

REAL FAITH

*LEARNING TO LIVE IN CHRIST*

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## REAL FAITH

*LEARNING TO LIVE IN CHRIST*

### Overview

We are all in the process of building our lives. On a daily basis, each of us makes decisions which build upon our past and prepare us for the future. In constructing a building, a great amount of planning, time, and energy are put into laying the foundation. Without a solid foundation, any construction project is in trouble from the outset. The one-to-one discipleship process you are beginning is intended to help you lay a solid foundation for your life . . . a foundation that is based upon the principles of God's Word found in the Bible.

### Expectations

With any undertaking, it is important to know up front what to expect. Here is what will be asked of you:

1. Be willing to spend time regularly reading the Bible on your own.
2. Be willing to learn how to communicate with others about your relationship with Christ.
3. Be willing to pass on to one other person what you learn in this discipleship process.

### Helpful Hints

Here are two other principles to help you along the way:

1. Any question is a good question. Your discipleship partner, the person who takes you through the material, may not always have the answer, but he or she can work together with you to find the answer.
2. The goal is not to get through one session per meeting, but to learn to apply Biblical principles to your life. If you need more than one meeting to cover a lesson, take some extra time and enjoy the process.

# The Faith Principle

A principle that we will come back to again and again throughout the discipleship process is that of **faith**. The Bible defines faith as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). What this means for Christians is that even though we may not fully understand what is going on around us, we can have confidence that God is completely trustworthy and has our best interests in mind at all times. For example, an airplane pilot may have his view obscured by clouds, but he has been trained to rely on his instrument panel to give him the accurate information and direction he needs to safely navigate his course.

In a similar way, the follower of Christ is to live by faith in God and His Word on a daily basis. Here is a definition of faith that we will refer to regularly:

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*Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true. The reason I can live as though it is true is because it is true. The reason it is true is because God says it is true.*

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This definition of faith is used with permission from Manley Beasley.

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Every day the Christian must decide whether to place his faith in his circumstances and emotions or in what the Bible says is true. For example, many Christians regularly feel a great sense of condemnation. The Bible teaches, however, that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). The follower of Christ either consciously or subconsciously decides whether he will believe and act according to the former or the latter. The decision he makes has a dramatic effect on the quality of his relationship with Christ.

Here are some other Bible passages about faith that we will refer to regularly:

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2 Corinthians 5:7	<i>We live by <b>faith</b>, not by sight.</i>
Hebrews 11:6a	<i>And without <b>faith</b> it is impossible to please God.</i>
Galatians 3:11b	<i>The righteous will live by <b>faith</b>.</i>
Romans 14:23b	<i>Everything that does not come from <b>faith</b> is sin.</i>

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In the sessions that follow, we will cover Biblical principles about God, our relationship with Him, and our relationships with others. In order to apply these principles to our lives, we will need to make decisions of faith. We will need to believe and act on what God says is true versus what we are told by our culture or our emotions or our circumstances.

## Note

Any spiritual study is in danger of becoming merely an academic exercise. Our prayer for you as you move through the ***Life Builders*** process is that you will apply the truth of each lesson by faith. Faith is choosing to believe what the Scripture says even when my feelings seem to run contrary. Each ***Life Builder*** lesson is full of Scripture, not so we can know more, but as we choose to believe that Scripture by faith and act upon it empowered by the Holy Spirit, then we are transformed another degree into the image of Jesus Christ. Make sure that you apply the Faith Principle to each lesson and each Bible passage as you work through this process. God bless you on your journey of building lives for the kingdom of God.

## Acknowledgment



*Life Builders*: Building for Eternity wishes to acknowledge the work and contributions of Dr. Bill Bright, Founder and President of Campus Crusade for Christ. Much of the *Life Builders*' material was adapted from the discipleship training content that Dr. Bright developed. We are deeply indebted to him for this. We pray that God will use these materials to glorify Himself around the world!

**REAL FAITH**

*LEARNING TO LIVE IN CHRIST*

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**NOTE:** All Bible passages quoted in this notebook are taken from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise indicated.



## SESSION 1

### *Can You Be Secure in Your Relationship with God?*

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#### Overview

As we begin, we will look at the role of the intellect, the emotions, and the will in our relationship with God. In addition, we will look at some important Scriptures which clearly communicate the key principles of being rightly related to God. Finally, we will discover how and why we can have confidence that our relationship with God is secure and unchangeable, regardless of our emotions, experience, or "performance" as His followers.

#### REAL FAITH

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#### Getting Started

**Bible Memory Verse:** Ephesians 2:8-9

#### **Review the Faith Principle**

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7 *We live by faith, not by sight.*

Hebrews 11:6a *And without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Galatians 3:11b *The righteous will live by faith.*

Romans 14:23b *Everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

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#### Steve's Story

Steve, age 32, attended church with his parents when he was a kid, but quit going when he graduated from high school. It was a relief for him to get away from home and begin to make his own decisions. When he was twenty-five he landed his dream job. Then, just a year later, he married his high school sweetheart. Life couldn't have been better.

A few months into marriage, however, things began to fall apart. Steve and his wife began to have heated arguments on a regular basis. The pressures of the job began to mount as well. Steve was asked to take on more and more responsibility, and this resulted in additional time away from home. Eventually the word "divorce" started coming up in his arguments with his wife. This wasn't what he had envisioned his marriage would look like. Right when all this was happening, a friend from work invited him to a luncheon to hear a Christian speaker. At this meeting, Steve made a decision to become a follower of Christ. Initially, Steve seemed excited to learn about his relationship with God. He attended a Bible study with his friend and started to see some positive changes in his personal life,

work, and marriage.

Over time, however, the arguments with his wife re-intensified, the pressures at work began to get to him again, and he started going out after work rather than going home to be with his wife. Steve wondered whether God had truly produced any change in his life. After all, his "performance" didn't seem to match with how he thought a Christian should live. He started to wonder if Christ was really in his life, and at times he wondered whether he had ever had a relationship with God in the first place.

◆ **What advice would you offer Steve?**

## Is Security Possible?

Like Steve, many Christians have questions as to the certainty of their relationship with Christ. Some people ask, "How can Jesus be in my life when my performance is so dismal?" Others wonder, "How can forgiveness and eternal life be a gift? There's got to be more to it than accepting Christ!" In addition, there are many believers who worry that they might not go to heaven when they die.

It is not uncommon for followers of Christ to struggle with the above thoughts. When these thoughts come, how should Christians respond? In order to answer this question, it is helpful to look at the role of the **intellect**, **emotions**, and **will** in our relationship with God.

## The Role of the Intellect

Christianity is not a "blind leap of faith." It is a personal relationship with the God of the universe, revealed in space and time through Jesus Christ. It would be foolish for someone to believe or trust in someone or something if there were no rational basis for that belief. For example, I may believe with all my heart that I could jump off a tall building and not fall. Unfortunately for me, the law of gravity, not my "leap of faith," will dictate the outcome of my decision to jump. So the first question we need to ask is, "Is there any rational basis for following Christ?" Let's look at the claims Jesus made about Himself and then see whether or not He provided any evidence to support those claims.

- ◆ **What claims did Jesus make about Himself in the following passages?**

John 10:30-33

John 14:6-9

John 11:23-26

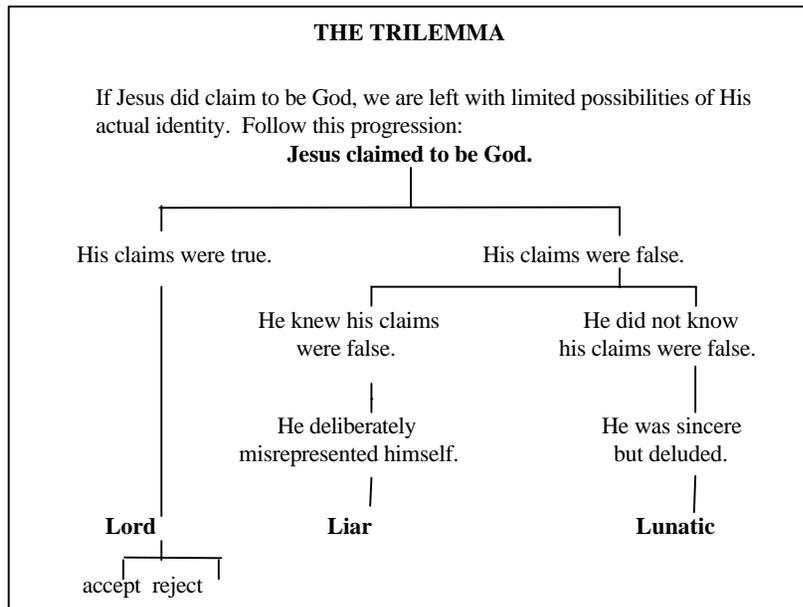
Mohammed claimed to be a prophet,  
Buddha was an agnostic,  
Confucius was an ethical teacher – Jesus claimed to be God.

- ◆ **What evidence do the following passages provide to support Jesus' claims?**

Matthew 8:23-27

Luke 5:17-26

I Corinthians 15:3-6; Romans 1:4



- ◆ **Consider the above progression. What would you say most people have concluded about Jesus?**

- ◆ **What conclusions have you come to about Him?**

## The Role of Emotions

Emotions have been defined as feelings or reactions to a specific act, event, or experience. Because emotions vary greatly, they are not a valid basis for determining whether or not you have a relationship with God.

*Probably no one thing has caused more people to lack the assurance of a vital, personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ than a wrong emphasis on emotions. Seeking an emotional experience contradicts faith - the very thing that pleases God. The Bible says, "And without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6).*

*--Bill Bright*

Assurance of your relationship with God is based on the authority of God's Word, not on your emotions. The Christian lives by faith—trust—in the reliability of God and His Word. The following illustration shows the relationship between **fact** (God and His Word), **faith** (our trust in God and His Word), and **feeling** (the responses to our experiences).

At times a pilot's senses will tell him one thing, and his instrument panel will indicate something else. He would be foolish, however, to trust in his senses. A pilot must learn to trust (**faith**) his instrument panel (**fact**) rather than his senses (**feelings**) to know the altitude, location, and orientation of his aircraft.

In the same way, we must not depend upon our feelings as a gauge of whether or not we have a relationship with God.

Whether you feel like a follower of Christ or not, you can be sure that you are one if you have met God's conditions as revealed in His Word. The promise of God's Word, not our feelings, is our authority.

- ◆ **What would your faith be like if you trusted in your emotions rather than in the facts of God's Word?**
  
- ◆ **What would your faith be like if you trusted in the facts of God's Word?**
  
- ◆ **What role do emotions play in being confident of our relationship with Jesus?**

## The Role of the Will

We have just looked at the role of the intellect in our relationship with God and the danger of basing our faith on our emotions. Now we will look at the role of the will.

- ◆ **Read John 1:12. What is the role of the will in beginning a relationship with God?**
- ◆ **The importance of the will in our relationship with God can be illustrated by the marriage relationship.**

<b>Marriage Relationship</b>	<b>Relationship With Christ</b>
A man may be convinced <b>intellectually</b> that his fiance' is "the one."	You may believe <b>intellectually</b> in Christ.
He may <b>emotionally</b> feel that he loves her deeply.	You may have an <b>emotional</b> experience.
However, the man and woman become husband and wife only when, as an act of their <b>wills</b> , they commit themselves to each other in a wedding ceremony.	You do not become a Christian until, as an act of your <b>will</b> , you receive Christ into your life as your Savior and Lord.

So how do we, as an act of the will, begin a relationship with God?

