

SESSION 9

Experiencing God's Power for a Lifetime

Overview

In our last session, we looked at who the Holy Spirit is and what His role is in the life of the believer. We learned what prevents believers from experiencing the Spirit's power and discovered how believers can be empowered by the Holy Spirit on a moment-by-moment basis.

REAL FAITH

In this session, we will discover how believers can continue to be empowered by the Spirit over the long haul. First, we will review *spiritual breathing*, the key to avoiding an up and down Christian experience. Then we will look at the three sources of spiritual conflict which confront believers in their growth process. Third, we will look at the resources available to believers as they face this spiritual conflict. Finally, we will look again at the role of *faith* in experiencing the Spirit's power on an ongoing basis.

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: Galatians 5:16

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.*

John Is Caught Off Guard

John's life changed dramatically his final year of college. He'd been into partying the first three years, but came to faith in Christ during his senior year. Right away another student began meeting with him to help him grow in his relationship with Christ. During this process, he saw that his desire to "numb out" through alcohol gradually disappeared. He learned that he could instead be empowered by the Spirit of God on a daily basis. He eventually began leading others to Christ and discipling them in their relationship with God.

When John graduated from college, he took a job as a regional sales representative. Out on the road, John suddenly found himself falling into the same temptations he faced before he came to know Christ. Though he had previously experienced God's power, he felt as though that power was no longer in his life. Why had the old temptations come back with such intensity, and why was he not experiencing God's power as he had the first year of his Christian life?

Discuss: **What kind of direction would you give to John?**

Like John, many believers have experienced God's power in their lives over a period of weeks, months, or years, only to eventually slip back into a pattern of defeat and frustration. One of the reasons this happens is that believers are often not equipped to follow Christ for a lifetime. This would be the equivalent of a marathon runner being trained only for the first mile of the race; he may start well, but he will quickly fade when he passes the length of his training regimen. The Apostle Paul referred to the Christian life as a race (1 Corinthians 9:24-27) that requires training and endurance. He also frequently referred to the Christian life as the Christian *walk*. In Galatians 5:16 (NAS) he wrote, "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." How can believers keep on experiencing God's power over the long haul? The following four "training" principles will help prepare you to walk with Christ for a lifetime.

1. Be Sure You Are Empowered by the Holy Spirit

It has been said that the Christian life is very difficult, yet very simple. It is difficult to live if we are relying on our own gifts, abilities, and resources. However, the more we learn to rely on God's power, the simpler the Christian life becomes. The secret of the Christian life is to live daily in the power of the Holy Spirit, thus allowing Jesus to change us and to live through us to impact the lives of those around us.

The following passages offer insight into being empowered by the Holy Spirit. What principles can we derive from them?

- ◆ 1 Corinthians 2:1-5
- ◆ Acts 4:13
- ◆ Acts 1:8
- ◆ John 15:4-5

What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? It is not necessarily an emotional experience, nor will it necessarily bring us some type of spiritual experience that is obvious or open. To be filled with the Spirit is to be controlled by the Spirit. It is to be so yielded to Christ that our supreme desire is to do His will.

-- Billy Graham

In Ephesians 5:18, the apostle Paul gave the command to be filled with the Holy Spirit. In Session 8, we learned that being empowered by the Holy Spirit is not dependent upon our feelings or emotions. If a Christian desires to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, confesses his sins, surrenders his life to Christ, and, **by faith**, trusts the Spirit to fill him, he can know for certain he is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, the daily experience of many believers is more like a ride on a roller coaster. Rather than relying upon God's resources, they experience an up and down spiritual life. As they control their own lives, they go from one

emotional experience to the next, which leads to frustration and defeat.

Spiritual breathing is the key to being filled with God's Spirit on an ongoing basis. 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.

REMEMBER: God commands believers to be empowered by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), and He promises that He will grant our requests when we pray according to His will (1 John 5:14-15). We must, **by faith**, expect the Holy Spirit to fill and empower us. This expectation is based upon the authority of God's command to be filled and His promise that He will answer when we pray according to His will.

Discuss: Why is there such a tendency for believers to seek emotional experiences, or to rely on their emotions, as a gauge of their spirituality?

How have you trusted your emotions in relation to the filling of the Holy Spirit?

Tell of a time in which you lived by faith in the Spirit's power when your emotions were in opposition to faith.

How can you continue to be empowered by the Holy Spirit for the long haul?

2. Be Prepared for Spiritual Conflict

The Bible is clear that followers of Christ are involved in a spiritual battle (read Ephesians 6:12). Even though this battle is ultimately God's responsibility (read 2 Chronicles 20:15), and even though the final outcome has already been determined (read Revelation 20:11-21:4), the Christian still needs to be prepared for three sources of conflict which would seek to hinder him in his walk with Christ.

◆ *The World System*

Read I John 2:15-17.

What are the characteristics of the world system?

How does the world system distract you or pull you away from being empowered by the Spirit?

◆ *Our Sinful Human Nature*

Read Galatians 5:17

How does this source of spiritual conflict differ from the world system?

How does the sinful human nature tempt or draw you away from intimacy with Christ?

◆ *The Devil*

Read 1 Peter 5:8, Revelation 12:9-10, and Ephesians 6:11.

How is the devil described in these passages?

What specific strategies does he have for tempting and devouring you?

3. Know Your Resources as a Child of God

When you became a follower of Christ, you were literally adopted into God's family as one of His children (see John 1:12). Since you now belong to Christ and carry His name ("Christian"), God's inexhaustible resources are available to you.

Your resources as God's child are spelled out for you in God's Word, the Bible. As you spend time reading and studying God's Word, you understand more of who you are in Christ and how it is that you can allow Him to give you His power each day.

As you read the following Bible passages, write out key words and phrases which describe the resources that are available to believers in Christ:

- ◆ Ephesians 1:3-14

- ◆ Hebrews 4:12

- ◆ Ephesians 1:17-23

- ◆ Acts 1:8

- ◆ Ephesians 6:10-18

The more we understand our resources as God's children, the more God will produce the "fruit" of Christ-likeness and effective ministry for His kingdom. (Read John 15:1-8.) God does not force us to obey Him. The more we grasp what He has given us, the more we desire to do His will.

4. Live By Faith (See Galatians 3:11)

Living by faith means that we place our trust in God and His Word, regardless of our circumstances or emotions. It is usually easy to say, "God, I trust You!" when everything is going your way. It is more difficult to say, "Thank You, God," when your life is coming apart at the seams . . . when a loved one dies, when your financial world crumbles, when illness hits close to home, or when you are experiencing relational stress. Is it possible to trust God even when life is most stressful? Let's look at some Bible passages which give insight into this question.

