went so far as to wish they were back in Egypt! (Numbers 14:3) Complaining only reflects our lack of faith and understanding of the character of God. Would God really bring a crisis into your life just to make you miserable and unhappy? Sadly, that is exactly what many believe.

Complaining is not the confession the Lord wants to hear. What He longs for is our admission of failure and total inability to change ourselves. We will never change until we honestly face and admit to our complete dependency on Him. Contrary to popular belief that *God helps those who help themselves*, God helps those who turn to Him completely. Consider 2 Chronicles 16:9, *For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.* Is your heart completely His? God wants to show Himself strong on your behalf but He is waiting to hear your desperate cry for help!

HOW TO AFFECT CHANGE

The following is a seven-step process in letting God bring change into your character.

1. Confess your willingness to be a part of the change process. Isaiah 1:19, *If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land.* It is imperative that you begin by speaking words of faith. Express your desire to do whatever the Lord asks in order to be transformed, knowing that He will give you the ability through the Holy Spirit.

2. Ask God to reveal any areas in your character that need changing. Psalm 139:23-24, *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* Let the Lord be the one to lead in change. Don't try to tell Him what you need! He knows best where to begin His transforming work.

3. Confess and repent for your sinful character. 1 John 1:9, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Confess your sin to Him and expect Him to forgive you. Repent means to have a change of mind. Before the sin did not bother you. Now it does!

4. Confess your inability to change on your own and ask for the Holy Spirit to fill you and empower you for change. Ephesians 5:18, *And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.*

5. Thank God for your situation. 1 Thessalonians 5:18, *In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.* The only way you will be able to thank God is to remember that His purpose in your crisis is to develop the character of Christ.

6. Make a commitment to change and cooperate with the Lord. Psalm 37:5, *Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.* While it is the Holy Spirit's work to transform you, it is your responsibility to cooperate with Him. A sixteen year old boy who had just surrendered to the ministry was unwilling to go to the camp pool even though the temperature was hovering near 100°. Jerry said he could not go swimming because he did not want the obvious temptation of the girls dominating his mind. He was determined to stay pure by cooperating with God's working in him!

7. Begin to praise God for changing you. 1 Peter 4:16, *Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.* Don't make any demands on the Lord. Just commit your transformation to Him and hold on to Him! Expect a blessing, but let Him set what it will be. Far too often our expectations trip us up and we become discouraged and quit. Praise God for His goodness and character, all the while knowing that your blessing will come in His good time!

LESSON FOUR: THE POWER OF A BOWED KNEE

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. *Philippians 2:10-11*

1. As you read over the notes from Lesson Three, what sticks out in your mind as significant?

2. What are the signs of rebellion?

• Proverbs 3:5-6 _____

• Matthew 6:33 _____

• Galatians 6:2 _____

• Luke 6:38 _____

• Proverbs 14:30 _____

• Hebrews 13:17 _____

• Numbers 14:27 _____

• Matthew 10:28 _____

• 1 John 5:3 _____

• James 1:8 _____

• Numbers 13:33 _____

2. What are the signs of submission?

• Matthew 8:9 _____

• Philippians 3:10 _____

• 1 John 1:3 _____

3. God Demands Submission (write down your insights from these verses)

• Psalm 145:3; Job 38:4-11 _____

• Jeremiah 29:11 _____

• 1 John 1:3 _____

4. Challenge for this week.

<p>CHALLENGE</p>	<p>Prayer the Prayer of Absolute Surrender on page 26. Pray each day the Prayer of Submission.</p>
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5. For next week

- Read Pages 22-26
- Memorize Philippians 2:10-11

LESSON FOUR: THE POWER OF A BOWED KNEE

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:10-11

The little boy had been disobedient to his mother for several hours and was unwilling to even acknowledge her commands. Finally she threatened him with a spanking and told him to sit down immediately. Reluctantly the boy slowly fell into the chair and with a sulking look said, “I’m sitting down on the outside, but I’m standing up on the inside!”

Submission to authority is such a lost art in America today. One educator said that it was impossible to tell children anything. Our children are unable to learn in classrooms where several classmates will not obey the teacher. Some teachers are retiring early simply because they are unable to discipline their students. One student actually told my wife, a teacher of many years, that he did not have to do what anyone said except his mother!

The Bible describes this lack of submission as something very insidious. 1 Samuel 15:23 says, *For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.* God equates rebellion with witchcraft, an affront to His very character. Witchcraft is the process of controlling events or people for our own ends. In other words, it is the attempt of one to be God! God hates rebellion.

SIGNS OF REBELLION

How can we identify rebellion in our own lives? What are the signs of someone caught in rebellion? Since the following signs can come in varying degrees, you should be asking the Lord to reveal any lack of submission in your own heart and life.

The life of a person in rebellion does not have to be full of anger and antagonism towards God. Some have simply given up hope of a life with purpose. They are unhappy pouters wishing things were better, but unable or unwilling to do what it takes to change. God has abandoned them, so they believe. They are as follows:

They have little regard for God’s will.

When a decision has to be made, since an ongoing study of the Word is nonexistent, the Lord’s will is unknown. In fact, this person lives as if God’s will can never really be known!

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.* To acknowledge God is to put Him in the driver’s seat of our lives. The rebellious person cannot give up the right to steer his life in a direction he does not approve. He is stubborn and unbending when it comes to his desires.

They have little regard for the Kingdom unless it meets some personal need. Matthew 6:33 gives the primary directive for every believer, *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.* But the rebellious must have a different reason for seeking God—a selfish one!

Conflict can reveal this rebellion. Consider the trouble between Abraham and Lot. When their herdsmen were fighting over water and grazing rights, Abraham suggested that they separate. Lot, choosing the land that looked best, chose to move toward Sodom. Abraham, on the other hand, let God choose for Him. Later Abraham listened as God, pointing to all the land including the land chosen by Lot, told him it would all be his! Lot ended up in Sodom, the wickedest city in the world. He lost everything including his wife, his self-respect, his possessions, and the respect of his daughters. Abraham demonstrated a concern for the Kingdom and in the end received God’s blessings. Lot, like so many in the Church today, thought nothing of the Kingdom and lost what little he did have. The Disciples died for their faith. Many today wouldn’t lose a night’s sleep or even one meal for it!

They are unable to give without strings attached that will either enrich them financially

or enhance their standing in the eyes of others. Luke 6:38 says, *Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.* Several years ago a man sued his Pastor and Church because he did not get the return on his giving that he had been promised! He lost in the human court as well as God's!