◆ **Read Ephesians 2:8-9 (NAS) in the following chart.**

<p><i>For by <b>GRACE</b></i>  <i>you have been <b>SAVED</b></i></p>	<p><b>Grace</b> is defined as an undeserved gift.</p> <p>What does it mean to be <b>saved by grace</b>?</p> <p>From what are we saved or rescued?</p>
<p><i>through <b>FAITH</b>,</i></p>	<p><b>Faith</b> is defined as choosing to trust in in someone or something.</p> <p>What must you choose to do to become a Christian?</p>
<p><i>and that not of yourselves, it is the <b>GIFT</b> of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.</i></p>	<p>What is the role of good works in obtaining salvation?</p>

(For additional study read John 3:16-18 and John 5:24)

◆ **What happens if we do not accept God's gift of forgiveness?**

In 1830, George Wilson was tried by the U.S. court in Philadelphia for robbery and murder and was sentenced to hang. Andrew Jackson, President of the United States, granted him a presidential pardon. But Wilson refused the pardon, insisting that it was not a pardon unless he accepted it. The question was brought before the U.S. Supreme Court, and Chief Justice John Marshall wrote the following decision: "A pardon is a paper, the value of which depends upon its acceptance by the person implicated. It's hardly to be supposed that one under sentence of death would refuse to accept a pardon, but if it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must hang." What was the outcome? George Wilson was hanged.

In a similar way, each person must receive the pardon that Jesus offers, the forgiveness of sins, as an act of his will. Otherwise, he is not pardoned.

## Your Security with God

From the moment that you receive Christ by faith, as an act of the will, you can rest in the certainty that you will spend eternity with God.

What key words and phrases in the following passages express the security that we have in our relationship with God?

- 1 John 5:10-13
- John 10:27-29
- John 6:37-39
- Romans 8:38-39

**Discuss:** If you have received Christ by putting your faith in Him as your Lord and Savior, how would these verses affect the way that you live? How do your emotions or circumstances affect your faith in God and His Word?

## Thinking It Through

1. Which word best describes how certain you are that Christ is in your life?  
\_\_\_\_\_ positive    \_\_\_\_\_ hopeful    \_\_\_\_\_ confused    \_\_\_\_\_ doubtful
2. If you died right now, how certain are you that you would spend eternity with God?  
\_\_\_\_\_ positive    \_\_\_\_\_ hopeful    \_\_\_\_\_ confused    \_\_\_\_\_ doubtful
3. Suppose you were standing before God, and He asked you, "Why should I let you into heaven?" What would you say?
3. On what authority do you base your answer?

**Discuss:** If Christ is in your life right now, and you have forgiveness and eternal life, is it possible for all that to change sometime in the future? Why or why not?

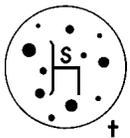
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## Application

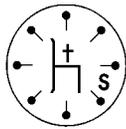
Receiving Christ involves turning to God from self (repentance) and trusting Christ to come into our lives to forgive us of our sins and to make us what He wants us to be. Just to agree intellectually that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for our sins is not enough. Nor is it enough to have an emotional experience. We receive Jesus Christ by faith, as an act of the will.

The following two circles represent two kinds of lives:

*(The circle represents a person's life, the cross represents Christ, S represents self, and the chair represents the control center of a person's life.)*



Self-Directed



Christ-Directed

Which circle best represents your life?

Which circle would you like to have represent your life?

If you have never made the decision to receive God's gift of forgiveness through Christ, or if you are unsure about it, you can receive Christ right now by faith through prayer. Prayer is simply talking with God. God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested prayer:

*Lord Jesus, I want to know You personally. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.*

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If it does, pray this prayer right now, and Christ will come into your life as He promised.

## SESSION 2

### *How Can God's Forgiveness Become Real?*

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#### Overview

In our last session, we learned how we can be confident that our relationship with God is secure and unchangeable, regardless of our emotions, experience, or “performance” as His followers.

In this session, we will cover how we can continue to experience God's forgiveness on a daily basis. First, we will look at our need for forgiveness, and we will discuss why many

Christians' relationship with God has so little effect on their day to day activities.

Then we will look at the problem: what is it that keeps believers living under a heavy load of guilt, not experiencing the forgiveness God offers? Finally, we will look at how we can live in constant communication with God, experiencing His forgiveness and direction every day of our lives.

REAL FAITH

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#### Getting Started

**Bible Memory Verse:** I John 1:9

#### **Review the Faith Principle**

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7 We live by faith, not by sight.

Hebrews 11:6a And without faith it is impossible to please God.

Galatians 3:11b The righteous will live by faith.

Romans 14:23b Everything that does not come from faith is sin.

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#### Phil and Sue

Phil's behavior baffled Sue, his younger sister. While in college, Phil received Christ and helped Sue make the same decision. Now, ten years later, their lives are so different. Phil doesn't seem to care at all about what he does wrong. He says he's forgiven, and he excuses breaking God's laws by talking about God's grace.

He doesn't seek to develop his relationship with God at all, and he keeps his distance from others as well. His co-workers, friends, and the women he's dated all wonder why he is so indifferent.

It seems to Sue that nobody tries harder to obey God's laws than she does, but she

feels guilty all the time. She drives herself, her kids, and her husband crazy by trying to be perfect and make everybody happy. When she fails to measure up, she can't forgive herself or others. She's trying so desperately to do what is right, but the harder she tries, the worse she feels.

- **Why doesn't Phil's Christianity seem to affect his life?**

- **Why does Sue's Christianity make her so miserable?**

**Discuss:**      **What would you say to Phil?**

**What would you say to Sue?**

Jesus meant for the Christian life to be an adventure. In John 10:10 (NAS) He said, "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly" (that it might be full and meaningful). Some Christians truly seem to experience this life of meaning and purpose that Jesus talked about. They seem to know where they are going, and they enjoy the journey. Unfortunately for many other believers, the Christian life is anything but an adventure. For some it is drudgery. For others, their relationship with Jesus has almost no effect on their day-to-day activities.

- ♦ **Why do you think some Christians experience the "abundant life" while others do not?**

## What Gets in the Way?

Two key factors must be addressed if the believer is to experience a life of meaning, purpose, and effectiveness for the kingdom of God.

### 1. **We possess a sin nature.**

How is our sin nature described in the following Bible passages?

- ♦ Romans 3:10-12

- ♦ Isaiah 53:6

**NOTE:** *Sin is not just a matter of cheating, lying, immoral behavior, etc. These actions are only the results of an attitude of sin. A simple definition of sin is doing what we want instead of what God wants—both in actions and attitudes.*

◆ Jeremiah 17:9

◆ Romans 3:23

The Bible is clear that everyone is sinful. Each person is born with an attitude of rebellion towards God. Each person has a natural tendency to rebel against God rather than follow Him.

## 2. **We do not naturally live by faith.**

According to the following Scriptures, what has God given to believers in Christ?

◆ Colossians 1:13-14

◆ Psalm 103:12

◆ Romans 8:1

Believers in Christ are no longer condemned for their sins. God has given all Christians His unconditional love, forgiveness, and acceptance. Unfortunately, these truths are diametrically opposed to everything we have been told by our culture, our emotions, and our circumstances. Rather than believing these Biblical truths by faith, our natural tendency is to live as though we are not loved, not forgiven, and not accepted.

Therefore, even though God desires for all Christians to experience the abundant life, all Christians face the daily challenges of a natural tendency to rebel against God and a natural tendency to believe what we are told by our emotions, our circumstances, and our culture. These attitudes, left unchecked, result in a lifestyle of independence from God.

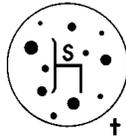
## Three Kinds of People

To get a better idea of what this lifestyle of independence from God looks like, let's take a look at the words of the Apostle Paul. In his letter to the Corinthian church (a church in which the Christians were living like non-believers), Paul describes three kinds of people.

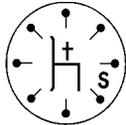
**Read 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3 and note the following spiritual conditions of people:**

*(The circle = a person's life, the † = Christ, the S = self, and the chair = the control center)*

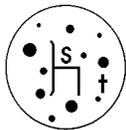
- **Natural** (1 Corinthians 2:14). This is the non-Christian. He does not understand the things of God. They seem foolish to him.



- **Spiritual** (1 Corinthians 2:15-16). This is the Christian who is Christ-controlled, empowered by the Spirit of God.



- **Worldly or Fleshly** (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). This is the believer who knows Christ, but is not living by faith.



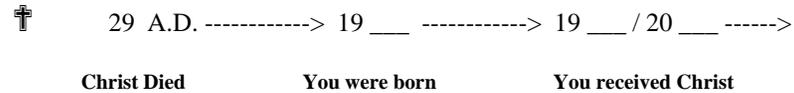
**Discuss:** Could a person be living a good, moral life and still be a "Fleshly" Christian (i.e. not be living by faith)? Why or why not?

## The Solution

The writer to the Hebrews contrasts the Old Testament sacrificial system with the sacrifice of Christ. Read Hebrews 10:10-18.

- ◆ According to verses 10 through 14, what has Christ done with our sins?
- ◆ What words or phrases in verses 10 through 18 indicate the extent of our forgiveness?
- ◆ According to this passage, what is the basis for our forgiveness?

- ◆ Take a moment to fill in the following diagram:



- ◆ How many of your sins were in the future when Christ died for you?

**Discuss:** What has Christ done with the sins you will commit tomorrow or next year?

### ***Relationship versus Fellowship***

The Bible is very clear that believers have received forgiveness for all of their sins, past, present, and future. Sin does not affect the Christian's **relationship** with God. It does, however, affect the believers **fellowship** or communication with God. For example, a son's relationship with his earthly father is permanent. No matter what the son does, he will always be the child of his father. Suppose, however, he rebelled against his father and angrily left home in spite of his father's efforts to reach out to him. (Read the story of the godly father and his prodigal son in Luke 15:11-24.)

- Would he still be his father's child?
- What would happen to their fellowship?
- Would his father still love him? Would his father forgive him?

As we discussed in the previous session, the believer's relationship with God is permanent (John 10:27-29; I John 5:11-13; John 6:36-39). But, what do we do when our fellowship with God is interrupted? What do we do when we sin?

## Restoring Fellowship with God

According to 1 John 1:9, what are we to do when we sin?

**Confession** means agreeing with God about our sin. When God brings to your attention that something you have done is wrong, simply confess it to Him.

*Confession means agreeing with God about our sin.*

There are four aspects to confession:

1. **Agree** with God that you have sinned (1 John 1:9).
2. **Thank** God that He has already forgiven you (Romans 4:7).
3. **Repent** by turning toward God and away from sin, trusting Him to change your attitude and actions (Philippians 2:13).
4. **Trust, by faith**, that you are completely forgiven and cleansed by God.

**KEEP SHORT  
ACCOUNTS:**

When you become aware of sin, confess it right away. Do not let sins accumulate. You do not have to be out of fellowship with God for long!

By confessing your sins whenever God brings them to mind, you can maintain your fellowship with God. You do not have to live with an ongoing sense of guilt, fear, or shame. You can daily experience the forgiveness that is already yours through Christ!

***The Importance of Restitution***

There will be times when you will need to make restitution for your sin. You will need to go to the person you have sinned against to make something right or to ask his forgiveness. In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus commands us to be reconciled to others. Failing to do so may reap serious consequences.

Once you have asked forgiveness of the person or made whatever restitution is necessary, you can continue to experience God's forgiveness.

***What if I still feel guilty?***

**Have you ever confessed a sin and felt like God did not forgive you?**

Satan wants to keep Christians from experiencing the abundant life. How does he do this? He convinces them to live based upon their feelings, and their feelings tell them that they are condemned and not forgiven. **This is another instance where the Christian must operate by faith.**

When feelings of guilt remain even after you have confessed your sin to God, you must decide to live according to God's truth rather than Satan's lies (see Revelation 12:10). God's Word makes it clear that Christians can experience the forgiveness that is theirs through Christ by simply confessing those sins. Once you have confessed your specific sins to God, any guilt that remains is from Satan or from a lack of trust in God's promise of forgiveness.