As you read the following scriptures, write out principles you discover which would help a Christian live by faith, even when his circumstances are at their worst.

- ◆ Jeremiah 31:3
- ◆ Romans 8:28
- ◆ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
- ◆ 1 Peter 5:6-7
- ◆ Philippians 4:11-13

It is your senses and your imagination that are going to attack belief. Here, as in the New Testament, the conflict is not between faith and reason but between faith and sight. We can face things which we know to be dangerous if they don't look or sound too dangerous; our real trouble is often with things we know to be safe but which look dreadful.

-- C.S. Lewis

As we have discussed in these sessions, the object of our faith must be the unchangeable (God and His Word), not our changing circumstances and emotions.

Application

The four principles covered in this session which prepare believers to walk with Christ for the long haul are:

1. Be sure you are empowered by the Spirit.
2. Be prepared for spiritual conflict.
3. Know your resources as a child of God.
4. Live by faith.

Reflect: Which of these principles is most helpful to you? Why?

How would a greater understanding of this principle affect your attitudes and actions?

What do you do daily to be prepared for spiritual conflict?

How would faith help you live by the power of the Holy Spirit?

What Bible passages from this session seem most relevant at this point in your life? Plan to read and reflect on these passages during a quiet time or study time this week.

SESSION 10

Prioritizing Your Relationship with God

Overview

In our last session, we discovered how believers in Christ can continue to be empowered by the Holy Spirit over the long haul. We reviewed spiritual breathing, looked at our sources of spiritual conflict, and emphasized the role of faith in experiencing the Spirit's power on a moment-by-moment basis.

REAL FAITH

In this session, we will evaluate the importance we place on our relationship with God. We will identify ways in which God has reached out to us and the response He desires from us. In addition, we will discover what it means to abide in Christ, and we will discuss some practical ways to make our relationship with God our first priority.

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: Philippians 3:7-8

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.*

Personal Evaluation

On a scale of 1-5 (1 being low, 5 being high), what value do you place on the following activities?

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ___ Diet/Exercise | ___ Friendships |
| ___ Marriage/Romance | ___ Volunteer Work |
| ___ Children | ___ Entertainment/Leisure |
| ___ Work | ___ Financial Management |
| ___ Spiritual Development | ___ Household Responsibilities |

Approximately how many hours per week do you spend on the following activities?

___ Diet/Exercise	___ Friendships
___ Marriage/Romance	___ Volunteer Work
___ Children	___ Entertainment/Leisure
___ Work	___ Financial Management
___ Spiritual Development	___ Household Responsibilities

Regardless of what we may say, our true priorities are revealed in our actual use of time, finances, and other resources. Jesus stated that the first and greatest commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). The Bible is clear that followers of Christ are to make their relationship with God their highest priority. This does not mean, however, that believers should spend all their time praying, reading the Bible, and ministering to others. The Bible is also clear that believers are to work hard (Colossians 3:23) and care for their families (1 Timothy 5:8). The point Jesus was making is that our relationship with God should impact every other area of our lives.

Why do believers in Christ have difficulty prioritizing their relationship with God? One of the main reasons is that God is invisible, while all the others in our lives are very much visible. Our family members, our friends, and our co-workers are right in front of us every day, reminding us how important we are to them and how important they are to us. Since we cannot see God, it is more difficult for us to grasp how important we are to Him and how important He is to us.

Let’s take a closer look at the priority God places on our relationship with Him. Then we will look at some practical steps we can take to make our relationship with God a higher priority.

God Initiates and Sustains Your Relationship with Him

Read Romans 8:28-39. As you read, notice the following:

- ◆ God brought you into His family (v. 28-29).
- ◆ Your relationship with Him is His work, from start to finish (v. 30).
- ◆ He made the ultimate sacrifice to pay for your sin (v. 32).
- ◆ He assures you that nothing can ever affect His love for you (v. 31-39).

*God did all
this for us
when we
did not even
care about
Him!*

Discuss: How does God demonstrate His love for you?

What things do you tend to believe will separate you from God's love?

What circumstances in your life might make you feel that God has stopped loving you?

Experiencing God's Love Motivates You to Seek Him

- ◆ **Every person is created with an inner need to know and seek God.**

King Solomon wrote that God "has planted eternity in the human heart" (Ecclesiastes 3:11, NLT). Jesus said, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Our ultimate purpose is to know and love God.

- ◆ **Our love for God is a response to His love for us.**

Read 1 John 4:19. How do you respond when someone demonstrates love to you?

To what end . . . does God bother to speak to us? The truly staggering answer that the Bible gives to this question is that God's purpose in revelation is to make friends with us . . . He speaks to us simply to fulfill the purpose for which we were made; that is, to bring into being a relationship in which he is a friend to us, and we to him, he finding his joy in giving us gifts and we finding ours in giving him thanks.

-- J.I. Packer

- ◆ **The more you experience God's love for you, the more you will love and seek Him.**

Read Luke 7:36-50.

Discuss: What did Jesus mean when He said, “He who has been forgiven little loves little?”

Would you consider yourself more a person who has been forgiven little or a person who has been forgiven much?

Read Romans 3:9-18. What does the Bible say about the depth of our need for forgiveness?

God Wants Your Relationship with Him to Be Your Highest Priority

Read the following passages. As you read, write down key words and phrases which express what God wants from us.

◆ Mark 12:28-31

◆ Philippians 3:7-14

◆ John 15:1-11

NOTE ON JOHN 15:1-11: The words *abiding* and *remaining* suggest a deep and personal relationship with God as the source of our daily strength. Abiding in Christ produces the following results:

- a life of fruitfulness (v. 1-5).
- a life of answers to prayer (v. 7).
- a life of experiencing His love (v. 9-10).
- a life of joy (v. 11).

Reflect: What things in life are very important to you? How do these compare with what is most important?

Is there anything in your life you are unwilling to give up for Christ?

Making God Your First Priority

How, then, can you make your relationship with God your first priority?

- **Decide, by faith**, to make your relationship with God your most important relationship. Pray this simple prayer:

God, I commit to making my relationship with You my highest priority. Cause my relationship with You to affect every area of my life . . . my thoughts, my attitudes, and my actions.

Amen.