They are unable to care for the needs of others without some compensation or recognition. Galatians 6:2, *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.* The rebellious attitude can be very subtle. I'll never forget meeting with a famous pastor who was very candid about his ministry in a specific church several years prior to our meeting. I told him that many of the people considered him their personal friend and that I believed it was impossible for any one person to have so many friends at one time. He laughed and said that he had ministered there out of his own need. He had left a previous pastorate wounded and bleeding, in need of some real love and affection. He visited each family drawing from them what he needed himself. It was a real healing time for him. Things were not like that at his present church proving that his real motivation for ministering was self-centered and self-motivated!

They are envious. Martin Luther once said, *"Too many Christians envy the sinners their pleasure and the saints their joy because they don't have either one."* This envy will destroy a person from the inside out. Proverbs 14:30 states, *A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.* The rebellious person focuses on their own needs and desires. Others are envied and used, but never really loved!

They are unable to submit to those over them. Hebrews 13:17 says, *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.* The rebellious long to be self-employed, having little desire to follow anyone's leadership. Paul commands us to submit to each other. But for the unsubmitive bosses are endured; teachers tolerated; and Pastors followed only when they

agree with the rebellious person's ideas! They do not see that obeying others is obeying God.

They are complainers. A complaining spirit is the constant companion of the rebellious. Having little regard for the character of God in their lives, they murmur like the Children of Israel! Numbers 14:27 tells of God's impatience with them, *How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me.* For forty years they griped at God about one thing or another. If it wasn't the food, it was the water! Unsubmitive people are on the boards and committees of our churches controlling and firing pastors at will!

There have no fear of God and the consequences of sin. Matthew 10:28 says, *And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* Having given up the notion that God is at work in them, rebellious people simply live as if God does not see or hear anything!

They hesitate at obeying God. John says that our obedience is a measure of our love for God. 1 John 5:3 says, *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.*

Do you know why the army likes nineteen-year-old men? Because they will do what they are told without asking why! If a soldier hesitates it could mean the death himself or of his fellows soldiers. God requires our obedience to be both one hundred percent and immediate. Hesitation means that there is a question as to the wisdom of the command. The rebellious question God's Word, His will, and His purpose.

They are full of doubt. The rebellious person does not know the mind of the Lord. He waivers back and forth like the waves of the ocean. One minute he believes, the next he does not! James disgustingly states, *A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.* James 1:8. This instability results in a failure to lead others. People want to follow a person who knows where he's going.

They are the victims of circumstances and people. The rebellious never take personal responsibility for life. They say, *"If only this had not happened."* Or *"If only they had not done such and such to me."* Numbers 13:33

reveals this attitude, *and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.* God was not a part of their world view! Rebellion is the attitude that either I am in control, or you are in control, but never God! If God were in control He would have to be submitted to and that would be unacceptable to them.

SIGNS OF SUBMISSION

The believer who is completely submitted to the Lord is a very rare breed indeed. In an age of individualism it is hard to find someone who is willing to follow the directions of another without ever wanting that relationship to change or expecting it should. Slavery, while detestable when applied by one human on another, is the best description of the believer's relationship to the Lord Jesus. What are the signs of a true slave of Jesus?

Faith is the first sign of a submissive believer. When the Roman centurion confronted Jesus with the illness of his servant he demonstrated his understanding of authority. He said, *For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.* Matthew 8:9

Jesus was astonished at his understanding and replied, *When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.* Matthew 8:10. Jesus equated a proper understanding of submission to authority with faith.

At the center of faith is an abiding belief that God is sovereign and can be trusted. That is why rebellion is like witchcraft. It is an attack on God's character and His willingness to use His power to take care of us. Faith rests all its hope in God who is, *able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,* Ephesians 3:20.

Focus is the next sign. Paul states his life's ambition in Philippians 3:10, *That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.* The focus of the believer is knowing God. The Kingdom is all that matters to the slave. Paul again says in Philippians 3:13-14, *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I*

do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Paul chose just one thing to focus onto and that was the Kingdom!

When a believer is completely submitted to the Lord Jesus they will always choose the Kingdom over personal pleasure or comfort. If obedience entails suffering, they will suffer without letting anyone know it. Some in the church are willing to suffer just as long as everyone knows it!

How many of us would follow if we knew the costs involved? When you hear a call to mission work or to the ministry it is generally couched in terms of grandeur and blessings! It is as if we must be coaxed into serving. Paul followed even when he was shown how much he would suffer. *For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.* Acts 9:16. Rebellious people have to be enticed—submissive believers just have to be told! They are focused on the Kingdom and its advancement, not on their own comfort and pleasure.

Since the focus is the Kingdom obedience is a joy for the surrendered heart. Understanding that God has chosen the believer to be a part of something great brings purpose and excitement to living. Rebellion dries up the bones—submission brings vitality!

The love of the Lord constrained Paul to preach the word, 2 Corinthians 5:14. When the believer is focused on the Lord he is motivated to accomplish. When the rebellious are focused on themselves they are discouraged and defeated before they start. Only submitted believers can accomplish great things for God!

Fellowship is the third sign of submission. 1 John 1:3 says, *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.* The submissive believer spends time fellowshiping with the Lord. George Mueller said he believed there were two reasons for the secret of his happiness and all the blessings which God had given him. The one was that he had been enabled by grace to maintain a good conscience before God day by day; the other was, that he was a lover of God's Word.

It is impossible to fellowship with God when you are in rebellion. Obedience must be maintained. Fellowship is time spent alone with God. His Word becomes precious and His statutes a joy. Jesus said, *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*, Matthew 11:30. This type of life is only true for the submissive believer.

Worship is also a mark of fellowship. When real worship is present, only those surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus will experience its beauty and peace. While others enjoy the emotion of it, they will never know the depths of God's presence! God will not commit Himself to those who are not completely surrendered to Him. Two Scriptures come to mind: 2 Chronicles 16:9, *For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him*. The other is John 2:24, *But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men*. If worship is to be real God must be present, and He will not be present if there is rebellion!

Some people in the church hate worship. They don't mind the sermon, the special, or even the hymns, but if worship breaks out they are uncomfortable. Worship is only enjoyed by those who have already bowed their knees to the one being worshiped. For everyone else it is just a religious exercise because God is not in their midst because of rebellion.

GOD DEMANDS SUBMISSION

God's character demands it. Is there anyone in all the universe to compare to the Lord? Does any person come even close? No! Only He is worthy of our worship. The Psalmist says, *Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable*, Psalm 145:3.

Job thought he could lay claim to his righteousness apart from God. But our assertions do not match the truth of His being! Listen to God as He challenges Job. *Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut up the sea with*

doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddlingband for it, And brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed? Job 38:4-11. He alone right to demand our allegiance.

He is omnipotent. When we are in need of power to whom should we turn. Is it even feasible to consider something lesser than He? He has the power of life and death as well as our health.