Sometimes people have difficulty distinguishing whether their feelings of guilt are from God or from the enemy. Something that can help you tell the difference is that God points out *specific instances of sin* (e.g. "Your outburst of anger toward that person was wrong"), while Satan accuses in *vague generalities* (e.g. "You're such a bad person"). In addition, God wants to bring you to a place of forgiveness and freedom, while Satan wants you to become mired in fear, guilt, and shame.

#### *SUMMARIZING CONFESSION*

**Confession is an expression of faith.**

Confession does not result in more forgiveness, since Christ has already forgiven us once and for all (Hebrews 10: 10-18).

**Confession is a response to God's love for us.**

Confession is an expression of faith and an act of obedience, which results in God making real, in our experience, what He has already done for us through the death of His Son.

**Confession keeps us in fellowship with God.** If we refuse to confess our sins, we become "fleshly" and walk in the shadows instead of in the light of God's love and forgiveness (I John 1:7).

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## Application

Take some time tonight to get alone with God.

1. Ask God to reveal any unconfessed sin in your life.
2. Write these sins on a sheet of paper and confess each one to God. You can be totally transparent, since this is just between you and God.
3. After you have confessed these sins, write out God's promise of forgiveness from 1 John 1:9 across the list.
4. Destroy the list and thank God that He has forgiven all your sin.
5. Seek to make restitution to, or ask forgiveness of, those whom God brings to mind.
6. After you have confessed your sins, any guilt that remains comes from Satan, not from God, because God's forgiveness is complete. The Bible clearly states that God "has removed our sins as far away from us as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12).
7. Read Jeremiah 31:3, John 3:16, Romans 5:8, and Romans 8:38-39. After reading these passages, claim by faith that God loves you unconditionally and will always love you unconditionally.
8. Before Session 3, read the Supplement in the back of this notebook—**"Can We Trust the Bible?"**

## SESSION 3

### *Can You Trust the Bible?*

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#### Overview

In our last session, we learned why many Christians do not experience the full and meaningful life Christ offers. We also learned how confessing our sins to God can enable us to experience His love and forgiveness in our daily lives.

#### REAL FAITH

In this session, we look at the Bible, the source of our information about Jesus. We will cover the evidence for the Bible's reliability, authority, and divine origin. In addition, we will learn about the role that the Bible is to play in our lives. Finally, we will discuss the importance of not only reading God's Word, but also relying upon it.

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#### Getting Started

**Read the article "Can We Trust the Bible?" in the SUPPLEMENTS section.**

**Bible Memory Verse:** 2 Timothy 3:16-17

#### Review the Faith Principle

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7	<i>We live by <u>faith</u>, not by sight.</i>
Hebrews 11:6a	<i>And without <u>faith</u> it is impossible to please God.</i>
Galatians 3:11b	<i>The righteous will live by <u>faith</u>.</i>
Romans 14:23b	<i>Everything that does not come from <u>faith</u> is sin.</i>

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#### What Would You Say?

Tony was reading his Bible in his cubicle over lunch break. Ray poked his head in and noticed what Tony was doing. "You don't actually believe that stuff, do you Tony?"

"Well, yes," was Tony's timid reply.

"Really?" said Ray. "I think it's got some good stories that teach morals. Of course, so do a lot of other books. And it was written so long ago . . . you just know it's been changed and adapted as it's been passed down through the centuries. I think it's a book full of myths and legends, but not anything to be taken too seriously."

- **If you were Tony, what would you say?**

## Is the Bible Reliable and Accurate?

Throughout the centuries people have questioned the authenticity of the Bible. People have asked questions such as, "How do I know it's not just a book of fairy tales?" or "How do I know that the Bible I have today is the same one that was originally written?" These and many other questions were addressed in the article, "Can We Trust the Bible?" Using this article for reference, answer the following questions:

**What evidence does the bibliographical test provide for the reliability of the Bible?**

**What does archaeology tell you about the Bible's accuracy?**

**How confident are you that the Bible you have today is the same as what was originally written?**

## Is the Bible the Word of God?

Now we will look at what the Bible has to say about its divine authorship. In order to begin thinking about this issue, read the following statement and indicate whether you agree or disagree.

*If the Bible is not the Word of God, then Christianity is a lie and no one knows one thing about the character and purposes of God.*

\_\_\_\_\_ Agree      \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree      \_\_\_\_\_ Unsure

Let's look at what the Bible says about itself.

### ◆ It is God-breathed or inspired.

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).*

The word picture here is that of God breathing His life into the writings of the authors. As the wind fills the sails of a sailboat and propels it, so the Spirit of God filled and moved the authors of the Bible. They did not merely take dictation, however. The words reflect their individual temperaments, training, and backgrounds. Still, the result was the exact words that God intended.

◆ **The Old Testament authors claim their writings are the Word of God.**

More than 3,800 times the writers of the Old Testament used the phrase, "Thus says the Lord..." In addition, the Old Testament writers used other phrases which indicate they believed they were writing the very words of God.

**What words or phrases in the following passages indicate that the authors were convinced they were writing God's Word?**

**2 Samuel 23:2**

**Deuteronomy 4:2**

**Daniel 9:2**

◆ **The New Testament claims the same divine authority level as the Old Testament.**

The New Testament writers made statements in their writings about both the Old and New Testaments.

**Read 2 Peter 1:16-21. What was Peter's view of Old Testament prophecy?**

**Read 2 Peter 3:16. What does Peter call the Apostle Paul's writings?**

Jesus and the authors of the Scripture clearly claim that the Bible is the unique Word of God. These claims do not by themselves establish the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, since the Bible clearly claims inspiration, it must either be inspired or be in error.

**Read 1 Timothy 5:18. In this passage, Paul quotes a phrase found in Luke 10:7 and Deuteronomy 25:4. How does Paul view the New Testament gospel of Luke?**

◆ **Jesus acknowledged the reliability, relevance, and divine authority of the Old Testament Scriptures.**

Jesus made extensive use of the Old Testament, which was the only Scripture available at that time.

**What did Jesus say in the following passages to indicate that . . .**

**the Bible is reliable?** (Matthew 5:18, Matthew 24:35)

**the Bible is relevant to everyday living?** (Matthew 4:4,7,10)

**the Bible is God's Word?** (Matthew 22:23-33)

**NOTE ON MATTHEW 22:23-33:** The Sadducees were a Jewish sect. They came to Jesus hoping to trick Him. Jesus silenced their insincere questions by quoting a passage from Exodus in the Old Testament in which he said that the Scriptures were spoken by God. The book of Exodus was hundreds of years old at the time, and Jesus called it God's Word spoken to them (not just to those who were alive in the day of Moses).

◆ **The Bible is "eternal truth."** (Read Psalm 19:7 and Psalm 119:160)

There are numerous claims in the Bible that attest to its unique truthfulness:

- The Bible is perfect. (Read Psalm 19:7)
- The Bible is true and eternal. (Read Psalm 119:160)
- The Bible is flawless. (Read Psalm 18:30)

◆ **In summary**, not only do we have evidence that the Bible is reliable and accurate, we also have a wealth of support which emphasizes that the Bible is God's Word. Still, there are times when our emotions, our experience, or even other people tell us something else. Sometimes, even when we have hard evidence, we "feel" like there are errors in the Bible.

**Discuss:** **What should be our response when we feel that the Bible is in error?**

Here is another opportunity to put the faith principle into practice. When our emotions are telling us not to trust the Bible, we must, *by faith*, believe that the Bible is true. We must live according to Biblical truth rather than living by our feelings or emotions. How can we do this? We trust. We must choose to believe what the Bible says about itself. Choosing to believe the truth brings confidence and freedom. Note the words of Jesus:

*To the Jews who had believed in him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32).*

**Application:** Can you come to the place of believing that the Bible is perfect, eternal, and flawless? If so, express the following words to God:

*Father, I believe that Your Word, the Bible, is perfect, eternal, and flawless. I choose to make the Bible my primary source of authority. Enable me to read it regularly, interpret it accurately, and apply its truths to my life.*

## What Role Does the Bible Play in My Life?

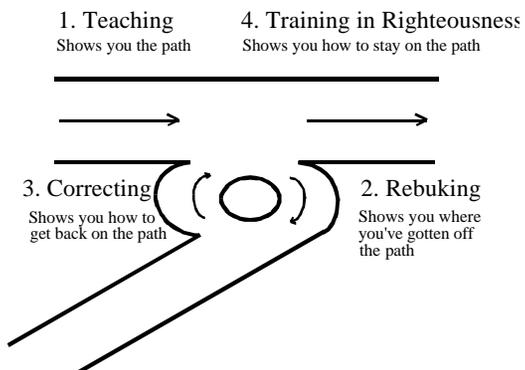
- ◆ What does God want His word to accomplish in our lives? There are several things. The following list is not exhaustive, but addresses some of the main purposes. Read the Bible passages in the following chart. In the right-hand column write, in your own words, the role the Bible can play in your life.

BIBLE PASSAGE	THE BIBLE'S ROLE IN MY LIFE
Romans 10:17	
John 5:39b	
Acts 20:32	
Psalm 119:105	

- ◆ One of the main roles the Bible plays in our lives is that of equipping us for life. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul spelled out how the Bible equips us:

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

These four equipping roles are illustrated by the following diagram:



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**Discuss:** Which of the four equipping roles is most needed in your life right now? Why?

## How Can I Increase My Reliance upon God's Word?

We have seen that the Bible is God's reliable, practical, inspired Word to us. Even though this is the case, there are many other voices in our lives calling for us to yield to their leadership: cultural norms, peers, our past, personal preferences, family, media, emotions, and people of authority, just to name a few. However, if the Bible truly is our Creator's Word to us, then it ought to be the ultimate source of authority for our lives.

How then can we increase our reliance upon God's Word?

### ◆ By Treasuring God's Word.

What value did the following Biblical characters place on God's Word?

1. **Moses** (Read Deuteronomy 32:44-47)
2. **David** (Read Psalm 19:9-11)
3. **The Psalmist** (Read Psalm 1:1-3)

**Reflect:** What does it mean that God's Word is your life?

What is the most important thing in your life?

What do you delight in?

Does the Bible need to play a more important role in your life?

◆ **By Obeying God's Word.**

Read the following Bible passages and write in the chart the results of obeying God's Word and the consequences of not obeying God's Word.

	<b>Luke 6:46-49</b>	<b>Psalm 1:1-6</b>
<b>What are the results of obeying God's Word?</b>		
<b>What are the consequences of not obeying God's Word?</b>		

◆ **By Reading God's Word.**

One of the reasons that many Christians do not grow in their relationship with God is that they do not spend enough time reading His Word. This would be the equivalent of trying to get to know another person without ever listening to what he is saying. Reading the Bible is not so much "something that a Christian should do" as it is a way to get to know the God who created us, who loves us unconditionally, and who has our best interests in mind.

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## Application

### *How do you get started reading the Bible?*

Here are some suggestions:

1. **Set aside a regular time each day to communicate with God.** This time may be anywhere from five to thirty minutes. If you've never read the Bible before, five or ten minutes will be a good start.
2. **Find a time and location where you can minimize distractions.** This may be early in the morning before everyone else is up, later at night after the kids are in bed, a quiet corner during lunch break, or in the car before you go to work. Experiment until you find what works for you.
3. **Start with one of the gospels . . . Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.** These books focus on the life of Jesus. A chapter or so per day is a good goal.
4. **Ask God to give you understanding** before you start.
5. **Read the Bible passage thoughtfully**, and ask yourself questions such as:
  - What are the main points the writer is trying to make with his audience?
  - What does this passage teach me about God?
  - What does this passage teach me about people?
  - What life principles are taught?
  - What one or two principles can I apply to my own life?
6. **Jot down your thoughts in a journal.**
7. **Spend a few minutes talking with God about:**
  - Applying what you have learned to your life
  - Concerns about your day
  - The needs of friends and family members
  - Those you know who are not yet Christians

## SESSION 4

### *How to Dig Deeper into God's Word*

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#### Overview

In our last session, we looked at evidence for the Bible's reliability, authority, and divine origin. We also learned about the purposes that God's Word fulfills in our relationship with Him. Finally, we discussed the importance of not only reading the Bible, but also following the principles it teaches.