- **Ask God** to give you a fresh appreciation of His love for you.
- **Ask God to help you remember each day** that you were created to know and love Him.
- **Focus on enjoying the relationship** rather than fulfilling an obligation.
- **Schedule time with God** on a daily basis. Time together is the key to developing any relationship. You can get to know God by talking to Him and spending time in His Word. Take a moment right now to plan this time into your schedule. The time that works best for me is _____.
- **Confess** to God anything in your life that is displeasing to Him. Repent, or turn away from:
 - indifference to God.
 - dependence on self.
 - lack of time spent with God.
- **Express your love for God** by ministering to others. God wants to bring non-believers into His family, and He wants believers to deepen their relationships with Him. You can demonstrate God's love to others by:
 - praying for and with them.
 - serving them.
 - talking with them about your relationship with Christ.

Summary

1. God initiates and sustains your relationship with Him.
2. Experiencing God's love motivates you to seek Him.
3. God wants your relationship with Him to be your highest priority.

Application

During this next week, take a break from your regular Bible reading. Use the following passages to meditate on God's love for you and on what He has done for you. Write down truths about your relationship with God in the space provided below. Evaluate your personal priorities in light of what God says about your relationship to Him.

Ephesians 1

Ephesians 2

Ephesians 3:14-21

1 John 3

1 John 4:7-5:5

Revelation 2:1-5

Discuss: What progress have you made in prioritizing your relationship with God?

What is one practical step you can take in making your relationship with God a higher priority?

SESSION 11

Stewardship: Managing What God Has Entrusted to You

Overview

In our last session, we discovered that God both initiates and sustains our relationship with Him. We also learned the importance of putting God first in our lives and that abiding in Christ allows Him to live His life through us.

REAL FAITH

In part one of this session, we will define stewardship, and we will learn why it is an essential component to our growth as believers. We will also study some biblical principles on how to become more effective stewards. In part two, we will look more closely at the resources God has entrusted to us to manage: our time, our talent, and our treasure. Then we will evaluate how we are doing in our role as God's stewards.

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: Psalm 24:1

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>

STEWARDSHIP: PART 1

The Forgotten Topic

Stewardship rates barely an honorable mention in the lexicon of current business terminology. A scan of cover stories in Fortune, Forbes, Fast Company and Harvard Business Review for the last three years revealed that leadership was featured in 12 instances, change was covered on four occasions, work was the lead topic 7 times and strategy was explored a total of 57 times. Stewardship was completely ignored.

Life@Work Journal, Nov./Dec. 1998, p. 25.

Discuss: Why do you think the topic of stewardship was left out?

Even though stewardship is barely mentioned in business journals, it is a frequently discussed topic throughout the pages of Scripture. Let's first define stewardship, then look at what the Bible says about it.

Stewardship Defined

- stew' ard** 1. a man entrusted with the management of the household or estate of another; one employed to manage the domestic affairs, superintend the servants, collect the rents or income, keep the accounts, etc.
2. one who acts as a supervisor or administrator, as of finances and property, for another or others.

Webster's New 20th Century Dictionary of the English Language

According to the above definition, stewardship involves managing the property, finances, or affairs of another person. The steward is not the owner. He does not possess that which he has been entrusted to manage. The owner gives the steward the responsibility to manage his possessions, and to do so wisely.

In a very real sense, God gives each follower of Christ something to manage . . . the believers' own life. Believers are to be wise stewards of their lives and all the resources which God entrusts to them.

Why Believers Need to Be Wise Stewards

The culture around us and our own selfish desires promote the idea that we are in control of our lives, that our time, talent, and treasure belong to us. The concept of wisely managing our lives for God's purposes is difficult to accept unless we understand three important biblical principles:

1. Jesus Christ is Lord and owner of all.

The Bible teaches that God, through Jesus Christ, owns everything, including us, because:

- ◆ Jesus created us.

Read Colossians 1:15-18. What words or phrases in this passage indicate that Jesus is our creator and owner?

- ◆ Jesus bought us with His blood.

Read I Peter 1:18-19. Jesus is not only our creator, He is also our redeemer. Our salvation was purchased at the cost of His life. As a result of this purchase, Jesus has full ownership of our lives.

- ◆ God the Father appointed Jesus as Lord.

Read Ephesians 1:19-23. Note the following phrases which indicate Jesus' position as Lord over everything and everyone.

Seated him at his right hand

Far above all rule and authority, power and dominion

Far above . . . every title that can be given

God placed all things under his feet

God . . . appointed him to be head over everything

2. Followers of Christ are commanded to wisely manage their lives.

- ◆ Everything the believer has is entrusted to him by God.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:7. Some believers in the first-century church at Corinth felt that they were better than others because of their spiritual gifts and position in the church. The Apostle Paul reminded them that their gifts were given to them by God and were not to be used for selfish reasons, but to serve God's purposes.

- ◆ All believers will one day give an account of their stewardship.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-14.

Summarize in one or two sentences what this passage means.

What personal applications from this passage come to mind for you?

3. God has our best interests in mind.

Read John 12:24-26.

There are two key principles taught in this passage.

- ◆ **If we cling to our own interests, we lose our lives.** The idea of losing our lives refers to the paradox that the more we focus on our own interests, the more we think that we do not have enough

time, talent, and treasure. The end result is a life without peace or satisfaction.

- ◆ **We keep our lives by releasing our own interests (dying to self) and living for God's purposes. This results in peace, direction, and effectiveness for God's kingdom.** Because we entrust our lives to Him, we are free to focus on others. We are free from the bondage of self-centeredness and can experience the joy of loving and serving others. Obviously, this does not mean that we are passive individuals, devoid of passion and personality. Instead, our passion and personality are strengthened as we are directed by God, the one who designed our whole being.

Reflect: Give an example from your own life of how you have either “lost” through self-made plans or “kept” your life by giving up your own plans.

Discuss: Which of the above three Biblical principles is most challenging to you? Why?

Which of the above three principles is most motivating for you? Why?

How Are We to Become Wise Stewards?

A principle we have discussed throughout the discipleship sessions is that our growth is a process. Though our attitudes about stewardship may change rather quickly (e.g. our study of the Bible brings us to the realization that God is the owner, and we are managers), the practical outworking of these attitudes is something that grows over time. How do we grow in our stewardship of what God has entrusted to us? The following principles will help.

1. Invest your entire life for God's purposes and kingdom.

Read Matthew 13:44-46.

According to Jesus' words in this passage, how important are God's kingdom and purposes? How might this principle affect your priorities or your daily schedule?