He is omnipresent. He is never out to lunch. His watchcare over us is constant. Here is His claim in Hebrews 13:5, *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*.

He is omniscient. Like Israel many Christian retreat to their own schemes and devices rather than turn to their all-knowing Father. Several years ago our youngest son found himself in a difficult relationship. His mother and I had wanted to help but were unable. He just would not ask. When we attempted to offer assistance he became annoyed and resistant. We watched and prayed. Finally an opportunity arose to talk to him. I'll never forget saying, *"You have a wealth of wisdom and knowledge sitting right here in front of you. Don't be like so many others who thought that experience is a better teacher than Mom and Dad!"* Like a any good parent, God wants our very best and He knows how to bring it about. But He must be asked!

God's purposes demand it. Jeremiah 29:11 is one of my favorite verses. It puts God's purposes in the right perspective. *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end*. Several translations interpret "to give you an expected end" as "to give you hope and a future." God's purposes are for our good. If we are to experience all that He intends then we will have to submit to Him completely. 2 Chronicles 16:9, *For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him*. Absolute surrender is a requirement for receiving the blessings of God.

When Jesus was on earth He healed people, cast out demons, and even raised the dead. Yet in His own home town of Nazareth He did very little. Why was the will of the Father thwarted in

Jesus' home village? Jesus said it was their unbelief. God will not become a sideshow for our entertainment. He will act according to His will in cooperation with our faith.

2 Peter 3:9 says, *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* Even though his desire is to save everyone, not all will be saved. He requires every person to submit to Him first. Paul makes this so very clear in Romans 10:9-10, *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.* Prior to experiencing salvation the sinner must first bow his knee to Jesus and proclaim Him Lord and Master!

LIFESTYLE SUBMISSION

Repent of your rebellious spirit. Luke 13:3 says, *I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.* To repent is to change your direction. If the Lord has revealed any rebellion in you then you should immediately repent. Your desire should be to be as submissive as He requires!

Ask God to forgive you and cleanse you. 1 John 1:9 says, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* To gain a clear conscience you must claim your forgiveness and cleansing from the Lord. He will do what He promises.

Prayer the prayer of absolute surrender:

I surrender to You, Lord Jesus. You alone are my Lord and Master. I will obey You, love You, follow You, serve You, and die for You if necessary. I give up my ambitions, my goals, my desires, my abilities, my expectations, my demands, my freedom, my future, my reputation, my successes, my failures, and my very life. Everything is Yours. You are my God. I am Your slave.

Claim your surrender as a work of the Holy Spirit in you. Remember Philippians 2:13, *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* He will bring about your surrender!

Repeat the following prayer each morning:

Only You, Lord, are worthy to be praised. You alone are God and I submit my will, my desires, and my actions to You today. I will obey you in everything and will look to You for wisdom and guidance. I love You, Lord. Your humble servant, _____.

Listen for the voice of the Lord in every situation.

LESSON FIVE: THE POWER OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

1. What did the Lord show you as you read last week's lesson over? _____

2. Give your definition for forgiveness. _____

3. According to Genesis 1:27 how is man special? _____

4. According to Genesis 3:8 what was God doing? Compare that to Genesis 2:18. _____

5. What is the progression of sin from Genesis 3:6-9? Compare this to Joshua 7:21.
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
6. According to Romans 3:23, what keeps us all at arms length from God? _____
7. According to Romans 6:23, what are the wages of sin? _____
8. How do some people attempt to deal with their sin?
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
9. According to the following verses, what did Jesus do for us?
 - 2 Corinthians 5:21 _____
 - 1 Peter 3:8 _____
 - 1 Corinthians 15:55-57 _____

10. According to the following verses, what does God demand of us?

- John 1:12 _____
- Romans 6:23 _____
- Ephesians 2:8 _____

12. What two things does 1 John 1:9 promise that God will do for us?

- _____
- _____

13. What must we do to get these blessings? _____

14. Consider the following verses and the results of unconfessed sin in the believer's life:

Psalm 66:18

- _____

1 Corinthians 11:30

- _____
- _____

Galatians 6:7

- _____

From page 31, what is the progression of the heart as expressed in Hebrews?

Hebrews 2:1-4 _____

Hebrews 3:7-4:2 _____

Hebrews 5:11-14 _____

Hebrews 6:1-20 _____

Hebrews 10:26-39 _____

Hebrews 12:15-29 _____

1 John 3:21

- _____

1 Corinthians 3:2

- _____

1 Corinthians 3:3

- _____

2 Corinthians 10:4; Romans 6:12

- _____

15. Read the notes on pages 29-32.

Memorize 1 John 1:9

CHALLENGE

Follow the **Steps to Cleansing** on page 32.

LESSON FIVE: THE POWER OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

A devote woman was attempting to get her husband to attend church one bright sunning Sunday morning using every imaginable means. She even got on her knees and begged him, but to no avail. He responded to her pleas with, “Those people don’t like me. They won’t talk to me. They act as if I’m a leper. They’re the meanest people I’ve ever met. I hate being around them!”

She responded, “But you’re the Pastor. You have to go!”

Another Pastor said church would be great if it weren’t for the people!

Getting along with each other is such a difficult task when we operate in the flesh. In 1 Corinthians 1 Paul expresses his dismay at their divisiveness. They had raised their differences above their similarities and had become a reproach to the Kingdom. 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 sums up his thinking, “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”

In His model prayer Jesus calls us to life of forgiveness when He says, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” Matthew 6:12. When we walk in forgiveness we are able to live together in peace and harmony. This walk of forgiveness begins by receiving forgiveness.

RECEIVING FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is essentially the restoration of a relationship when one has damaged that relationship through specific actions. The Westminster Catechism states that the purpose of man is to know God and enjoy Him forever. God created us for His pleasure. He wanted a relationship of mutual love.

According to Genesis 1:27 God created man in His own image. Man was able to

communicate with God on a level no animal was ever able to commune. Man was a special creation! Man is not just another animal like a monkey or purpose. Man has special qualities because He created in the image of God.

When I was in fourth grade I was insulted in class by one of my teachers for being a Christian. The teacher asked me to stand and explain what God looked like. He quoted Genesis 1:27 and asked if God looked like him or like me. While certainly no Bible scholar, I knew that the verse was not referring to physical attributes and I told him so. I told him we know God personally and sat down. I do not recall his response, but I do know that he did not have a personal relationship with Jesus and therefore was in need of forgiveness.