#### REAL FAITH

In this session we will cover how to understand and interpret the Bible and apply its truths to our lives. We will learn a three-step method of studying the Bible and spend some time putting this study method into practice. In addition, we will work with you at *establishing a regular time for your own personal Bible study*.

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#### Getting Started

**Bible Memory Verse:** 2 Timothy 2:15

##### **Review the Faith Principle**

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7     *We live by faith, not by sight.*  
Hebrews 11:6a     *And without faith it is impossible to please God.*  
Galatians 3:11b     *The righteous will live by faith.*  
Romans 14:23b     *Everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

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#### Introduction

Indicate whether the following statements about Bible study are "True" or "False."

\_\_\_\_\_ In observing a passage, you should first ask yourself, "What does this mean?"

\_\_\_\_\_ Many passages will have more than one correct way to be interpreted.

\_\_\_\_\_ There may be many ways to apply one passage of Scripture.

# Overview of the Inductive Bible Study Method

1. **Observation:** The first step involves observing the text by asking the question, *What does it say?*

**OBSERVATION  
TEXT**  
*What does it say?*

In this step, we look at the Biblical text without seeking to determine the meaning that the writer was intending to communicate.

2. **Interpretation:** The next step involves interpreting the message or meaning of the text by asking the question, *What does it mean?*

**OBSERVATION  
TEXT**  
*What does it say?*

**INTERPRETATION  
MESSAGE**  
*What does it mean?*

In this step, we take the observations from the first step and ask questions about these observations in order to determine the intended meaning of the writer.

3. **Application:** The third step involves applying the message of the passage to our lives by asking the question, *What must I do?*

**OBSERVATION  
TEXT**  
*What does it say?*

**INTERPRETATION  
MESSAGE**  
*What does it mean?*

**APPLICATION  
MY LIFE**  
*What must I do?*

In this final step, we take the message from step two and make practical application to our own lives.

## Step 1: Observation . . . What Does This Passage Say?

Effective Bible study starts with good observation. Interpretation depends entirely on the quality of our observations. Our natural tendency is to move immediately into interpretation without making clear observations.

## Exercise

*In order to learn how to observe effectively, take a moment and survey the room in which you are sitting. Now close your eyes and tell your discipleship partner everything that you observed.*

*How did you do? Are there details that you missed? Of the objects that you noticed, did you remember the color, shape, and orientation related to other objects in the room? Are there any objects that you did not remember?*

*The point of this exercise is to show the importance of paying attention to detail. For most aspects of our lives, our eyes are trained to observe generally, not specifically. For doing effective Bible study, however, we need to train our eyes and our minds to observe specifically . . . to pay attention to detail.*

Observation deals only with the text--not the meaning of the text. The process of observation asks questions of the text such as what, how, when, and where. It also looks for repeated words, themes, or ideas as well as grammatical construction.

### A. Steps to observation

1. Read the passage two or three times (in different translations if possible).
2. Make a list of observations. The following chart will assist you in this process. Use this chart to train yourself as to the right questions to ask.

Who	Who is writing? Who is mentioned? Who is the audience?	Cause/Effect	If "this" happens, "that" will result
		Questions	Does the writer ask any questions?
What	What is discussed? What is happening?	Prepositions	What words connect key ideas and relationships?
Where	Where is this occurring?	Conjunctions	How are phrases linked together?
When	When did this take place? What is the time frame?	Grammar	Are there any adjectives, adverbs, etc? What do they modify?
Why	What reasons are given?	Verb Tenses	Is it in the past, present, or future tense?
How	How did it happen?	Literary Form	Is it history, a poem, or a story with a point or punch line?
Commands or Promises	Are there any commands to follow, promises to claim?	Repeated Words	Are there any ideas, words, or phrases that are repeated?
Atmosphere (Mood/Tone)	Does the author seem forceful, sad, excited, concerned, etc?	Comparisons/ Contrasts	Any comparisons or contrasts between things, activities, or people?

## B. Practicing observation

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--which is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

(Romans 12:1-2)

### Sample observations from Romans 12:1-2

- **Therefore:** linking to something stated in the previous paragraph.
- **Urge:** emphatic.
- **Brothers:** to believers.
- **Offer:** (verb)--something you give.
- **Living:** modifies body.
- **Holy:** modifies body.
- **Why do we offer our bodies?:** because of mercy of God.
- **Do not conform:** emphatic command.
- **Conform:** to be like--take form of.
- **Be transformed:** change.
- **How:** renewing of your mind.
- **Renew:** new + re (again) make new again.
- **Then:** in order or so.
- **You would "test and approve"** what God's will is.
- **God's will:** (1) good; (2) pleasing; (3) perfect.

## Step 2: Interpretation . . . What Does This Passage Mean?

The aim of interpretation is to determine the originally intended meaning of the writer. Here are three key principles to keep in mind in the process:

1. There is only one correct interpretation for any passage.
2. The task of interpretation is to determine what God intended to communicate in this portion of His Word.
3. All Scripture must be studied in context.

**Discuss:** Why might someone say there are many ways to interpret the Bible?

### A. Steps to interpretation

1. Define key words (in your own words or from an English Dictionary if necessary) and ask questions about the text.
  - Why did the author write about this topic at this point? (What is the context of this passage in light of the rest of the paragraph, chapter, or book?)
  - What does the author mean by what he wrote?

*The aim of good interpretation is not uniqueness; one is not trying to discover what no one else has ever seen before...The aim of good interpretation is simple; to get at the "plain meaning of the text."*

--Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart, How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth, p. 15-16.

2. Use other Scripture to help you interpret the passage.

- What does the immediate context tell you about the meaning? (i.e. What insight do the verses just before and just after this one give you about what the writer meant?)
- What does the broader context tell you about the meaning? (i.e. What light is shed on the passage by the rest of this paragraph, chapter, book, or other books of the Bible?)
- What do cross-references tell you?

*Note: In many Bibles you will find, at the center or bottom of each page, references to other Bible verses. These notations are called "cross-references." Cross-references direct you to other portions of the Bible that contain information on the topic covered in the verse you are reading.*

3. List any principles that you derive from the passage.

4. Check available Bible study tools.

*Note: Other Bible study tools that are available at most bookstores are Bible dictionaries, Bible handbooks, and Bible commentaries. The best way to make use of these tools is to consult them after first doing your own study of the passage. Then you can "consult the experts" for additional insight. Most theologians emphasize that "the best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself."*

5. Write a brief summary statement that clearly and concisely captures the author's intent and message.

## **B. Practicing interpretation**

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--which is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

(Romans 12:1-2)

1. What do these terms mean? (Use a Bible dictionary if one is available.)

*Mercy*

*Conform*

*Transform*

*In truth, you cannot read the Scriptures too much; And what you read, you cannot read too well; And what you read well, you cannot too well understand; And what you understand well, you cannot too well teach; And what you teach well, you cannot too well live.*

--Martin Luther

2. What does Paul mean by these phrases?

*Pattern of this world*

*Renewing of your mind*

3. Look at some other verses that man provide insight into the above phrases.

*Pattern of this world*

1 John 2:15-17

*Renewing of your mind*

Colossians 3:1-4

Ephesians 4:22-24

4. What is one principle you can derive from the passage?

One example: *God wants to change me by changing the way I think.*

5. If available, refer to a Bible dictionary, handbook, or commentary. If you do not currently have access to these tools, you can purchase them or check them out from your local library. Be sure to ask the person who is taking you through this material to show you the tools he or she uses.

6. Write a brief summary statement of Romans 12:1-2.

One example: *God wants me to give myself fully to Him and allow Him to change my way of thinking.*

### Step 3: Application . . . What Must I Do?

Now that we have observed what the passage says and interpreted its meaning, we move to application. Here we answer the question, "What must I do?" In application, we take the principles or truths we have discovered through interpretation and apply them to our own lives. Remember, there is *only one correct interpretation or meaning*, but from that interpretation can come many personal applications.

**A. The application step will answer these questions:**

1. How does this truth apply to my life?
2. What specific changes do I need to trust God to make in my life in light of this truth?
3. What steps do I need to take to carry out those changes?
4. How can I cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit in my life?

**B. Practicing Application**

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--which is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

(Romans 12:1-2)

1. What principles did I discover in the interpretation process?
2. How do these truths apply to my life?
3. What action do I need to take? What specific changes do I need to trust God to make in my life in light of this truth?
4. What steps do I need to take to carry out those changes? How can I cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit in my life?

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## Application

Plan a one-month strategy for studying the Bible for thirty minutes each week.

What will I study? \_\_\_\_\_

When and where will I study? \_\_\_\_\_

Show your study notes to your discipleship partner after the first week or on the following agreed upon date \_\_\_\_\_. Refer to the next five pages of the notebook for a sample Bible Study Worksheet and some possible passages for study.

**Bible Study Worksheet** Passage: \_\_\_\_\_

Bible Verse	Observations	Interpretation	Application

## SUGGESTED PASSAGE #1 FOR PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

### Matthew 28:16-20

<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

#### Instructions:

1. Review the three-step Bible study method.
2. Divide a piece of paper into four columns and label the four columns *verse*, *observation*, *interpretation*, and *application*.
3. Read through the passage, noting your observations on each verse. Once you have finished observation, go through the passage again, this time interpreting your observations. Finally, look through your interpretations and make personal application to your own life.
4. Review your study with your discipleship partner.

## SUGGESTED PASSAGE #2 FOR PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

### Philippians 4:4-7

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

#### Instructions:

1. Review the three-step Bible study method.
2. Divide a piece of paper into four columns and label the four columns *verse*, *observation*, *interpretation*, and *application*.
3. Read through the passage, noting your observations on each verse. Once you have finished observation, go through the passage again, this time interpreting your observations. Finally, look through your interpretations and make personal application to your own life.
4. Review your study with your discipleship partner.

## SUGGESTED PASSAGE #3 FOR PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

### Acts 1:1-11

<sup>1</sup> In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup> until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>6</sup> So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

<sup>7</sup> He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

<sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

<sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

### Instructions:

1. Review the three-step Bible study method.
2. Divide a piece of paper into four columns and label the four columns *verse*, *observation*, *interpretation*, and *application*.
3. Read through the passage, noting your observations on each verse. Once you have finished observation, go through the passage again, this time interpreting your observations. Finally, look through your interpretations and make personal application to your own life.
4. Review your study with your discipleship partner.

## SUGGESTED PASSAGE #4 FOR PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

### John 1:1-14

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning.

<sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

<sup>6</sup> There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. <sup>9</sup> The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup> He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God -- <sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

### Instructions:

1. Review the three-step Bible study method.
2. Divide a piece of paper into four columns and label the four columns *verse*, *observation*, *interpretation*, and *application*.
3. Read through the passage, noting your observations on each verse. Once you have finished observation, go through the passage again, this time interpreting your observations. Finally, look through your interpretations and make personal application to your own life.
4. Review your study with your discipleship partner.

## SESSION 5

### *Knowing Who You Are in Christ*

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#### Overview

In our last session, we learned how to interpret the Bible and apply its truths to our lives. In addition, we looked at a three-step method of studying the Bible and covered some practical steps for putting this study method into practice.