2. Be content with who you are and what you have.

What principles about contentment do you see in the following passages?

- ◆ 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

- ◆ Hebrews 13:5-6

- ◆ Philippians 4:11-13

Reflect: Do you think most people are content with who they are and what they have?

How content are you with how God has made you and what He has entrusted to you?

3. Seek to be faithful and obedient.

God has entrusted different gifts, skills, abilities, results and resources to each of His followers. Fortunately for us, He does not ask us to tackle anything that He has not also equipped us to handle. He simply asks us to be faithful with what He has already given us.

Read Matthew 25:14-28.

- ◆ What was the master's response to the servants who had been faithful with a few things (v. 21, 23)?

- ◆ What happened to the resources of the faithful servants? What happened to the resources of the unfaithful servant (v. 28)?

- ◆ What emotion was expressed by the unfaithful servant (v. 25)? How would this feeling toward God negatively affect a believer's ability to be a wise steward of his time, talent, and treasure?

4. Expect Fruitfulness.

But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the Word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown (Matthew 13:23).

Jesus told several parables about wise stewards. The parable of the sower in Matthew 13 teaches that the good soil produced 30, 60, and 100 times the original amount sown. The good soil illustrates the response of the faithful person and the resulting fruit.

Discuss: Why do believers find it difficult to expect fruitfulness?

5. Be prepared to give an account of your stewardship to God.

Even though every believer in Christ has received complete forgiveness and an eternal relationship with God, every believer will also be held accountable for how he managed his gifts, talents, abilities, and resources. What do the following Bible passages say about the believer's accountability before God?

*People don't do
what you **expect**;*

*they do what you
inspect.*

-- Bill Bright

◆ 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

◆ 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

Discuss: How does it make you feel to know that even though you will spend eternity with God, you will still be held accountable for your stewardship?

NOTE: God will obviously not shame believers nor remind them of failings throughout all eternity. This would be inconsistent with His character. The Bible is clear that there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). Somehow, when believers enter into God's presence in heaven, there will be accountability without the slightest hint of condemnation.

STEWARDSHIP: PART 2

What Are the Major Areas of Our Stewardship?

God has given us the stewardship of our lives. This means that we have been given the responsibility to manage our thought life, our relationships, our spiritual growth, our bodies, our time, our possessions, etc. All of the areas of stewardship can be listed under one of the following categories: our **time**, our **talent** (gifts, abilities, physical well-being), and our **treasure** (material possessions and relationships). Let's take a closer look at each area of our stewardship.

1. Stewardship of time

What principles do you find in the following Scriptures about stewardship of time?

James 4:13-17	
Psalms 144:4	
Psalms 90:12	
Ephesians 5:15-17	

*You cannot kill
time without
injuring eternity.*

--Henry Thoreau

Our life on this planet is brief in relation to eternity. When we are young, we believe that the end of our life on earth is very far away. When we reach mid-life, we notice that the years are passing much more rapidly. Then we wake up one day, and the twilight of our life is upon us. In addition, none of us knows exactly how long our life will be. Life on earth truly is a "mere breath." The Bible is clear that we are to use our time wisely. It makes sense that we should invest our time for eternal purposes.

2. Stewardship of talent

- ◆ **God gives us natural gifts and abilities.** What are some of your unique gifts, strengths, and skills?

- ◆ **God gives us spiritual gifts.** Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Ephesians 4:11-13, Romans 12:1-8. What are some of the spiritual gifts listed in these Scriptures?
- ◆ **Our spiritual gifts are to be used to build up and equip the body of Christ** (e.g. the church). Read Ephesians 4:11-16.
- ◆ **We are commanded to use our talents wisely.** Read Luke 19:12-26.

NOTE: All of our spiritual gifts, talents, and abilities are to be used to honor God and extend His kingdom. This does not mean, however, that everything we do needs to be direct ministry (e.g. communicating the gospel, discipling believers, leading worship, involvement in church, or Christian work). Our family relationships, our work, and our household responsibilities can be lived out to honor God and are just as important as the above direct ministry activities. Our concern should be to present our gifts and abilities to God and allow Him to direct our use of them in the circumstances in which He places us

3. Stewardship of treasure

- ◆ There are certain principles God reveals about the finances He entrusts to us. Whether we are wealthy or poor, understanding these principles will help us become more effective stewards.

a. The principle of *return*.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6. Summarize the principle of return in your own words.

b. The principle of *proportion*.

Read Luke 21:1-4.

God does not look at the amount we give, but at the proportion of our wealth the amount given represents.

You cannot get around it; Scripture promises material and spiritual benefits to the man who gives to God. You cannot out-give God. I challenge you to try it and see.

-- Billy Graham

Discuss: Why do you think God looks at the proportion rather than the amount?

c. The principle of *cheerful giving*.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:7.

We need to be sure that our attitude is right as we give, not only in finances, but in all areas of stewardship. When we can give cheerfully, we are giving by faith.

Discuss: What can we do when we find ourselves giving out of guilt or fear or some other negative motivation?

d. The principle of *greater blessing*.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:8-11.

The exciting thing about giving--whether it is our time, talent, or treasure--is that we get a triple return. God promises to: 1) increase our ability to give, 2) multiply the effect of our giving, and 3) cause our material gifts to result in lasting glory.

e. The principle of *accepting from others when in need*.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:13-15.

Sometimes we are willing to give to others, but we are not as willing to receive from others. It is wise stewardship to accept help from others graciously when in need.

f. The principle of *giving by faith*.

Read Philippians 4:15-19 and 2 Corinthians 8:1-4.

The apostle Paul commended the people of the Philippian and Macedonian churches for their sacrificial giving. These believers gave generously to others, trusting that God would continue to provide for their own needs. Our natural human tendency is to think, "When I have more I'll give more." The principle of giving by faith says, "I'll give out of what I have, and I'll trust that God will continue to provide for me." Paul told the Philippian believers, "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). Giving by faith means that we give even though we cannot see all the details of how God is going to take care of us.

- ◆ Many first-century Christians were **very generous** to meet needs and give money to help spread the Gospel. The way they gave is a good example to us.

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

- a. They gave out of their poverty.
 - b. They gave sacrificially.
 - c. They gave cheerfully and lovingly.
 - d. They gave because they had first surrendered their lives to Christ.
- ◆ There are primarily **five principles** for managing your finances.
 - a. *Provide for your household.* Read 1Timothy 5:8.
 - b. *Be free from the love of money.* Read 1Timothy 6:7-10.
 - c. *Be generous and give.* Read 1Timothy 6:17-19.
 - d. *Give according to what you have.* Read 2 Corinthians 8:12.
 - e. *Let your giving be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and according to biblical convictions.* Read 2 Corinthians 9:7.