Genesis 3:8 tells us that God was looking for Adam and Eve to talk with them. Earlier in Genesis we see Adam talking with God directly! What an awesome thought—they talked intimately and regularly. Adam was able to express his desire for a partner and God demonstrated His willingness to help by creating a woman (Genesis 2:18-23). God desires a relationship of mutual respect and love with every person. 2 Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

What hinders us from such a relationship with the Lord? Why does God seem so distant and disinterested in us? Why is it so hard to sense His presence and His power? The answer is sin! In order to restore a relationship with God sin must be dealt with.

Some religions reject the notion of sin and assume they can think their way to God. Some believe they can work their way to God, while others just discount sin as manufactured and live anyway they please. God makes it very clear that sin is problem that must be overcome in order to have communion with Him.

Genesis 3 is a summary of the entrance of sin

into the world. Note Eve's discussion of the progression of sin in Genesis 3:6-8. First she "saw" the fruit. Then she "desired" it. Then she "took" it, and then she "hid." This same progression can be seen in Joshua 7:21, "When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it. Achan and his entire family were killed for his sin; Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden for theirs! They were no longer able to walk and talk with God as they had in the past. Sin now stood between their relationship with God!

Sin keeps every person at arms length from God. Since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), no one is able to commune with Him. All of humanity lives outside the Garden! Death awaits every human ever born. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death." God proclaims that the punishment for sin is death because His holiness demands it. He will not allow sin in His presence.

If you have been attempting to make up for your sin by doing good or hoping that God would ignore your sin you have made a grave error in judgment. God is so serious about sin. He went to great lengths to take care of it for you by sending His Son, Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:21 describes Jesus in this way, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Jesus took on our sin! 1 Peter 3:18 gives us a view of God's heart as He gives the work of Christ for us, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." Jesus faced the judgment of God that was to be ours so that we could be restored in our relationship to the Father. What a wonderful Savior we have!

The possibility of restoration has been secured by the blood of Jesus. He took the full punishment of sin which is death and then was resurrected by the Spirit in order to prove His power over even death. Paul shouts this truth in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where [is] thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin [is] the

law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus has won us the victory.

But God demands faith to activate the work of Jesus on our behalf. If He did not require our faith then everyone would be saved and there would be no need to believe. John 1:12 states, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" Jesus must be received just like any other gift. Paul states in Romans 6:23 that eternal life is the free gift of God. If you desire to have your sins forgiven so that you can have a personal relationship with Christ you must place your faith in the finished work of Christ on the Cross.

Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith." God saves us, not because we deserve it, but because Jesus died for us and we have placed our faith in Him. There is no other way to restore a relationship with God. The following is a prayer to receive forgiveness and establish a relationship with the Lord:

Heavenly Father, I recognize that I am a sinner and in need of forgiveness. Thank You for sending Jesus to take the punishment for my sin. I place my faith in Him and the saving work He did for me on the Cross. I now proclaim Him to be my Lord and Master. I will follow Him, obey Him, serve Him, and love Him. Thanking for forgiving me and for giving me the right to be called your child. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer and meant what you prayed you are now forgiven and have begun a personal relationship with God. Read your Bible, pray, obey the Lord, and tell someone in your group about the commitment you made. God bless you!

RECEIVING CLEANSING

If you have already established a relationship with the Lord you might still be in need of forgiveness, but of a different nature. 1 John 1:9 states, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Here John is referring to sins not sin. Note the former is plural, while the latter is singular. Sins must be dealt with biblically.

Do not become like so many who simply deny sin. John has already stated that sin is present in everyone's life (1 John 1:8). In order

to walk in forgiveness every believer must experience the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit on a daily basis. This cleansing comes in response to admission and confession of sin.

The following is a list of results when we sin without getting cleansing:

- **God does not hear our prayers.** Psalm 66:18, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”

- **We will become weak or even die.**

1 Corinthians 11:30, “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

- **We set in motion a progression that may end in destruction.** Galatians 6:7, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. God is no fool, He will not allow us to benefit from sin. When we sin we bring the destructive nature of sin into our lives. We cannot sin without it affecting us. First, we are immediately challenged by the Holy Spirit and a sense of guilt falls on us. Hebrews calls this stage *drifting* Hebrews 2:1-4. It can be almost imperceptible. The idea here is one of a boat becoming untied and drifting away from the dock so slowly no one notices.

This is followed by *doubting*. Hebrews 3:7-4:2 is a discussion of a person who has sinned, has not repented, and begins to doubt the truth. Doubt is a terrible state to be in. James says that when we doubt we do not receive anything from God (James 1:7).

Dull of hearing comes very quickly. Hebrews 5:11-14 explains the situation that follows drifting and doubting. Now it becomes difficult to hear God. How many times have you heard someone exclaim that they are unable to hear the voice of the Lord? Sin left unrepented of will lead to an inability to know the mind of the Lord. People like this just get by on their own abilities and have given up even trying to determine the will of the Lord.

Why even continue the charade? Once a believer has drifted, doubted, then dulled his hearing, *departing* is the only option that makes sense. Hebrews 6:1-20 describes this person. Your neighborhood is full of departed Christians. And I’m not talking about the cemeteries! They have decided to give up on God. They believe He no longer answers their prayers; doesn’t seem to be speaking to them; and can’t be depended upon when there’s a

need! They stay home on Sundays and are the most difficult ones to get back in Church because God is at fault, so they believe.

Some then progress to the next stage, *despising*. What a dangerous place to be in! One man in our area makes it his business to condemn Christians as fools and God as evil and harsh. He despises both! His unrepentant state has brought him sickness both physically and emotionally. He is no pleasure to be around at all! Hebrews 10:26-39 describes this person’s situation. God has no pleasure in them. They are on dangerous ground to say the least.

Yet there is just one more step, *denying*. Hebrews 12:15-29 lays out this final stage. Now the one who began by drifting, not repenting of sin, is no openly denying the faith! This person is accused of refusing God in Hebrews 12:25. The implication is that he is now rejecting the Lord—all because of unconfessed sin! The writer is obviously a Pastor who is attempting to warn his flock of the seriousness of sin and warning them to watch out or they will be pulled into this whirlpool. Let me warn you as well. Stop the progression as quickly as possible. The longer you allow sin to remain the more difficult it is to return!

- **We are unable to have confidence before the Lord.** 1 John 3:21, “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

Something has been stolen from us—we no longer feel good in God’s presence. We are uncomfortable. We hide! We act just like Adam and Achan after they sinned. Communion with the Lord has been damaged. And it is now easier to sin the same sin. If we have become deafened to the Spirit we no longer are as bothered by sin

- **We are unable to learn the deeper things of the Spirit.** 1 Corinthians 3:2, “I gave you milk, not solid food, for you are still not ready.”

- **We are like the world in character and therefore unlike Jesus.** 1 Corinthians 3:3, “You are still worldly.”