One of the foundational truths we discover as we study the Bible is that we receive a new identity when we begin a relationship with God. In this session, we will learn more about our identity and how we are to view ourselves as followers of Christ. Instead of believing that we will not amount to anything in God's eyes, we can be confident that we are of infinite value because of what God has done for us through Christ. In addition, we will look at the personal benefits of understanding this new identity, and we will learn how that identity can impact our daily attitudes and actions.

REAL FAITH

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#### Getting Started

**Bible Memory Verse:** Galatians 2:20

##### **Review the Faith Principle**

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true. The reason I can live as though it is true is because it is true. The reason that it is true is because God said it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7 *We live by faith, not by sight.*  
Hebrews 11:6a *And without faith it is impossible to please God.*  
Galatians 3:11b *The righteous will live by faith.*  
Romans 14:23b *Everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

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#### A Change of Citizenship

Ali emigrated from Jordan eight years ago with his family. They became American citizens and opened a small grocery store in Denver. Ali reads an Arabic newspaper from his home country to catch up on what's been happening there. He also goes to the mosque regularly to pray. He is proud to be an American, however, and has learned English, including many slang terms, so he can fit into

his new culture. Ali displays the American flag on holidays and observes the Muslim fast, Ramadan, every year. With his friends he speaks Arabic but insists that his children speak only English.

One day Ali's six-year-old son asked him, "Dad, are we American or Jordanian?" Ali hesitated before he answered, "American."

- **Why do you think Ali hesitated before answering his son?**
- **Do Christians face a similar dilemma? Why or why not?**

When we become followers of Christ, we take on a new identity. However, God does more with our identity than just make us citizens of His kingdom. He also adopts us as His children. As a result of becoming His children, we now reflect His character and carry His name. Certainly there are times when we do not feel or act like God's children. However, regardless of our "performance," we are now identified with Jesus Christ. We share in His life and character. We belong to Him.

In Galatians 2:20 the apostle Paul wrote:

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Paul mentions three key truths in this passage:

1. **Christ lives in believers** (i.e. believers have taken on a new identity).
2. **Believers are to live by faith** (i.e. believers live out their identity by faith).
3. **Believers are loved by God** (i.e. understanding our identity helps us experience Christ's love in a greater way).

Let's take a closer look at these truths and their application to our day-to-day Christian lives.

## You Have Taken on a New Identity

The moment you trusted in Christ, you experienced a change in your identity. Your outward appearance did not change, but you experienced a change in your standing before, and orientation toward, God. Like Ali, the man in the opening story, you have become a citizen of a new kingdom . . . God's kingdom. With any change of citizenship, there are new ways of looking at yourself and the kingdom to which you belong. What does the Bible have to say about your new identity or citizenship?

## 1. You are identified with Christ positionally in His crucifixion.

*Many Christians are not enjoying the...freedom which is their inheritance in Christ because they.....don't understand the dramatic changes which occurred in them the moment they trusted in Him.*

What did Paul mean when he said that you have been "crucified with Christ?" When Christ died, you died too. Obviously you did not die physically. Rather, you died to (i.e. were separated from) the condemnation of God and the power of sin to rule in your life. You were "crucified" to these things, just as if you were positionally on the cross with Christ.

- ◆ **According to I Peter 2:24, what has Christ done with your sin?**

- ◆ **Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Philippians 3:8-9. According to these two passages, what has Christ given us?**

Imagine for a moment that you have committed several crimes, and you are now in the courtroom awaiting the judge's verdict. Even though you are guilty of all the accusations and deserve to be punished, the judge declares you "not guilty" and even goes a step further, declaring that you are "innocent of every charge." This is essentially what God has done for us. Even though we are guilty and deserve to pay the penalty for our own sin, God (the judge) has declared us "not guilty," and He goes even further by declaring us "innocent of every charge."

- ◆ **What does it mean that Jesus is righteous?**
- ◆ **What does it mean that you are righteous?**
- ◆ **Would you consider yourself a righteous person? Why or why not?**
- ◆ **The above passages indicate that each Christian is a new person with righteous standing before God. Is it easy for you to believe this about yourself? Why or why not?**

The following chart summarizes our identification with Christ in His crucifixion.



BEFORE THE CROSS		THE RESULT OF JESUS' DEATH ON THE CROSS	
Jesus	Us	Jesus Took On	We Took On
Righteous Sinless	Unrighteous Sinful	Our Unrighteousness Our Sinfulness	His Righteousness His Sinlessness

Before we believe in Christ, we stand before God as sinful and unrighteous. When we believe in Christ, we are changed. Jesus takes our sin upon Himself, and we are credited with His righteousness. We must choose, *by faith*, to see ourselves as God has made us . . . as new people with righteous standing before God.

**Discuss:** What does it mean to you to know that God has declared you "not guilty" and "innocent of every charge?"

How would daily understanding and acknowledging the above truths affect your life?

**2. You are identified with Christ in His resurrection to new life. You are now dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

- ◆ Read Romans 6:11-13. What does it mean that believers are dead to sin?
- ◆ What are some practical ways that you can offer yourself to God rather than to sin?

*For he has rescued us from the one who rules in the kingdom of darkness, and he has brought us into the Kingdom of his dear Son.*

Colossians 1:13 (NLT)

**3. You have a new hope--spending eternity with Jesus, free from the penalty, power, and presence of sin.**

Read Colossians 1:27 and Romans 5:3-5. What does it mean to have hope? What are the results when people have no hope?

**4. You are completely accepted by God because you are identified with Christ.** (See Romans 8:1, 32-33 and Galatians 2:20)

# You Live Out Your New Identity By Faith in Christ

## 1. Your new identity is lived by faith, not by "keeping the law."

*For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (Romans 1:17).*

God accepts us unconditionally on the basis of Christ's death on the cross. Our natural human tendency, however, is to think that we must do something to earn God's acceptance and then follow God's laws well enough to keep His acceptance after we have received it.

**What are some things that people do in an attempt to earn God's acceptance?**

**Why is it that believers think that they must "perform" adequately in order to maintain God's acceptance?**

The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 2:21:

*I am not one of those who treats the grace of God as meaningless. For if we could be saved by keeping the law, then there was no need for Christ to die. (NLT)*

According to the Bible, even if a person could keep all of the laws and commands of Scripture, he still could not be justified (declared "not guilty") before God. The Bible is clear--justification has nothing to do with external activity. We do not gain, nor maintain, a relationship with God by our "performance."

## 2. You experience your new identity as you choose to live by faith in Christ.

God intends for His followers to experience the reality of their new identity in their day-to-day activities. In many cases, however, Christians do not experience this reality. They have read in the Bible that believers are new creatures in Christ (II Cor. 5:17), but they have resigned themselves to the fact that, though they may have glimpses of God's power on occasion, they can not regularly live as new creatures.

**In Romans 6:1-18, the apostle Paul discussed how believers can increasingly live out their new identity. Read the passage. As you read, see if you can identify some of Paul's practical "how to's" for living it out.**

Paul begins his discussion with the question, "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" Even though Paul answers his own question with the negative, "By no means!" many believers either consciously or subconsciously answer, "Why not?! I've tried to live as a new creation and it doesn't work!" Fortunately, Paul does give us some practical "**how to's.**" Let's see what they are.

◆ **Know the truths of your identity in Christ.** (Romans 6:3, 6, 8, 9)

- a. You are crucified with Christ; previous ways don't have to control you.
- b. You are dead to sin; you don't have to give in to it.
- c. You are united with Him in a new life; you're not alone in your growth.
- d. You have power from Christ to live the Christian life; you're not limited to your own finite resources.

**These truths are a reality, whether you feel as though they are or not. If you were to daily acknowledge these four truths, by faith, what would be the effect on your life?**

◆ **Count on or consider these facts to be true.** (Romans 6:11)

*Satan will try to convince you that you are an unworthy, unacceptable, sin-sick person who will never amount to anything in God's eyes.*

Regardless of how you feel, make the decision to believe and act on what God's Word says about you. For example, you may have thoughts and feelings (from yourself or from Satan) that indicate you are controlled by your past, you will give in to the same sins again, and you are on your own in your growth and development. As we have just read in

Romans, the exact opposite of these thoughts is true. Focus on the truth of the Bible, rather than on the lies of the accuser.

**Why is it sometimes difficult to focus on God's truth about you rather than the lies of the accuser?**

◆ **Offer yourself to the Lord.** (Romans 6:12-13)

Many believers find a simple, daily prayer helpful in offering themselves to God rather than to sin. You might try praying something like this each day.

*Father, I offer myself to you today. I yield to your leadership in my life. I give you my thoughts, emotions, attitudes, and actions. May I be Your instrument today. Amen.*

◆ **Choose to obey Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.** (Romans 6:17-18)

When we are tempted to disobey God, we can instead choose to live according to our new identity. We can increasingly choose God's way as we learn to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. Being "filled with" or "controlled by" the Holy Spirit is not optional for the Christian. It is an absolute necessity for overcoming temptation. Relying on the power of the Holy Spirit is discussed extensively in Session 9. Once again, however, a simple prayer will be helpful as you are regularly faced with temptations to disobey God:

*Father, I know that I cannot obey You if I am relying upon only my own resources and abilities. I yield myself to Your Spirit. Fill me with Your power. Amen.*

**Discuss:** Which of the above "how to's" is most helpful to you? Why?

## You Have Others to Help You Live Out Your Identity

When you accepted Christ, you became part of the church, the Body of Christ.

### **Read the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:13.**

We are part of a large group of fellow believers in Christ. Being part of this group, or "body," has many benefits, one of which is the help we can receive from others as we face temptation. What are the sources of the temptations we face?

### **The Bible indicates that Christians face temptations on three fronts:**

- a. Temptation from the world system. (1 John 2:15-17; John 16:33)
- b. Temptation from our own sinful desires. (Galatians 5:16-21)
- c. Temptation from the devil. (1 Peter 5:8)

As we face temptations from all these sources, we cannot over-emphasize the importance of seeking the help and support of other members of the body.

The following story illustrates the importance of this truth.

*In a wild game park in East Africa, an American tourist witnessed a group of porcupines being circled by lions. The situation looked bleak for the porcupines as the lions closed in for the kill. Then something very interesting happened. The porcupines all faced one another and put their noses together, showing only the sharp quills of their back-sides and tails to the lions. Once in formation, the porcupines stayed put. No matter how the lions approached the group, they could not penetrate the porcupine "quill-defense system." After a few minutes of futile effort, the frustrated lions walked away.*

The Bible indicates, in I Peter 5:8, that the devil "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." Fortunately, believers are not alone in fending off the attacks of Satan. We have others to help us, pray for us, and hold us accountable as we seek to live for Christ.

**Discuss: What barriers are there which would prevent you from linking up with other Christians to help you live out your new identity?**

**Who could be your partner for these purposes?**

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## Application

In light of the truths in this session, ask yourself these questions:

1. What two things about your identity in Christ mean the most to you? Why?
2. What do the phrases "dead to sin" and "alive to God" mean?
3. If we have victory in Christ, why do we experience defeat sometimes? How can the truth of our victory change our experience and our discouragement?

## SESSION 6

### *Freedom from the Performance Trap*

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#### Overview

In our last session, we looked at the new identity we have received as followers of Christ. In addition, we looked at the personal benefits of understanding this new identity, and we learned how that new identity can impact our daily attitudes and actions.

In this session, we will cover the meaning of the grace of God, the central theme of the New Testament. We will also look at the impact that God's grace has on us from the moment we begin a relationship with Christ. In addition, we will contrast God's truth and Satan's lies concerning grace and show how grace can be experienced in our relationships and ministry. Finally, we will make application of one of the truths about grace to a current home, work, or ministry situation.

REAL FAITH

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#### Getting Started

**Bible Memory Verse:** Romans 3:23-24

##### **Review the Faith Principle**

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7 *We live by faith, not by sight.*

Hebrews 11:6a *And without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Galatians 3:11b *The righteous will live by faith.*

Romans 14:23b *Everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

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#### What Would You Say?