- ◆ Where to give

As a steward, it is your responsibility to invest money where it is used faithfully and where it brings the most return. You should give to:

- *your church.*
- *ministries and missions that reach the lost and equip believers for ministry.* Read Philippians 4:14-19.
- *the needs of fellow believers.* Read Galatians 6:10.
- *the needs of the poor and non-believers.* Read Galatians 2:10.

Application . . . Growing in Stewardship

Take some time alone with God and reflect on the following questions:

1. Do I recognize that God owns everything I have?
2. Is He the master of my time, talent, and treasure?
3. Do I want to please God above all else?

Use the following questions to specifically evaluate how you can better use your time, talent, and treasure for God's purposes and kingdom.

1. Time

Review the past week. What are some areas where your time was well spent? What are some areas where your time was not well spent?

What values and priorities does your use of time reflect?

What things need to be cut out of your schedule?

In which of the following would God have you adjust your time allotment?

- Time with God in prayer and Bible reading or study
- Time with your wife
- Communicating with others about Christ
- Time with friends
- Planning your schedule for greater effectiveness
- Serving in some capacity in your church
- Time with your children, siblings, or parents
- Helping others grow in their relationship with God
- Equipping believers for greater effectiveness
- Meeting the needs of the poor or those who are sick
- Developing yourself (life skills, career, leadership abilities, etc.)
- Serving your spouse so he/she can develop himself/herself

2. Talent

What gifts, abilities, and spiritual gifts do I have that could benefit the body of Christ to advance His kingdom?

What ways could I use those gifts, and with whom might I employ them?

How will I begin to do this?

How can I learn from others and develop myself?

3. Treasure

Am I giving financially to God's kingdom work in my own church and to missions worldwide?

Am I giving first to God from my finances?

I will set as my goal for regular giving:

\$ _____ per _____.

Am I making my own needs known and allowing others to minister to me?

SESSION 12

Bringing Others to Christ

Overview

In our last session, we defined stewardship, and we learned why it is an essential component to our growth as believers. We also studied some biblical principles on how to become effective stewards. In addition, we looked at the resources God has entrusted to us to manage: our time, our talent, and our treasure. Finally, we evaluated our stewardship.

REAL FAITH

In this session we will look at how to help others begin a relationship with God. First we will look at being prepared personally as we seek to point others toward Christ. Then we'll give you some practical evangelism tools and show you how to use them.

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: Colossians 1:28

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.*

Evangelism Attempts

Luke had heard in the message at church that reaching out to non-believers was an important part of following Christ. The pastor's message from Acts 1:8 was clear: believers are to be witnesses for Christ. Even though he didn't know quite where to start, Luke decided to ask his neighbor, Craig, to come to church. Craig's response? "Sorry, Luke, but that's my only chance to sleep in." Luke made a couple of other attempts, but eventually decided that bringing others to Christ must be the job of the trained professionals.

Discuss: What are some of the roadblocks that keep Christians from communicating with others about Christ?

What hinders you from telling others about Christ?

Be Prepared Personally

The Apostle Peter wrote the following words to the Christians who were scattered throughout Asia Minor:

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)

Peter wanted these believers to be ready to communicate their faith in Christ at all times. He knew that a lack of preparedness would render these Christians ineffective in their influence with the many non-believers they would interact with on a daily basis.

The same is true in our day. Even though many believers desire to influence others for Christ, a lack of preparation and focus means that they miss out on the opportunities God brings their way. How, then, can we be prepared to bring others to Christ?

1. Rest in the security of your relationship with God.

Sometimes believers lack security in their own relationship with God. There may be several reasons for this. Some may have been very involved in church activities, but they have seen these activities as a means to a relationship with God rather than a result of a relationship with God. These people need to take the first step of trusting in Christ for forgiveness and an eternal relationship with God. Others may have entered a relationship with God through faith in Christ, but they lack security because of their experience of broken human relationships or because they focus on their “performance” as followers of Christ. If a believer lacks confidence in his relationship with God, it will be difficult for him to communicate effectively with others about Christ. Let’s review what the Bible says about the confidence we can have in our relationship with God.

Read the following passages. Jot down words and phrases which describe the security believers have in their relationship with God.

◆ **Romans 3:19-28**

◆ **Ephesians 2:8-9**

◆ **John 10:27-30**

2. Make confessing your sins a way of life.

It is inevitable that believers will sin. Satan's desire is that our sins remain unconfessed and drive a wedge between us and God. If he can keep us out of fellowship with God, he can render us ineffective. As a result, when the believer finds himself in a situation in which he can communicate his faith, Satan attempts to use unconfessed sin as a weapon. His tactics go something like this:

What makes you think you have anything to say to that person? After all, you just had evil thoughts toward your co-worker (or some other sin). God certainly couldn't use someone like you in this situation.

Our tendency is to believe this lie and turn inward. Fortunately, this does not have to be the case. Whether a believer has been out of fellowship with God for a moment, a day, a week, or a month, he can restore communication with God in an instant by confessing his sins. (See Session 2 to review how confessing your sins keeps you in fellowship with God.)

When you have the opportunity to communicate your faith in Christ, and the enemy begins accusing you, here is how to respond:

- ◆ If there truly is some specific sin which you have not confessed, acknowledge it to God, trust in His forgiveness, by faith, then take the initiative to talk about Christ.
- ◆ If the enemy accuses you with something you have already confessed, tell him to get lost in the name of Jesus, thank God for His forgiveness, by faith, then take the initiative to talk about Christ.

Discuss: Give an example of a time in which you kept silent about your faith because of real or perceived accusations against you.

When did you speak out even when you did not feel up to it?

3. Rely on the power of the Holy Spirit.

Even though God works through His followers to bring more people into His family, it is ultimately only the work of the Holy Spirit which can bring anyone into a relationship with God. What a relief! Believers do not need to "have their act totally together" in order to bring others to Christ. Followers of Christ can rely on the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the seeker, and in their own life, as they communicate their faith. Let's review how the Holy Spirit works in and through us:

- ◆ The Holy Spirit is at work in the life of the non-believer.

As you read the following passages, write down how the Holy Spirit is working in the life of the non-believer:

Romans 1:18-20

John 16:5-11

John 3:5-6

When a person receives Christ, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. That is why I cannot boast over much fruit or be discouraged over little fruit.