- **We are in bondage to sin’s power.** 2 Corinthians 10:4, “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.” Romans 6:12, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. The person who practices sin will live in bondage to it! But

God has promised victory through repentance.

The following are the **Steps to Cleansing** for every believer who desires the power and presence of the Lord in their lives.

• **Ask God to reveal any sin.**

Psalm 139:23-24, Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Expect the Holy Spirit to open your eyes. Expect Him to do it in a loving way, but do expect some pain. No one likes to see their sin.

Have a piece of paper and pen ready to write down anything the Lord tells.

• **Admit to the Lord that what's on your list is sin.**

1 John 1:9, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Don't try to make excuses or blame anyone else for your sin. Be honest with the Lord, He already knows the truth.

• **Admit to the Lord that you have sinned against Him.**

Psalm 51:4, Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight. While your actions might have involved other people, in the end, every sin is against God.

• **Ask the Lord to forgive you.**

Be specific! You sinned specifically—now repent in the same manner. Do not do a blanket confession, attempting to get general forgiveness without admitting things individually. You will not be forgiven! The Word says to “if we confess our sins”.

• **Trust Him to do what He promises by thanking Him for your forgiveness.** Receive your forgiveness by faith. Don't let the devil trick you into believing otherwise. Stand on the Word of God!

• **Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you when you are tempted to commit the sin again.**

• **Ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom** in keeping out of any situation that will result in your sinning again.

• **Walk in forgiveness by rejoicing and praising God.** Acts 3:8, “and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

LESSON SEVEN: THE POWER OF GODLY LIVING

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, *Be ye holy; for I am holy. 1 Peter 1:15-16*

1. What did the Lord show you as you read last week's lesson over? _____

2. According to 1 Peter 1:15-16, what are we to be?
 • _____

3. Why are we to be holy?
 • 1 Peter 1:16 _____

• 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12 _____

• Philippians 2:13 _____

1 Corinthians 15:31 _____

Prayer of Death: Lord Jesus, You are King of my life. I will not be ruled by my old nature, nor by anyone else, nor by the evil one, but by You. Take charge of my thoughts, my actions, my reactions, and lead me through this day. Amen!

Philippians 4:13 _____

4. From the notes on pages 36-38 write the Six Principles for Godly Living in your own words.
Principle 1: 1 Corinthians 10:23 _____

Principle 2: Romans 14:21 _____

Principle 3: 1 Corinthians 6:12b _____

Principle 4: 1 Corinthians 10:32-33 _____

Principle 5: 2 Corinthians 2:11 _____

Principle 6: 1 Corinthians 10:31 _____

- 5. For next week: Read the notes on pages 41-44.
Memorize 1 Peter 1:15-16
Do the challenge.

CHALLENGE

Do an inventory of all your activities and see if they pass all five principles.
Determine that every activity in the future will be godly.

LESSON SEVEN: THE POWER OF GODLY LIVING

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, *Be ye holy; for I am holy.* 1 Peter 1:15-16

Since salvation has been extended, forgiveness has been received, and a home in Heaven has been promised, what difference does the way we live here on earth make anyway? Are the Epicureans correct when they say, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die”? Why all this emphasis on living right or holy? Why can’t we enjoy the best of both the Lord and the world?

These are real questions asked by many believers over the centuries. Peter gives us one answer in 1 Peter 1:15-16, *But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.* Living a holy life is first, **the command of the Lord!** While there are many things in life that are optional to us, holiness is not. We may be free to choose to go fishing or hunting, but we are not free to act contrary to the nature of the Lord in us! He has commanded that we be like Him in our “conversation”. By conversation Peter means “in all we do.” The command to be holy cuts into every aspect of our lives. We are commanded to be holy in our thinking, speaking, working, playing, serving, in everything we do. Remember a command of the Lord is not to be taken lightly. Esau was considered a profane person because he took the things of God lightly.

Living a holy life is second, **the will of the Lord.** 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says, *For this is the will of God, even your sanctification. Sanctification is the process by which a believer becomes like Christ in character through the working of the Holy Spirit.* Luke tells us in Acts 11:26 that the believers were called *Christians* first in Antioch. Why do you suppose that unbelievers called them christians? The word actually means *followers of Jesus*. In that time a follower was one who was like his master. He not only agreed with his leader’s ideas but he was a copy of him as well. It is the will of the Father that we be a copy of Jesus while on this earth.

Paul speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:27, *Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular,* and in Ephesians 4:12, *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.* Since we are His Body we are to demonstrate His character as well. Is it any wonder that people do not want Jesus after seeing believers act so unlike Jesus? Instead of being like in character many are more like the evil one, satan!

Living a holy life is third, **the work of the Holy Spirit.** In the previous section the last phrase of the definition of sanctification read, *through the working of the Holy Spirit.* God always works in cooperation with us. He does His part—we do ours! Our part in being holy is to crucify the flesh on a daily basis. 1 Corinthians 15:31 says, *I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.* Paul knew that every day had to begin with a death to his old nature that wanted to sin. A good prayer to pray each morning is the following: ***Lord Jesus, You are King of my life. I will not be ruled by my old nature, nor by anyone else, nor by the evil one, but by You. Take charge of my thoughts, my actions, my reactions, and lead me through this day. Amen!*** That pray set in action the work of the Holy Spirit. He now is free to lead, guide, and empower on a moment by moment basis.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to empower you to accomplish the will of the Father. He does this by controlling your emotions, your thoughts, your desires, and your actions. Paul expressed it this way in Philippians 4:13, *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.* It is the work of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us. Colossians 1:27 gives our hope of holiness, *Christ in you, the hope of glory.* D. L. Moody once said that the world has not yet seen what God can do through a man totally committed to Him. Will you be that person?

The Bible is replete with specific instructions about unholy activities. Yet there are so many

things it does not cover explicitly, leaving us to find other ways of determining what would be consistent with godly living. While in seminary I had the privilege of meeting believers from all over the USA and even some from abroad. It was amazing how different we were in many of the things we considered “unholy activities”! Some believed that no Christian would ever play cards, while those that played cards were convinced that the non-card-players were sinful for playing dominoes!! Culture plays a large role in determining guidelines for holiness for many Christians.

Before I give you the *Six Principles* which will help you determine if something should be a part of your life I would like to challenge you to ask the right question. I can’t count the number of times I was asked by a teenager how far he or she should go on a date. My response was always, “*You are asking the wrong question. You should be asking how holy can I be, not how sinful can I be without getting God mad at me!*” There is within each of us a desire to come as close to the line as possible without crossing it. Dr. Dobson tells a story of his little girl at a basketball game. He had told her she could go down the bleachers to the floor but could not cross the line onto the court. Immediately she ran down the bleachers to the floor, placed her foot on top of the line she was not to cross, and looked back at her daddy. She was testing his limits—trying to be obedient but having every desire to disobey! Your desire should be to be holy in everything.