Shelley, age 33, is a stay-at-home mom with three small children. She grew up in a church-going family, but did not become a Christian until she was in college. When someone explained that she could receive God's forgiveness as a gift of His grace, she accepted God's gift enthusiastically. Through the help of a Christian friend, she learned the basics of growing in her relationship with Christ. She began leading others to Christ and discipling them in their newfound faith.

A few years after graduating from college, she got married, and not long after that, she and her husband began having children. Though she enjoyed her relationship with her husband and her children, the pressures of marriage and parenting began to take their toll on her spiritual life. She noticed that her temper flared up more often with her kids, and she began to feel resentment toward her husband. In addition, she began to experience fears about their finances and whether or not she would have enough energy for her job as a mom. Then she began getting down on herself because she did not feel that she was doing very well at following Christ. The more she got down on herself, the worse she "performed." The worse she "performed," the harder she tried "to do better the next time."

- **What advice would you offer Shelley? How could a more clear understanding of God's grace help in her situation?**

**Grace defined:** Grace has been defined as the unmerited favor of God. This theme of God's unmerited favor runs throughout the Bible. It is expressed most clearly in His unconditional acceptance of lost sinners through the sacrificial death of His Son. God's grace is also demonstrated in His continued acceptance of those who come to faith in Christ. God's grace is the believer's only hope for joy and satisfaction in this life and the life to come. Understanding, experiencing, and applying the grace of God to daily life is critical if a believer is to live as God intended.

## Life Under Grace vs. Life Under the Law

**Read Galatians 2:15-21. What do you think the apostle Paul meant by the phrases "observing the law" and "the grace of God?"**

The phrase *life under grace* is an apt description of what God wants every believer to experience. We must not seek to earn God's favor by our own good works. We are not justified by our works or by keeping the law (v. 16). Christ paid for all our sin on the cross. We now have right standing with God; we are holy and blameless before Him. We can experience grace only by faith in Jesus Christ.

We will refer to *life under the law* as "performing to gain God's approval." Living by the law (or by "works") means trusting in our own performance or standards in order to gain approval with God. It is the enemy of *life under grace*.

## We Experience God's Grace from the Moment of Salvation

When a person comes into a relationship with God through faith in Christ, he or she begins to experience God's grace or unmerited favor. Let's take a look at several Bible passages which will give greater understanding of our need for, and our experience of, God's grace:

### ◆ **We deserve condemnation.**

Read Romans 3:9-24. Answer the following questions about our standing before God prior to believing in Christ.

**How many people ... have sinned? (3:9, 23)**

**... are righteous? (3:10)**

**... seek God? (3:11)**

**... fall short of God's standard? (3:23)**

Also read Ephesians 2:1-3. Answer the following additional questions about our standing before God prior to believing in Christ.

**What is our spiritual condition? (2:1)**

**Whom did we follow? (2:2)**

**What were we by nature? (2:3)**

◆ **Even though we deserve condemnation, we receive God's absolute approval when we begin a relationship with Christ.**

The Bible is clear that right standing before God comes through faith in Christ, not through our performance or behavior. Let's look at some Scriptures which will give us a greater insight into our standing, or position, before God as believers in Christ.

1. **We are made righteous.** Read Romans 3:21-22. Because Jesus was righteous, all those who believe in His name receive His righteousness.
2. **We are justified.** Read Romans 3:24. "Justify" is a legal term which means to be free from blame or guilt. The charges of our sin are done away with, and we are declared "not guilty" and "innocent of all charges."
3. **We are redeemed.** Read Romans 3:24. The word "redemption" literally means to "buy back from the slave market." According to this passage, God has bought each of us back from slavery to the power and penalty of sin and given us freedom to follow Christ.
4. **We are reconciled.** Read Romans 5:10 and Colossians 1:21-22. Though we were once God's enemies, we are now His friends.
5. **We are sanctified.**

Read I Corinthians 6:11  
and Hebrews 10:14.

"Sanctification" means "set apart for a special purpose." Believers have been set apart as objects of God's love and purpose. Positionally, believers are declared holy. The believer's "performance," however, does not always align with his position.

God is in the process of sanctifying believers, that is, making them holy, in their daily living.

*God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.*

--2 Corinthians 5:21

**Discuss:** The Bible is clear that Jesus Christ is righteous, holy, sinless, and perfect. The above Scriptures also indicate that the person who begins a relationship with Christ is positionally righteous, holy, sinless, and perfect. How should a follower of Christ approach life when he or she understands these positional truths?

**How will you approach life in light of these truths?**

**What are you doing to either help or hinder your own sanctification process?**

◆ **We have freedom from the moment of salvation.**

God's grace allows us to experience freedom in three areas:

1. **We have freedom from sin.**  
We now have a choice. Sin no longer has to have control over us. (Read Romans 6:1-3, 11-18.)
2. **We have freedom from fear.**  
We do not have to live in fear of condemnation. Rather, we can live a life of freedom as we are led by the Holy Spirit. (Read Romans 8:1, 4, 6.)
3. **We have freedom from performance.**  
We cannot gain anything through our works. God gives us His complete acceptance when we receive Christ. Therefore, we no longer have to try to earn His acceptance by performing. (Read Romans 3:27-28; 4:4-5.)

*Discuss* **How would living according to performance have a negative affect in your life?**

## Experiencing Grace in Our Daily Lives

Because of the grace that God has extended to us, we can now experience grace in our daily lives. Grace can affect how we view ourselves when we sin, why we serve God, and how we relate to others.

◆ **A Biblical Story of Grace.**

One of the greatest stories of grace in the New Testament is found in Luke 7:36-50. Read the passage, then answer the questions in the following chart. Place an "X" in the appropriate box.

QUESTIONS	PHARISEE	WOMAN
1. Who gave freely? (v. 44)		
2. Who loved openly? (v. 45)		
3. Who served joyously? (v. 46)		
4. Who received forgiveness?		
5. Who was freed to love others?		

◆ **Grace in relation to sin.**

God's grace affects how we view ourselves. We either believe God's truth or Satan's lies. According to God's Word, He loves us unconditionally, completely, and perfectly. We are accepted by Him. When we have confessed our sin to Him, He forgives us and we do not need to feel guilty (Romans 8:1). Satan wants us to feel guilty and condemned when we sin. He wants our sin to become a barrier between us and God. Another lie of Satan is that forgiveness is a license to sin; of course, it is not. The best way to counteract Satan's lies is to immerse yourself in the truth of God's Word and to believe and act on these truths by faith. As you read, study, memorize, and meditate on God's Word, you will increasingly learn to choose to believe what is true, which will affect how you view yourself and how you view sin. As a result, you will begin to choose righteousness more often than sin.

**NOTE:** The greatest barrier to experiencing God's grace in our daily lives is that we buy into the lies of Satan. Satan wants us to feel the constant pressure of an inadequate performance. God, on the other hand, wants us to constantly remember that our acceptance is not based upon our performance. He wants us to know experientially what is already ours positionally through Christ.

◆ **Grace in our motivation.**

God's grace affects how we view Him and why we serve Him. We can either be motivated by grace or by guilt or by some combination of the two.

**Guilt motivation** means that we are serving God in order to gain His acceptance.

As a result, we focus on ourselves and on our performance rather than on God and His truth. We believe Satan's lie that we need to perform well in order to receive God's approval. If we attempt something and it does not go well, we can become humiliated because we failed (i.e. we looked bad) and then re-double our efforts to avoid looking like a failure the next time around.

*Expect great things  
from God. Attempt  
great things for God.*

--William Carey

**Grace motivation** means that our service to God is based on His unconditional love and acceptance of us. As a result, we have the freedom to take steps of faith because we have the freedom to fail. Since God's love for us cannot be affected by our "performance," we do not have to worry about how we will look if something does not go well. Life becomes an adventure of walking in God's path for us and becoming who He created us to be!

### ◆ **Grace in our relationships.**

God's grace affects how we view others. We will either unconditionally accept them through God's grace or conditionally accept them by placing them under the law. The more we understand and appreciate God's grace in our own lives, the more willing we will be to forgive others who hurt us.

**Law relationships:** If we choose to believe Satan's lies, we will extend limited acceptance in our relationships. We will view every hurt as a personal attack. We will be demanding of those around us. Acceptance of others is dependent on our personal experience of God's grace. If we have not personally experienced God's grace, limited acceptance of others will typify our relationships.

**Grace relationships:** If we experience God's grace in our daily lives, we can accept people as they are because God accepts us as we are. We will not hold grudges when wronged. Our acceptance of others will not depend on their meeting our expectations. In this kind of relationship, people will be free to share their joys as well as their weaknesses and faults. (Read Colossians 3:13.)

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## Summary

- At the moment of salvation, we experience the grace of God in our lives. We do not get what we deserve (condemnation), but we get what we do not deserve (acceptance).
- Experiencing God's grace will enable us to view ourselves as God views us, even when we sin. Immersing ourselves in God's Word will renew our minds so that we can think properly about who God says we are.
- As we focus on our unconditional acceptance by God, we are freed from the need to perform for God. We can then live and minister for Him in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- As we experience God's grace in our lives, we will extend His grace to others.

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## Application

Choose a situation in one of the areas below in which you are tempted to believe Satan's lies:

- My view of myself.
- My motivation.
- My relationships with others.

Using the chart on the next page, answer the following questions:

- What does God's word say about my situation?
- How has Satan lied to me about my situation?
- How would choosing to believe the truth of God's Word change my actions in that area?

## APPLYING GOD'S GRACE TO MY LIFE

Area of Temptation	God's Truth	Satan's Lie	My Action
<p>Grace in relationships; if a friend wrongs me.</p>	<p>Forgive others just as the Lord forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)</p>	<p>I do not have to forgive my friend; he doesn't deserve to be forgiven.</p>	<p>Confess my anger and forgive my friend. Demonstrate forgiveness in our friendship by showing kindness and love.</p>
<p>I do not feel righteous.</p>	<p>The Bible says that I am righteous. (II Corinthians 5:21)</p>	<p>I do not feel righteous because of my past behavior and sin.</p>	<p>I choose by faith to believe 2 Corinthians 5:21 over every past experience and Satanic accusation.</p>
<p>I feel guilty much of the time.</p>	<p>The Bible says that I have been justified, and I am not condemned. (Romans 3:24; 8:1)</p>		
<p>I need to perform to receive God's acceptance.</p>			

## SESSION 7

### *Telling Your Story*

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#### Overview

In our last session, we looked at the meaning of the grace of God, the central theme of the New Testament. We also learned about the impact that God's grace has on us from the moment we begin a relationship with Christ. In addition, we looked at the contrast between God's truth and Satan's lies concerning grace and saw how grace can be experienced in our relationships.

Today we will begin looking at how to communicate the truth of God's grace to others. One of the most effective methods for helping another person understand his need for Christ is to tell your own story or personal testimony. In this session, we will look at the biblical foundation for telling your story, and we will discuss the personal benefits for being prepared to do it. Finally, you'll spend time writing out your story using a three-point outline.

REAL FAITH

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#### Getting Started

**Bible Memory Verse:** 1 Peter 3:15

##### **Review the Faith Principle**

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7 *We live by faith, not by sight.*

Hebrews 11:6a *And without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Galatians 3:11b *The righteous will live by faith.*

Romans 14:23b *Everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

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#### Juwan and Dave

Juwan and Dave had worked together for several years at the automobile assembly plant. Though they were from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, they really enjoyed one another's company. Each day on lunch break they talked about everything: their family backgrounds, their cultural similarities and differences, the latest on their favorite NBA and NFL teams, their frustrations with work, and, occasionally, even their challenges with the opposite sex (Juwan with his wife, Dave with his girlfriend).