-- Bill Bright

Titus 3:5-6

- ◆ You need to be empowered by the Spirit to bring others to Christ.

(See Session 8 to review how believers can be empowered by the Holy Spirit.)

***Discuss:* Why is being empowered by the Holy Spirit essential for our effectiveness in bringing others to Christ?**

4. Be sure you are properly equipped.

As we seek to bring people to Christ, just what is it that we need to communicate? Let's take a look at what the Apostle Paul communicated as he sought to bring people to Christ. As you read the following passages, write down the essential components of the message that the Apostle Paul told to those he was trying to reach.

Acts 13:26-39

Acts 17:1-4

Acts 17:16-34

As you can tell from the above passages, there were essential components to the “good news” that Paul was communicating to his audience:

- There is a creator God who desires to have a relationship with all people.
- Each person is self-centered or sinful, and this rebellious attitude keeps every person from a relationship with God.
- Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, is the only one who can bring people back into relationship with God the Father. He took the punishment for our rebellion, and He offers forgiveness and an eternal relationship with God to every person.
- People receive God’s gift of forgiveness through Christ by admitting their sin and their need for Christ and by trusting in Christ to pay the penalty for their rebellion.

In addition to these essential components, Paul used dialogue and asked questions in order to get into spiritual discussions. He helped his listeners see how his message applied to their life situation. In the last section of this lesson, we will give you some tools and the training you need in order to be prepared to communicate the “good news” about Christ to others.

Be Intentional as You Relate to Others

Not only do you need to be prepared to communicate with others about Christ, you also need to be intentional in your daily activities and relationships. Like so many other areas of life, bringing others to Christ takes focus and planning; it does not “just happen.” We need to ask God to help us adjust our attitudes and priorities to make room for the people He has placed in our lives who do not yet know Christ. How is it that we can be intentional?

1. Ask God to work in you and others (*Prayer*).

- ◆ Ask God to give you greater concern and compassion for pre-Christians.
- ◆ Pray for those you know who may not yet know Christ.

The Apostle John wrote the following words,

And we can be confident that he will listen to us whenever we ask him for anything in line with his will. And if we know he is listening when we make our requests, we can be sure that he will give us what we ask for.

(1 John 5:14-15, NLT)

The Bible is very clear that it is “in line with God’s will” that non-believers come into relationship with God. As we pray for these people, we can be confident that God is at work drawing them to Himself.

Discuss: What things hinder you from praying for non-believers?

When could you pray for non-believers? (Driving to work? While you exercise? During your quiet time with God? etc.)

2. Demonstrate God’s love by serving others (*Care*).

How did Jesus demonstrate the Father’s love during His time on earth?

- ◆ **Matthew 14:13-21**
- ◆ **Mark 1:29-34**
- ◆ **John 13:1-17**
- ◆ **Matthew 20:28**

Discuss: What are some practical ways that you can demonstrate God’s love to others?

How might demonstrating God’s love through kindness move a seeker closer to believing in Christ?

3. Take the initiative to talk to people about Christ (*Share*).

In Colossians 1:28 the Apostle Paul wrote, “*So everywhere we go, we tell everyone about Christ. We warn them and teach them with all the wisdom God has given us, for we want to present them to God, mature in their relationship to Christ.*” (NLT) Believers need to be taught to follow Christ. Non-believers need to be warned of their condition apart from God and their need for a relationship with Christ. Those who do not come to faith in Christ will literally be separated from God forever. (Read Romans 6:23 and 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10.) It is critical that we not

only pray for pre-Christians and demonstrate God's love to them, but we also, at some point, must talk to them about their need for Christ.

Later on in this session, you will learn how to communicate concisely and accurately how a person can begin a relationship with God. In addition to knowing what to communicate, it is important to keep in mind the following principles:

1. Avoid getting sidetracked into peripheral issues. Focus on who Jesus is and what He offers to people.
2. Avoid arguments. Whether you are a good debater or not, it is unlikely that anyone will be argued into the kingdom. In addition, most arguments against Christ or the Bible are just smoke screens that people use to avoid having to deal with their need for Christ.

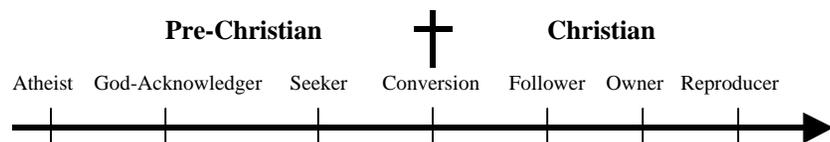
Discuss: What peripheral issues might people bring up as you seek to communicate your faith in Christ?

How might you keep the discussion focused on Christ?

4. Expect God to use you.

As you pray for others, serve them, and take the initiative to talk with them about Christ, you can expect that God will work through you to bring them closer to knowing Christ, and some of the time you will be the one who gets to lead them into a relationship with Christ!

Sometimes we may get discouraged when we do not see the outcome we desire from our evangelistic efforts. It would be exciting if everyone on our prayer list knelt in front of us and asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Jesus was pretty clear, however, that people have differing responses to His Word. (Read Luke 8:4-15.) Our objective as His messengers, then, should be to move non-believers along the continuum toward the point of entering a relationship with Christ. (See diagram.)



It has been said that success in evangelism is simply taking the initiative to communicate Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God. Be encouraged any time that you pray for someone, serve someone, or talk to someone about Christ.

Every Christian has a network of relationships with those who are not yet believers. God has strategically placed each believer in a position to be able to move these individuals along the continuum toward a relationship with Christ. Bringing people to Christ usually involves a three-fold strategy:

1. Prayer

It has been said that we should talk to God about people before we talk to people about God. Prayer prepares the believer as well as the person who does not yet know Christ. Think through your family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Jot down on the “Prayer-Care-Share Card” below (or on a 3x5 card) the names of those who are not yet believers. Pray for these people regularly . . . for their needs, concerns, and their orientation toward Christ. As you pray for these people, not only will God work in their lives, but He will also give you greater compassion for them and greater motivation to see them come into relationship with Christ.

PRAYER-CARE-SHARE CARD	
1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____
6.	_____
7.	_____

2. Care

There are many ways you can demonstrate God’s love to others:

- ◆ Ask someone “How are you?” Mean it and listen.
- ◆ When someone expresses a need, pray for him right then.
- ◆ Attend the funeral of the family member of a co-worker.
- ◆ Pray for someone “behind his back” and tell him later.
- ◆ Give someone a sincere, specific compliment.
- ◆ Help a neighbor with a house project.
- ◆ Take a co-worker out for lunch.
- ◆ Hold the door open for someone.
- ◆ Give something to someone.
- ◆ Ask someone about their life outside of work.