PRINCIPLE ONE: PRINCIPLE OF EDIFICATION

Paul used this principle in determining which things he would not do even though they might be lawful for him. 1 Corinthians 10:23 states, *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.* The word ‘edify’ means to ‘build up’ or ‘enhance.’ There are things we do that do not build us up, they actually injure us. For instance, when you fill your mind with worthless information contrary to the truths in the Scriptures it becomes impossible to trust God to do great things in and through you. If an activity causes you to lust you must refrain! Many ‘R’ rated movies are unacceptable for the believer who wants to remain holy. The

language, sexual content, and violence do not build up, they tear down.

Music can also become questionable by its affect. If music incites a person to activities that would be unacceptable then the music must be rejected. The principle can be restated positively as, “*Do only what makes you stronger in the Lord.*”

PRINCIPLE TWO: PRINCIPLE OF INFLUENCE

Romans 14:21 says, *It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.* The principle of influence means we determine whether an activity is godly by the effect it has on others. If what we say or do injures, discourages, or in some way tears someone down, we must refrain.

We live in a very negative society. Put downs are matter of every day life for many people. A comment here, a joke there, and before you know it a sense of rejection falls onto a person like a cloak of steel—an unbearable weight! We should weigh everything we say by the principle of influence. If what we do becomes a stumbling block for another believer we should immediately cease.

Some would contend that our decisions are made by others and not by us. That is often correct! Paul always put a premium on relationships and putting other people first. He would rather do without than injure another Christian. Are we so selfish that we would rather hurt our brothers and sisters so that we can continue doing what we desire to do?

PRINCIPLE THREE: PRINCIPLE OF IMPACT

Paul changes the emphasis of freedom from its effect on others to its long term impact in one’s own life. 1 Corinthians 6:12b states, *all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.* **Many people sacrifice their future on the altar of the present.**

If an activity has the potential for the development of harmful habits and/or addiction it should be avoided. One of the reasons that I refrain from any use of alcohol and tobacco is their addictive quality. Why would anyone who wants to be like Jesus use a substance that could

become his new master? The old saying, *'If you play with fire you will get burned'* is true. Ladies who read romance novels continuously later wonder why their marriages are unfulfilled! These books produce harmful thought patterns that actually can destroy real love between a husband and wife.

The Bible tells us to abstain from all appearance of evil, 1 Thessalonians 5:22. Anything that could lead us into bondage must be rejected. We live in a time when many are advocating the legalization of marijuana. Not only should marijuana be rejected by a believer because of its addictive nature, but any drug that would rule us should be suspect. Movies that lead to violence and sexual adventures should be reconsidered by any believer wanting to be holy. The principle is that nothing should become our master.

**PRINCIPLE FOUR:
PRINCIPLE OF OFFENSE**

1 Corinthians 10:32-33 state, *Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.* If what we do brings an offense to the body of Christ it should be rejected. Am I saying that we should be ruled by the thoughts and attitudes of others? Absolutely!

This principle is one of love. Love always seeks the best for others. 1 Corinthians 13:5 states, *Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.* Love does not seek its own. Paul is saying that he would rather do without than injure another believer or the cause of Christ.

Several years ago the wife of one of our deacons was angered over the problems she was experiencing with her new van. Unable to get any satisfaction from the small town dealer, she proceeded to shout loud and ridiculing comments in the lobby of the dealership. In order to obtain another vehicle she screamed that she would tell everyone in town about her dissatisfaction. The dealer gave in and offered her another car. She had won the battle. But she had lost a bigger war. As a well-known deacon's daughter and wife and member of our church, she had single-handedly sullied our testimony and brought reproach to cause of Christ. Not a

few people from outside our church made comments about the incident.

While having my car repaired at a local 'shade tree mechanic', I began to witness to the man fixing my car. She stood up and asked if was a preacher. I answered affirmatively, to which he shook his head and mumbled that he would never have worked on my car had he known! I was shocked and asked why. He then proceeded to tell me of the various pastors for whom he had done work without ever receiving his pay. I apologized and reminded him that I had always paid and would this time! I was never able to successfully witness to him because of the offense others had brought to him.

**PRINCIPLE FIVE:
PRINCIPLE OF SATAN'S ADVANTAGE**

2 Corinthians 2:11 states, *Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.* There can be practices and even preferences in our lives which give the enemy an advantage—ultimately producing destruction. Every action should be evaluated for the possibility of giving a place for the devil to have an advantage in our lives. If what we do makes us more susceptible to sin, we should abstain from the activity.

In a day when sexual promiscuity is at a fever pitch it is wise for every man to guard what he reads, watches, and hears. The suggestion of infidelity in marriage is everywhere. A car, shampoo, deodorant, fast food, all are being sold by sex. Guard your eyes men! Two of the most popular ads on television today are for products that improve your sex life and enlarge women's breasts! Our society is dominated by sex and we must remain pure. Guard your minds. Don't give the enemy an advantage. Most men can still remember the first nude pictures they ever saw! Stay away from the magazines at Seven-11.

**PRINCIPLE SIX:
PRINCIPLE OF GOD'S GLORY**

1 Corinthians 10:31 states, *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* The ultimate test of all that we do should be whether what we do brings glory to God. Does it pass the shame test? 1 John 2:28 says, *And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence,*

and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If the Lord were to return and catch you in the act, would you be ashamed? Would you have confidence and be thrilled for Him to be there with you? We should live with the attitude that He could come back at any time and catch us in the act!

So much of the time we live as if God does not see or know. Since He is not physical as we are we have a tendency to assume He is not near. But Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is at hand, Matthew 4:17. It is near us, not far! Jesus sees everything we do and knows everything we think. Therefore we should be doing only what brings Him glory. But how can playing baseball bring Him glory?

It is easy to see how witnessing, or preaching, or teaching might bring glory to God, but what of the mundane things of life? Is it possible to make cooking a glorifying thing? I suppose that might depend on the end result!?! Seriously, how can this daily activity be done to the glory of God?

Once you have determined that the considered activity passes the first five principles then to bring glory to God it must be done in faith. Some of you men might say that you always eat by faith, believing you won't die in the eating! ***Faith is the will submitted to the Lord's desire; the heart bowed to His sovereignty; the mind deferred to His wisdom; and the attitude completely dependence on His grace.*** Faith transcends everything we are. It permeates all that we possess and do. Faith is our lifestyle. Faith in Christ is our life. If faith so rules our being then whatever we do will be to the glory of God!