Rarely did they ever discuss their religious beliefs. Juwan was a Christian and regularly attended church with his family. Dave, on the other hand, stayed away from church altogether. Occasionally, Juwan would invite Dave to church, but Dave's response was always the same. "If that works for you, Juwan, that's fine. I personally don't need it."

Then one day at lunch Dave asked a question that surprised Juwan. "Juwan, I know that you're a pretty religious guy and all, but what difference does your religion make in your life?"

- **If you were in Juwan's situation, what would you say?**

## Being Prepared to Tell Your Story

- ◆ The Bible stresses **the importance of being ready** to tell others about Christ. The Apostle Peter penned the following words to the Christians in Asia Minor:

*When I seek to point people to Christ, it is because I am convinced that He alone is God's answer to life's deepest problems.*

-- Billy Graham

*But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15)*

One of the reasons that we are, at times, not more effective at leading others into a relationship with Christ is that we are not adequately prepared to do so. In some cases we have not thought through the words we would say. Other times we are unprepared spiritually; we are not really expecting that God would give us the opportunity to be His messenger.

**Discuss:** What are the main inhibitors that prevent you from telling others about your relationship with Christ?

- ◆ The **purpose of telling your story** is to let others know how you received Christ and how He has affected your daily life.

**Read 1 John 1:1-3.** Notice the phrases which indicate the method John used in communicating about Christ.

What words highlight the purpose of telling your story?

A well-prepared, clearly organized personal testimony, given in the power of the Holy Spirit, has a direct impact in nearly every witnessing situation. It can be given verbally (e.g. in a situation like Juwan's above) or in written form (e.g. in a letter you send to a friend). It can be used effectively in group settings or one-to-one with a friend, neighbor, or co-worker.

- ◆ **There are several reasons why telling your story is so effective in leading others to Christ.** First of all, people want to know what difference your relationship with God makes in your life. Most people want a faith that works.

*The best qualified people to do evangelism are lay Christians going about the business of their daily lives.*

--Gilbert Bilizekian

- ◆ Second, when packaged effectively, your story will touch people emotionally. For better or for worse, people in our culture live their lives in the realm of experience and emotion. Your own story can touch them at that level and point them to the reality of a relationship with God through Christ.

Third, in written form, a personal testimony can be used even by those who are more timid in sharing their faith. A quieter person may find it much easier to say, "I've got a letter that tells

the story of my spiritual journey. Would it be okay for me to send you a copy?" This also puts the recipient at ease; he is still in control and can read the letter when ready.

## How a First-Century Christian Told His Story

When the apostle Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, he was given the opportunity to speak to the angry crowd of Palestinian Jews who were watching as he was being led away.

**Read the story in Acts 21:40 through 22:21.**

Notice that Paul divided his story into three parts:

- 1. Before he came to know Christ** He shared about his attitudes and actions prior to becoming a believer (Acts 22:1-5).
- 2. How he came to know Christ** He explained how he came to faith in Christ (Acts 22:6-11).
- 3. After becoming a Christian** He explained how becoming a follower of Christ changed his life (Acts 22:12-21).

Look back over Paul's story and answer the following questions:

- **What words and phrases in part one (Acts 22:1-5) indicate that Paul was seeking to identify with his audience?**
- **What words or phrases in part two (Acts 22:6-11) indicate that Paul had turned to Christ?**
- **What do you see in part three (Acts 22:12-21) that indicates that Paul's life had been changed?**

Later on in Acts, Paul told his story again, but this time he made some adjustments because he was speaking to a different audience. He did not change the facts. Rather, he emphasized different points to affect a new group of listeners. Read the story in Acts 26:1-29.

- **Which main points are the same as the previous instance of telling his story?**
- **What does he emphasize that is different?**
- **What was Paul's purpose in telling his story?**  
(Acts 26:27-29)

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, when I first came to you I didn't use lofty words and brilliant ideas to tell you God's message. For I decided to concentrate only on Jesus Christ and his death on the cross.*

--The apostle Paul  
1 Corinthians 2:1-2

## How to Prepare Your Story

◆ Consider the following questions as you prepare your story:

### 1. Before you became a Christian

- What was your life like? What were your attitudes, emotions, needs, and problems?
- What did your life revolve around the most?
- In what ways were your activities unsatisfying?

- From what sources did you gain a sense of security, peace of mind, approval, and happiness?
- How did your misplaced sources of security, peace of mind, approval, and happiness cause you to become disappointed, jaded, or disenchanted?

## **2. How you came to know Christ**

- When was the first time you clearly heard the Gospel? How did it happen? When were you exposed to true Christianity?
- What were your initial reactions?
- When did your attitude begin to change? Why?
- What were the final struggles that went through your mind just before you accepted Christ?
- Even though there were struggles, why did you decide to place your trust in Christ?

## **3. After becoming a Christian**

- What specific changes did Christ make in your attitudes and actions?
- How long did it take before you noticed changes?
- How and why are you motivated differently now?
- How did Christ begin to meet your needs or give you insight about your emotions or problems?

◆ Further help for writing your story:

- **Real-life stories** of attitudes, actions, and emotions will establish you as a credible witness to pre-Christians.
  1. *Pre-Christians want to hear about a faith that is real.* Stories from your life will help them see that you are not just talking in the realm of theory.
  2. *People tend to make decisions and live life on the basis of emotion and experience, not on the basis of what is right or wrong.* If you can emphasize the emotions you felt (e.g. fear, loneliness, sadness, etc.) more than the activities in which you participated, you will have a much better chance of identifying with your audience.
- **Stay away from talking about church involvement or using Christian phrases and jargon.** Most people do not understand words like "saved" or "justification." In addition, when you mention the name of a church or denomination, you may alienate those who have either had a bad experience with that group or are a part of a different group.
- **Avoid being explicit and sensational in speaking of immorality, drug use, etc.** Remember the purpose in telling your story. You are seeking to point others to Christ, not showcase yourself and your activities.
- **Limit your story to three to five minutes.** People are limited in their time availability and attention span. In addition, keeping it short will help you cut out the non-essential portions.
- **What if you received Christ at an early age?**

If you received Christ at an early age, there is a good chance that you do not remember much of the "Before I Came to Know Christ" part of your life. If this is the case, you can still use the three-point outline, but you will probably place more emphasis on your life after receiving Christ. Or, if you received Christ at an early age, but went through a time of rebellion or a time where your faith became more real to you, you can use an outline something like this:

  1. My time of questioning or turning my back on God.
  2. How I re-committed my life to Christ.
  3. My life after I re-committed myself to Christ.

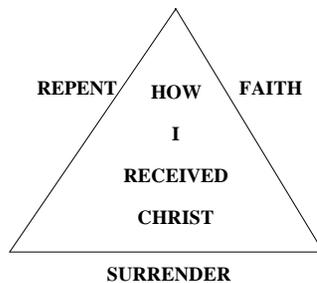
# Preparing to Write Your Story

## I. Before you became a Christian

- A. Read Romans 3:10-18 and Jeremiah 17:9. After reading this, explain the condition of every person who does not know Christ.
- B. Ask yourself how Romans 3:10-18 and Jeremiah 17:9 surface in the lifestyle of a pre-Christian.
- C. Explain what your life was like before Christ in a way that would relate to a pre-Christian. Do not say, "My heart was wicked." Describe what it was that you struggled with before coming to Christ. (Examples: loneliness, discouragement, etc.)

## II. How you came to know Christ

This equilateral triangle will better explain how one comes to know the person of Jesus Christ. We do not need to do three things to receive Christ, but these three words will help you to better communicate how you came to know Christ.



This diagram is used with permission from Dr. Howard Ramsey.

- A. When you came to Christ, there was an attitude of repentance, you placed your faith in Christ, and you were willing to surrender your life to Christ.
- B. Describe how you became a Christian based upon the words repent, faith, and surrender.
- C. Explain how you came to know Christ in words the pre-Christian will be able to understand.

### III. After becoming a Christian

- A. Refer back to Session 6, p. 48. Use the five doctrinal truths to explain what has happened to you after becoming a Christian.
- B. Explain what it means that you are righteous, justified, redeemed, reconciled, and sanctified in words a pre-Christian would be able to understand.

**NOTE:** One of the reasons people do not share their faith more regularly is that they do not think their life changed that much when they received Christ. Though there might not be a huge change behaviorally, there is a dramatic change positionally!

## Writing Your Story

- ◆ Have your discipleship partner tell you his story or give you a copy of his story in written form.
- ◆ Ask God to give you wisdom and guidance as you write your own story.
- ◆ Using the worksheet on the next page, jot down your initial ideas.
- ◆ Using the notes from your worksheet, write out your story. Try to keep it to five or six sentences for each section of the three-point outline.
- ◆ Bring your written story to your next discipleship meeting:
  - Go through it with your discipleship partner
  - Get his/her feedback and suggestions
  - Make any needed corrections
- ◆ Memorize your story and practice telling it.
- ◆ Put it in letter form on computer. You can then easily personalize it to send to friends, family members, or co-workers.
- ◆ Be prepared to tell your story to your discipleship partner at your next meeting or on the following agreed upon date \_\_\_\_\_.

# Worksheet for Your Story

## **1. Describe your life before you received Christ.**

Write on the basis of what you know today about people and God. Do not talk about cause (e.g. I was lost), but effect (e.g. lonely, aimless, fearful, purposeless). Do not focus on the things you did, but on the emotions you felt. Jesus Himself described the lost as those who were "distressed and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd." Remember that you are not writing your story for you, but for those who do not yet know Christ.

## **2. Describe how you became a Christian.**

Explain how you turned away from trusting in your own efforts to earn God's favor, and how you came to the point of trusting in Christ to give you forgiveness and an eternal relationship with God.

## **3. Describe your life now that you have received Christ.**

Write about your new identity in Christ. Describe how Christ meets your needs for forgiveness, peace, significance, lasting relationships, etc.

# Guidelines for writing your story

## A. What to do:

1. Ask God to give you wisdom and guidance as you write.
2. Write your story so it communicates with groups as well as with individuals.
3. Keep within your time limit.
4. Be realistic. Do not imply that Christ removes all of life's problems, but rather that He enables you to live through them as you walk in obedience.
5. Consider your audience. Write and speak to communicate with the particular group you are addressing.
6. Talk about Jesus. He is the main focus of your story.

## B. What not to do:

1. Do not make statements that reflect negatively on the church, organizations or people.
2. Avoid mentioning denominations or churches by name.
3. Avoid speaking in a preaching manner. Make your delivery in a normal, conversational tone.
4. Do not use vague terms such as "joyful," "peaceful," "happy," or "changed" without explaining them.
5. Avoid using biblical or religious words such as "saved," "converted," "convicted," or "sin" without clarifying what you mean. These words do not communicate to non-Christians.

## C. Writing style:

Write as though you were speaking to a friend rather than giving a formal speech.

1. Begin with an attention-getting sentence.
2. Be genuine from the start to finish.
3. Be specific. Give enough details to raise interest.
4. Be accurate.
5. Include interesting, thought-provoking experiences.
6. Use one or two Bible verses, but only where they relate directly to your experience. Explain the references if your audience is not familiar with the Bible. (Example: "One of Jesus' disciples said..." rather than "I John 5:1 I -13 says...").
7. Edit and rewrite as needed.
8. Write a closing that provides a finished and logical conclusion.

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## Application

1. Over the next two to three weeks work with your discipleship partner writing your personal story.  
(You will need to write and edit your story two to three times to become comfortable with it.)
2. Begin to pray for the individuals with whom you will share your story.
3. Give your story to a friend (verbally or written) and ask how it communicates to them.
4. Give your story with an evangelistic tool (JESUS video, evangelistic tape or article) to two to five people.