*Nobody cares
how much you
know until they
know how
much you care*

What can you do this week for one person on your

3. Share

As you pray for people and demonstrate care for them, you will have opportunities to tell them how they can enter a relationship with God.

◆ Raising the issue

One of the best ways to get started is to ask a non-threatening question about a person's beliefs. Here are some examples:

- *Tell me about your spiritual journey.*
- *What is your religious background?*
- *Where are you in your journey toward God?*

These questions allow you to assess the level of interest in spiritual things without sounding too pushy. If the response is cold or aloof, you may want to find out if the person had a bad experience with "religion," or you may decide to just change the subject. However, if he tells you a bit about his life and beliefs, you can ask a follow-up question:

- *What kind of effect did your religious training have on you?*
- *What level of importance do you place on your religious beliefs?*

◆ Transitioning to the gospel

If the door is still open for further discussion, you can transition into telling him about your own beliefs or faith. Here are some examples of how to do that:

Telling Your Story:

"Your background is similar to mine in the following way . . ." Tell him any similarities and use this as a transition into telling your own story or personal testimony.

Explaining the essence of the Gospel:

"Something that really helped me understand the basis for my own faith (relationship with God) was a clear, concise summary of the main teachings of the Bible. I've got a copy of this summary. It's called The Four Spiritual Laws." (Your Most Important Relationship or Your Most Important Investment can also be used.)

- *"I'd like to give you a copy of it. You may not feel the need for it now, but there will probably come a time when the pressure*

increases in your life and you'll want help. Put the booklet in a place where you can find it when you need it."

OR

- *"Would you mind if I gave you a copy of it to read through on your own? I'd like to find out what you think of it after you've read it."*

OR

- *"Would you mind if I take a few minutes and go through it with you?"*

◆ **Communicating the gospel**

Have your discipleship partner demonstrate how to use *The Four Spiritual Laws*. The first time through, he can take the role of the Christian, and you can take the role of the non-believer. When you have finished, switch roles. This time you communicate *The Four Spiritual Laws* to your partner. Be sure to debrief afterwards. What went well? What needs more work? In what situations could you see yourself communicating the essence of the gospel? How might you be able to use your own story, the *JESUS* video, or some other tool?

Application

Keep your "Prayer-Care-Share Card" in a convenient place. *Pray regularly for your pre-Christian family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers.*

Look for opportunities to demonstrate God's love to these people and others God brings across your path. *Demonstrate God's love in a practical way to one person on your Prayer-Care-Share card this week.*

This week take the initiative to ask one of these people about his/her religious background or spiritual journey. See where these questions lead. Take advantage of any opportunities to tell your story and communicate Christ's message.

Keep some copies of The Four Spiritual Laws (or some similar tool) in your wallet, purse, or bag. Look for opportunities to give these to people and go through them with people. Set a goal (i.e. one time per month, one time per week) for regularly giving away the Gospel.

SESSION 13

Loving Others Unconditionally

Overview

In our last session, we learned how to help others begin a relationship with God. First, we looked at being prepared personally as we seek to point others toward Christ. Then we gave you some practical evangelism tools and showed you how to use them.

REAL FAITH

In this session, we will consider how we can begin to love others as God loves us. We will do this by studying the principles of God's unconditional love for us and by discussing how to apply these principles *by faith* in our own relationships.

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

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.*

How Would You Respond?

On a scale of 1-5 (1 = easy, 5 = difficult), how hard would it be for you to forgive and love someone who:

- _____ pulled in front of you on an entrance ramp to the highway?
- _____ cut in front of you in a long line at the deli counter in the grocery store?
- _____ gave an untruthful negative report to your boss about you and your work?
- _____ kicked your child or sibling on purpose in a soccer game?
- _____ swindled money from your elderly aunt in a telephone scam?
- _____ critically injured your mother through a series of bad medical decisions, leaving her blind?

Most of us have been in situations like the ones above. We all have people in our lives whom we do not like, who do not like us, who have hurt us, who rub us the wrong way, or who are diametrically opposed to everything we believe in.

Discuss: What makes it hard for us to forgive and love another person?

What would you say or do if you were to attempt to show love to one of the above-mentioned people? How would you feel toward this person?

How are believers in Christ to respond to difficult people? Is it possible to love those who seem unlovable?

God's Love for Us Is Unconditional

Discuss: What does it mean to love unconditionally?

How does God show His love for you?

◆ **Read Romans 5:8.** How is God's love expressed in this scripture?

God's love for us is unconditional because His love does not depend on you or me. When we come to Christ, we are sinners, yet God loves us anyway.

◆ **Read Luke 15:11-32.**

How does Jesus show his forgiveness in this story of a man and his sons?

How does God show His patience with you?

The first person who gains from forgiveness is the person who does the forgiving, and the first person injured by refusal to forgive is the one who was wronged in the first place.

--Lewis Smedes, Author of Forgive & Forget

◆ **Read Jeremiah 31:3 and Hebrews 13:5-6.**

What is the main idea expressed in each of these Scriptures?

Jeremiah expresses that God's love is not limited; it is everlasting.

◆ **Read Hebrews 12:10-11.**

According to this Bible passage, how does God continue to demonstrate His love for believers?

Just as a loving father disciplines his son or daughter, God shows His love by disciplining you and me when we are disobedient. His purpose for discipline is for our own good, to produce peace and righteousness in us.

Discuss: How does God's discipline help you to grow mentally, physically, and spiritually?

We all need to be loved with a love that is unchangeable and dependable. God loves us with an unchangeable, dependable, unconditional love.

◆ **Read Romans 8:35-39.**

How is God's love for us described in this passage?

God Commands Us to Love Others

God's unconditional love has been given to all believers in Christ. As His followers, God asks us to demonstrate His love to others. Below is a list of Bible passages discussing how believers are to demonstrate God's love. Read each Scripture and answer the question that follows.

- ◆ **Matthew 22:36-39:** Whom are we commanded to love?

- ◆ **1 John 4:7-12:** Why are we to love God and others?

- ◆ **John 13:34-35:** How are we to love others?

- ◆ **Matthew 22:39, 5:43-47:** What kind of people are we commanded to love?