LESSON EIGHT: THE POWER OF PRAYER

Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not. Jeremiah 33:3

1. What did the Lord show you as you read last week's lesson over? _____

2. According to Luke 11:1, what was Jesus doing and what did His disciples ask Him?
 • _____
 • _____

3. According to Psalm 55:17, how often did he pray? _____

4. According to Hebrews 4:16 and Ephesians 1:5, what privileges do we have? _____

Do the following as you read the notes on pages 41-44

5. The Results of **Prayerlessness**

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

6. The Results of **Prayerfulness**

• James 1:7,8; 1 John 5:14; 2 Timothy 1:12 _____

• 2 Kings 6:17 _____

• Proverbs 29:18; Jeremiah 29:11 _____

7. What keeps us from praying?

• **D** _____

8. For next week: Read the notes on pages 47-50.

Memorize Jeremiah 33:3

Do the challenge.

CHALLENGE

Plan to have a daily time of prayer. Pick a specific time and place. Begin with thirty minutes. Spend time reading the Word, praising and thanking the Lord, and then asking the Lord for specific needs to be met. Be prepared to share with the group your experiences in prayer.

LESSON EIGHT: THE POWER OF PRAYER

Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not. Jeremiah 33:3

Martin Luther once said that his day was so full of activities and work that he just could not accomplish everything without first praying for four hours! Most Christians today are too busy to even pray for four minutes each day! A survey done of pastors revealed that they are not very prayerful either. Is it any wonder that we are so impotent?

Jesus was so active in His prayer life that the Disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1). Even with all of their Scriptures and experiences with God, the Jews did not know how to pray. They prayed in the morning, at noon time, and in the evening (Psalm 55:17), but something was different about Jesus' prayers. They heard Him pray for the sick—and they were healed. They watched as He prayed Lazarus back from the dead. When Jesus went off to pray they, in the weakness of their flesh, fell fast asleep! While His prayers were always answered, Jesus also had a strong intimate relationship with the father that was extraordinary! I believe it was these two dimensions to prayer that peaked their interest and emboldened them to ask for help.

Several years ago a well-known evangelist was asked if God heard the prayers of the Jews since they neither recognized Jesus as Lord and Messiah, nor did they pray in His Name. It is certainly a volatile question. Of course God hears every prayer—He hears everything! But is He obligated by His character to answer every prayer? The Bible is clear that it takes faith to move the Hand of God (Hebrews 11:6). Words spoken to God without the accompanying faith will not be answered. But prayer is not just an exercise in getting God to do what we want. Perhaps in reducing prayer to an act of manipulation we have drained it of its power and pleasure! If we define prayer as the essence of a relationship, the actual life between the believer and God, we can say that God is only intimately related to those who have placed their trust in the shed blood of Jesus and who have experienced a new birth. God only hears the

prayers of those who bear His life in them. Prayer then becomes the life of the new relationship, empowering and enlightening the believer. Rather than theological understanding, or religious activity being the measure of a believer's maturity, prayer becomes the defining evidence of abundant life! Without this intimacy Christianity is no better than any other religious attempt to make sense of reality. Ethics, morality, religious ritual all lose their power without the intimacy of prayer.

Muslims prostrate themselves in prayer several times each day but have no personal relationship with Allah. Jews read Scripture to God along with their prayers and yet remain distant from Him. Christians have access into the very presence of God (Hebrews 4:16) with the privileges of sons (Ephesians 1:5) and yet we pray less than the Muslims and the Jews! I am convinced we do not know the results of prayerlessness.

RESULTS OF PRAYERLESSNESS

Becky Tirabassi, in her book *Let Prayer Change Your Life*, lists several characteristics of a person of little prayer. First, ***there is more world in their thoughts and less talk of God in our conversation.*** The Kingdom of God is not a priority to those of little prayer. Their thoughts, conversations, and actions are more temporal. Pleasure is gained through worldly activities rather than in intimate talks with God. TV and sports have far more affect on mood than does the Holy Spirit. Recently Dale Earnhart, the most popular sports car driver, died in a terrible crash at the Daytona 500. Many people were saddened by his loss, while others were angered, some even sent death threats to the other man involved in the accident! The loss of a famous person is tragic, but the martyrdom of Christians all over the world is of far greater interest to God. There are more believers being killed for their faith today than in any other time in history! Where is the outcry? Where is the emotional plea for their lives? Prayerlessness

causes us to be more concerned with earthly goals and circumstances than with the issues of the Kingdom of God.

Secondly, Tirabassi says that *with little prayer we feel distant from God*. How can we sense His presence if we do not spend time with Him. We can not know His heart or mind unless we spend time with Him. I was recently called to give a recommendation for a personal friend. I was asked to describe him in three words. I responded that he was kind, hard-working, and considerate. I did not have to look it up in a book somewhere, nor did I have to ask someone for advice, nor did I remember what others had said about him. I shared what I knew from our relationship. Can you tell someone what God is like based on your intimate knowledge of Him from times in prayer? Or will you have to rely on what the Bible says, others testify to, or to what heard someone else say? God cannot be close without prayer.

Third, she says that *prayerlessness breeds an unwilling or rebellious spirit into our personality*. Our daughter, a freshman in college at the time, brought home the 'love of her life' for us to meet. We were not impressed! It was not the little spots of facial hair, nor the unkempt clothes, not even the silly talk, it was the spirit we sensed from him that bothered us. Several months later I had the opportunity to speak with our daughter about this young man. I asked her to clarify what kind of spiritual person he was. I gave her four choices from which to choose: unsaved, saved but untrained, saved with a heart for God and maturing, or saved but indifferent. She chose the last, to which I agreed quickly. He showed every sign of an unwilling, rebellious person. I challenged her to rethink her relationship considering the fact that complacent Christians are the hardest to motivate to change. Several months later she broke up the relationship and has since found a wonderful young man who has become her husband and the father of their first child. He is maturing Christian seeking God with all of his heart. Prayerlessness affects our very personality that discerning Christians are able to sense. You might think you can hide your lack of prayer—you are mistaken.

Fourth, Tirabassi says that *prayerlessness causes sin to lose its sting because it is not dealt with honestly*. When we begin to pray we are

first very cognizant of our sinfulness. Consider Isaiah as he enters God's presence. He says, *Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Isaiah 6:5*. Here we have a man of God who knows his own nature. He knows he has no right to be in God's presence and that he must be changed. Constant prayer keeps us aware of our sinful nature. But Isaiah did not stay in that sense of guilt. Verse 7 tells us that God sent an angel to touch his lips and cleanse him of his sin. He was then able to hear from God. When God asked for someone to go, Isaiah volunteered. Prayerlessness keeps us from hearing God's call on our lives. Sin goes unattended and we become weaker and weaker.

RESULTS OF PRAYERFULNESS

There are many results of a life filled with prayer. I want to focus on three in particular as they relate to powerful living. They are confidence, understanding, and vision.