## A sample story

(Used in letter form with the JESUS Video)

Dear Travis,

I'm sending this letter as a follow-up to our conversation. I have enclosed the video I mentioned along with an explanation of my spiritual journey. I appreciate your willingness to watch the tape of the life of Jesus Christ.

I grew up in a home where the parents thought more about their children than they did about themselves. Learning to do your best in school and work were common objectives in our household. I watched our parents live out the high values of honesty and regard for others over self. While growing up, the phrase, "Someday you will go to college and have it better than we did," was commonplace in our home.

This all sounded good, but the big problem was that my motivation to succeed was low, primarily as a result of a low self-esteem and self-confidence. Because of a weak foundation in school, the thought of going to college was shaky at best. When I reached high school, some of these problems led to bigger issues in my life. It seemed that guilt and fear were two hurdles that I just could not find a way to conquer.

In the midst of this particular chapter of my life, a friend invited me to a religious meeting. At this event I heard information that challenged me in a way that I had never been challenged before. I came to realize that I, like everyone else, had lived my life independent from God, and that independence had kept me from having a personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Shortly after that I realized that Jesus Christ was my only hope for heaven and any kind of fulfillment in life. Therefore, I admitted my problem and placed all of my trust in Jesus Christ. I prayed and asked Christ to come into my life and to make me the kind of person that he wanted me to be.

The day that I invited Christ into my life became more life-changing than I could ever imagine. My struggles with guilt about different issues in my past were settled when Christ took all of my mistakes in life and replaced them with forgiveness and a clean heart before God. I never knew it was possible for someone like me to be rightly related to God.

Knowing God through His Son Jesus Christ did wonderful things for my self-esteem. The confidence that I have received in knowing Him allows me to face the obstacles of life with the assurance that He loves me and will never hurt me. I can trust Him with my life. I've discovered that God now sees me in a right relationship with Him forever, and I am experiencing the fulfillment of His purpose for my life.

As you can tell, it is easy to be excited about knowing Jesus Christ. I have enclosed the video that we discussed. When you have some time, pop some popcorn and enjoy the film. If I can be of assistance to you in any way, please do not hesitate to give me a call at 985-739-0482.

Sincerely,

Steve

## SESSION 8

### *How to Access God's Power for Living*

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#### Overview

In our last session, we discovered that our own personal story can be used by God to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ. We looked first at the example of early believers and then learned how to write our own testimony so it could be an effective tool as well.

Today we will look at the role of the Holy Spirit in living the Christian life. First we will learn more about who the Holy Spirit is and what His role is in the life of the believer. Then we will find out what prevents believers from experiencing the Spirit's power in their lives. Finally, we will discover how every believer can be empowered by the Holy Spirit on a moment- by-moment basis.

REAL FAITH

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#### Getting Started

**Bible Memory Verse:** Ephesians 5:18

#### **Review the Faith Principle**

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7 *We live by faith, not by sight.*

Hebrews 11:6a *And without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Galatians 3:11b *The righteous will live by faith.*

Romans 14:23b *Everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

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#### Anne's Story

Anne was almost penniless. Her husband had died years before, and since then she had lived in loneliness and poverty. Anne was destitute and defeated.

One day Miriam, an old friend she had not seen since childhood, came for a visit. Miriam decided to stay with Anne for a few days to help. In the course of straightening up the house, Miriam discovered a folder tucked away in a file drawer of an old roll-top desk; it was simply labeled "For Anne." Inside the folder Anne and Miriam found an old bank savings book, a key to a safe deposit box, and a

note from Anne's husband explaining how he had provided for her care upon his death. When the value of the stock certificates, rare coins, and the savings account were calculated, Anne was told that she was worth more than \$833,000.00! She had been living in misery and despair for over twenty-two years when all along her husband had provided for her every need.

This story is similar to the way many Christians live. God has provided unlimited resources through the Holy Spirit. Yet, many Christians live unfulfilled, fruitless, and spiritually malnourished lives. They live only within the limits of their own human resources when they could instead be empowered by the Spirit of God.

Let's first find out more about who the Holy Spirit is and what role He plays in the lives of believers. Then we will look at how we can access the resources of the Holy Spirit on a daily basis.

## Who Is the Holy Spirit?

- ◆ **The Holy Spirit is God.** He is the third person of the Trinity . . . God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All the divine attributes ascribed to the Father and the Son are ascribed to the Holy Spirit as well. In the book of Acts, Luke made it clear that the Holy Spirit is God. Note the phrases in Acts 5:3-4 which affirm the divine nature of the Holy Spirit:

*Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."*  
(Acts 5:3-4)

- ◆ **He is a person, not just a force or an impersonal being.** He possesses intellect (1 Corinthians 2:11), will (1 Corinthians 12:11), and emotion.

**Read Ephesians 4:30. What do you see in this passage that indicates the Holy Spirit possesses emotion?**

**NOTE:** The Holy Spirit is not an "it". He is a person, not a vague, heavenly force.

## Why Did the Holy Spirit Come?

Read the following verses, and briefly summarize in your own words the role that the Holy Spirit plays in our lives:

**John 16:7-8**

**John 16:13-14**

**John 7:37-39**

**Acts 1:8**

## What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit?

### ◆ **It means to be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit.**

In Ephesians 5:18 the Apostle Paul wrote the following words:

*Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.* (NLT)

Paul told the Ephesian Christians to allow the Holy Spirit to direct their lives rather than to rely on their own resources to live the Christian life. Human beings allow many things to fill or control their lives. For example, we may say that someone is "filled with anger." What we mean by this phrase is that anger is controlling the person. These strong emotions affect the person's thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions.

**NOTE:** In the original Greek language, the command in Ephesians 5:18 to "be filled" is in the present continual tense. The verse literally means, "keep on continually being filled with the Spirit." Being filled with the Spirit is not a one-time experience. Rather, we need to be filled over and over again throughout our Christian lives.

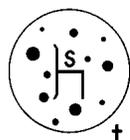
### ◆ **Being filled with the Spirit involves depending on God's power . . .**

- . . . to live holy lives (1 Peter 1:14-16).
- . . . to bear spiritual fruit (John 15:8).
- . . . to understand and apply God's Word (John 16:13).
- . . . to give us victory over our problems and temptations (Romans 8:26).

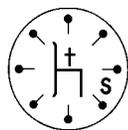
◆ **Being filled with the Spirit vs. having the Holy Spirit within us**

Being filled with the Spirit does not mean that we get more of the Holy Spirit.

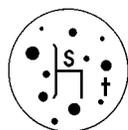
Every believer in Christ has the Holy Spirit living within from the moment of spiritual birth (Ephesians 1:13-14; I Corinthians 3:16; Romans 8:9). Though all Christians have the Holy Spirit living within them, not all Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 2:14-3:3). The following diagrams illustrate this point: *(The circle = a person's life, the † = Christ, the S = self and the chair = the control center of a person's life)*



**Natural**



**Spiritual**



**Worldly or Fleshly**

**Which of these people have the Holy Spirit living within them?**

**Which of these people are controlled by the Holy Spirit?**

## Why the Average Christian Is Not Filled with the Holy Spirit

There are two main reasons that Christians are not empowered by God's Spirit:

- ◆ **Lack of knowledge.** Similar to Anne in the opening story, many Christians do not realize that there are vast resources available to them. Many believers simply need to find out about the power of the Spirit that is available and then learn how to tap into that power.

- ◆ **Lack of faith.** This lack of faith frequently stems from false beliefs or misperceptions that people have about God. Even though God loves us unconditionally, many live in fear of God and, as a result, do not trust Him. Others may feel that God will make their lives miserable. They do not realize that God has good things in store for those who trust Him.

*And He will give you all you need from day to day if you live for Him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.*

--Matthew 6:33, NLT

# How You Can Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

Now that we have looked at the results of being filled with the Holy Spirit and the reasons that many do not experience the Spirit's power, we will now look at how we can be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

You can be filled with the Holy Spirit *right now* if you do the following:

## 1. Sincerely desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

**Read Matthew 5:6. Why do you think it is necessary to desire to be filled with the Spirit?**

## 2. Confess any sin which the Holy Spirit brings to mind. Confession also involves thanking God that He has forgiven all your sins -- past, present, and future -- because Christ died for you.

**Read I John 1:9. Why is confession necessary to being filled with the Spirit?**

## 3. Surrender control of your life to Christ.

**Read Romans 12:1-2. Can we be filled with the Spirit if we have an area of our lives which we refuse to surrender to God? On what do you base your answer?**

## 4. By faith trust the Holy Spirit to fill you according to:

- God's command that we be filled with His Spirit.

*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18, NAS)*

- God's promise that He will answer when we pray according to His will.

*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him. (1 John 5:14-15)*

*We must remember that the filling of the Spirit is not a matter of feeling, but of faith. We may feel strongly the closeness of God when we are filled, or we may not. Instead of trusting in our feelings, we must trust God's promises.*

--Billy Graham

**Discuss:** Is being filled with the Spirit something that God desires for Christians? How do you know?

**What is our basis for believing that God will fill us with His Spirit when we ask Him to?**

**NOTE: We are filled with the Holy Spirit by faith.**

1. We become followers of Christ by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).
2. We live the Christian life by faith (Colossians 2:6).
3. We do not have to beg God for that which is already ours.

---

## Application

We are filled with the Holy Spirit by faith alone. The following prayer is one way of expressing your faith that God will fill you with His Spirit:

*Dear Father, I need You. I acknowledge that I have been directing my own life, and that, as a result, I have sinned against You. I thank You that You have forgiven my sins through Christ's death on the cross. I now invite You to take Your place again on the throne of my life. Fill me with the Holy Spirit as You commanded me to be filled, and as You promised in Your Word that You would do if I asked in faith. As an expression of my faith, I now thank You for directing my life and for filling me with the Holy Spirit.*

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart?

If it does, take a moment right now to pray this prayer, by faith, trusting God to fill you with the Holy Spirit. Then, answer the following questions:

1. Did you ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit?
2. Do you know that you are now filled with the Holy Spirit?
3. On what authority do you know that you are filled with the Spirit?

**NOTE:** If a Christian desires to be filled with the Spirit, confesses his sins, surrenders his life to Christ, and by faith trusts the Holy Spirit to fill him, he can know for certain that he is filled with the Spirit. One reason that believers sometimes have difficulty believing they are filled is that they may have confused the “filling of the Spirit” with “sanctification.” While the filling of the Spirit is an instantaneous event (i.e. as soon as you ask, you are filled), sanctification (becoming more like Christ) is a life-long process. Go to Hebrews 10:10-14 for further study.

## Spiritual Breathing . . . Maintaining the Spirit's Filling

Now that you are filled with the Spirit, you may wonder, "What happens when I sin again?" or "How can I continue to be filled?" You can continue to be empowered by God's Spirit by practicing **spiritual breathing**. Spiritual breathing is a simple exercise which involves *exhaling* and *inhaling*.

**Exhale:** When you become aware that something you have done is sinful, confess the sin to God right away. Agree with God that what you have done was sin, and thank Him that He has forgiven you (1 John 1:9). Also remember that confession involves repentance -- turning back toward God and away from the sin.

**Inhale:** Surrender the control of your life to Christ and, by faith, trust that the Holy Spirit empowers you again.

As soon as you are aware of sin, breathe spiritually. You can maintain your communication with God and experience His power all day every day!

## Some Final Reminders

- ◆ **You cannot live the Christian life by your own good works.** You can never make yourself good enough to please God; you must live by faith in His finished work on the cross.
- ◆ **You cannot depend upon feelings.** Feelings are valid as a by-product of faith and obedience, but at no time should you depend upon feelings alone for salvation or growth (John 14:21).
- ◆ **You live by faith.** Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not a once-for-all experience. You are to be continually filled, controlled, and empowered by the Holy Spirit as a way of life.