Confidence is a necessity in powerful living. As in the sport's world, confidence can make the difference in winning and losing. Every time the Dallas Cowboys were behind it was the confidence of Roger Staubach that would bring them back to victory. But an uncertain leader, one lacking in confidence, is death to any team or army. James says that a person who doubts is like the wave of the sea, *For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. James 1:7-8*. By double-minded James was referring to a man that cannot make up his mind. At one moment he wants to go left. The next, right. Then left. Then right. This person will never experience a powerful life. He cannot make up his mind! In prayer we are able to settle our minds down and find God's will. 1 John 5:14 says, *And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us*. He hears us! Paul gives his expression of confidence in 2 Timothy 1:12, *For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have*

committed unto him against that day. To be thus persuaded is the result of prayer. Only time alone with God will give you such certainty and conviction.

Understanding is another result of prayer. In 2 Kings 6 Elisha prays that his servant will be able to see the truth. So often truth is determined by what we are able to sense. If we can't see it, smell it, touch it, or hear it, it must not be real! Yet God wants us to see things as He does. There is an entire spirit world that exists and cannot be perceived by our physical senses. Elisha's servant was terrified by the enemy encamped around the city. In the physical realm he was correct in his fear. But he was unable to understand all that was happening. He could not see the spiritual world. Listen to Elisha's prayer in 2 Kings 6:17, *And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.* The servant saw the truth. In prayer we too are able to see the armies of God!

When a group of students with Youth With a Mission were witnessing in Brazilia, Brazil they were unable to win anyone to Christ. People were just not interested in the Gospel. They decided to return to prayer and ask God for understanding and direction. In prayer He informed them of the great spiritual battle being fought and won by the enemy in the city. It kept everyone from hearing the good news. After praying against this dominating spirit they returned to witness. To their amazement everyone seemed interested, if not enthusiastic about the Gospel. Many were saved because they had prayed in wisdom. God had revealed them the reason for their failure. Prayer brings understanding, followed by appropriate action, and victory!

Vision is another result of prayer. Proverbs 29:18 states, *Where there is no vision, the people perish.* A life without vision is a life without hope. When you received Christ you received hope. That blessed hope that you would one day be with Him forever. That you would be free of sin, its punishment, and its power. What a great hope we have in Christ. Pray deepens hope. Prayer brings hope to the worst situations.

Several times in our ministry we have come to the brink of disaster only to find peace and

hope in the Lord. When we were going through a church split I thought I would die. Everything seemed so personal! I had become the focus of the attack and I was devastated. But every time I turned to the Lord He reminded me of His promises and His presence. He relieved the pressure and brought hope to my heart. Without His power through prayer I would not have made it through those difficult days. He reminded me of Jeremiah 29:11, *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.* He was thinking about me—and they were good thoughts!

When you spend time in prayer and God answers them you are encouraged. Love for Him is deepened. Enthusiasm is rekindled. Confidence is bolstered. Expectations are alivened. Faith is strengthened. Praise is ignited. Worship is indwelled. Work is empowered. And passion is invigorated. Prayer makes a difference!

WHAT KEEPS US FROM PRAYING?

In preparing for this lesson I asked the Lord to show me the things that have kept me from prayer. He gave me five: devotion, discipline, distraction, discouragement, and desperation. First, *the problem of devotion.*

Revelation 2:4 says, *Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.* The Church at Ephesus was marked by a lack of love for God. Have you ever noticed how young couples in love whisper? They have secrets and secret words! They want to be together all the time. They enjoy each other. That's what it is suppose to be like between a believer and the Lord.

I would question the sincerity of someone's love if they spent little time with the one they say they love. Several years ago I had the privilege of visiting Israel at a reduced rate. I jumped at the opportunity and had a wonderful time. But every time I show the slides or talk of Israel there is a void in my heart. You see I couldn't take my wife with me. While I called her every night from Jerusalem, (the phone call was more expensive than the room!), it just wasn't the same without her. God wants to be that important to us. He wants us to miss not talking to Him. He wants to be the love of our life!

We do not pray because it takes *discipline*. When my children did do something I had told them to do they would inevitably say that they had forgotten. As if forgetting was some how an acceptable excuse for neglect! I would then accuse them of poor planning stating that they had not planned to accomplish it. They would deny not planning and were very sincere. What they did not understand was that planning is not only a matter of intention but of action. While they did intend to be obedient they made no provision for it to happen. The discussion was always followed by a time of teaching about the need for discipline.

It takes planning to pray consistently. If you just intend to do it you will fail. One man once said that we judge others by their deeds, and ourselves by our intentions! God judges us by our deeds. Set aside a specific time each day to pray. Find a quiet place and do it!

Matthew 13:22 says, *He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.* The world offers too many **distractions** for prayer to become vital for some Christians. Who has time to pray with all the football, hockey, baseball, and basketball games to see. Forget watching, how about playing them. We had a man in our church who was so good he played on five baseball teams at once! Between work and baseball he was never home. Do you think he found time to pray? The answer he gave me was classic. He said his prayer life was doing great and that God had led him to be unfaithful to his wife! Talk about distractions! Along with many other things I told his prayer life was dead. Later, after repenting and returning to his wife he acknowledged that he had no prayer life at all.

Some women's lives are full of distractions. With child care, work, clubs, novels to read, and husbands to care for, how can any woman find time? The distractions to prayer are limitless but can be reduced. Everything takes time and energy. If prayer is not given a priority it will become the casualty of the distraction in your life.

Christians everywhere are *discouraged* by their prayer life. So many prayers have gone unanswered that they have given up praying at all. Some have become fatalistic than Christian, believing that God is going to do what He will and there is no point to prayer. Elijah was just as discouraged as we sometimes are. In 1 Kings 19:10 he expresses his discouragement, *And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.* He felt alone, abandoned. But God revealed Himself to Elijah just as He will to you. 1 Kings 19:12 records that God spoke to him in a still small voice. God is greater than our discouragement.

Desperate people get their prayers answered. The Lord revealed to me that prayerlessness was a result of a **lack of desperation**. In Luke 11:8 Jesus touches on the issue of importunity, the prayer of a desperate man. *I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.* Desperate people do not give up easily. They are tenacious, determined, and relentless.

My granddaughter is just like that. When she wants something she can be the strongest-willed person I have ever known. She will not give up at any price. She will even suffer the pain of a spanking! Oh, to be as determined as she when I pray! God is looking for desperate people on whom He can pour out His Spirit. 2 Chronicles 16:9 says, *For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.*

God is looking to bless desperate people. He wants to support their initiatives under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and will meet with anyone interested enough to spend time with Him each day!