Where Do We Get the Power to Love Unconditionally?

If believers were limited to just their own skills, abilities, and resources, then loving others unconditionally would be impossible. It would be especially difficult to love those who are very different from us, those who rub us the wrong way, those we dislike, or those who have wronged us. How, then, can we obey God's commands to love when it seems impossible to love?

Read the following Scriptures. What insight do these passages give as to the power to love unconditionally?

◆ **Romans 8:6-8**

◆ **Philippians 2:13**

◆ **Romans 5:3-5**

The above passages indicate that God, Himself, is our source of power to love others. Even though we may have made the statement "You make me so mad!" or may have had feelings of hate, unforgiveness, or an inability to trust, we still must love others. Just as God loves and forgives us, we must depend on God's power in us to love and forgive anyone who has wronged us. Whether we feel as though we can love or not, God commands us to love. What is the key to experiencing God's power to love others?

We Can Love By Faith

The only way we can truly love unconditionally is by faith (trust) in God and His Word. Consider the following:

1. All things in the Christian life are based on faith. We enter a relationship with God through faith (Ephesians 2:8), and we grow in our relationship with God through faith (Colossians 2:6).
2. Faith is agreeing with and depending on the truth of God's Word.

The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you "love" your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.

-- C.S. Lewis

3. In order to love by faith, we must:

- ◆ be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Read Ephesians 5:18 and Galatians 5:22-23.
- ◆ remember that we are commanded to love as Christ loved.
- ◆ remember that God promises to answer when we pray according to His will. Read 1 John 5:14-15.
- ◆ choose (as an act of our will) to love, knowing and trusting that God will give us the power and ability to love. Read Philippians 2:13, 4:13.
- ◆ demonstrate God's love by faith through our actions. Read Romans 12:20-21.

Pray for someone who does not like you. Take a meal to someone in need. Do something kind for an enemy rather than taking revenge. When tension mounts in your relationship with someone close to you, move toward the person rather than pulling away.

Remember that growth is a process. You will learn to love people more as you grow in faith in Christ. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:12.

Your love for God and others will give you peace within and a growing concern for those who have not yet come into a relationship with Christ.

Loving By Faith in Real Life

In 1990, a young mother of three pleaded for her life after being confronted by an assailant wearing combat fatigues.

"Please don't shoot me," she whimpered.

The murderer cold-heartedly fired anyway, killing the woman. The assailant made so many mistakes in covering up her crime that had the situation not been so tragic, it would have been comical. She sloppily disposed of her clothing and weapon. Colorado Springs police had her in custody within 24 hours. Shortly thereafter, they also arrested the victim's husband after determining that the two had an affair.

Sydna Masse was a neighbor of the murdered woman. When she heard about the killing, she responded with hate and rage.

"I had a dead friend and now lived behind three motherless kids. I felt I had every right to hate the murderer who caused this."

Sydna grew "physically hot" when the murderer's name—Jennifer—was even mentioned or her picture was flashed on television. "For a while, I couldn't even read the newspaper articles," she admits.

Sydna's hate wasn't a solitary affair. "The whole city and state hated her," she says. Jennifer's life sentence did little to ameliorate Sydna's passion. "There was no relief in her sentencing. That's the thing with

hatred and bitterness—it eats you alive. Every time I passed the house, I missed Diane and became angry all over again."

Shortly after Jennifer received her sentence, Sydna began going through a Bible study that included a chapter on forgiveness. Sydna prayerfully asked God whom she needed to forgive, and in her words, "Jennifer's name came right to my head. I literally did a whiplash and protested, 'No way I can forgive her. She killed my friend! She killed a mother of three!'"

In spite of her reluctance, Sydna finally acquiesced and wrote a carefully worded letter to Jennifer, expressing her forgiveness. She was caught by surprise by what happened inside her. As soon as Sydna dropped the letter into the mail, "a weight lifted. I felt like I was losing 20 pounds. That's when I learned that anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness keeps you from experiencing the depths of joy."

Story taken from "The Forgiveness Factor," Christianity Today, January 10, 2000, pages 38-40.

Role Play

Pick one of the examples from the opening "How would you respond?" section. You are now attending a neighborhood block party and end up at the same table as the person who offended you. Have your discipleship partner take on the role of this person. How would you communicate that you had been hurt by his actions and express forgiveness? Take a moment to think about it; then try expressing forgiveness to your discipleship partner.

Application

1. Spend time reflecting on God's love for and forgiveness of you.
2. Think and pray for those people you need to love and forgive. Make a conscious decision to forgive those who have wronged you. Continue to express forgiveness in your own "self talk" whenever the issue arises. Ask a friend to pray for you as you take faith steps in this area of life.
3. Pray for each person and ask God to give you opportunities to demonstrate love (either in words or actions) for them as described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

SESSION 14

Communicating with God

Overview

In our last session, we considered how we can begin to love others as God loves us. We did this by studying the principles of God's unconditional love for us and by discussing how to apply these principles *by faith* in our own relationships.

REAL FAITH

In this session we will look at the frequently misunderstood Christian discipline of prayer, the believers' communication with God. We will first define prayer. We will learn that prayer is more than bringing a grocery list of requests to God. It involves listening to God as well. Then we will discuss why prayer is such an important part of our growth as followers of Christ. Finally, we will learn how we can be effective in our communication with God.

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: Philippians 4:6-7

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 says 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>

Gary's Discovery

Gary loved his wife and two small children. For the most part, he liked his job. The medium-sized computer-tech company he worked for was on the cutting edge of software excellence. The future looked bright.

Although Gary had been a Christian for five years, he knew that there was something lacking in his relationship with God. There were times he felt like he was just going through the motions of living, working, and participating in Christian activities. Attending church on the weekend, a

small group every two weeks, and an occasional Christian conference were the extent of his communication with God.

Gary became restless with his life and his Christian experience. Over time, this affected his marriage and family as well. Where was the peace and purpose in serving God? He quietly cried out to Heaven.

God began drawing Gary to Himself. A closer, more intimate, relationship with God began to preoccupy his thinking. He began to set aside time each morning before leaving for the office to read his Bible and talk with God.

He discovered that this discipline of communicating with God was critical to every aspect of his life. These valued times of prayer not only served to enrich his marriage, but they also helped him to look at work differently . . . it wasn't just a job. It was an opportunity to extend God's love to others.

Reflect: How would you assess your own intimacy with God? How is He stirring your heart and prompting you to talk with Him more?

What Is Prayer?

Prayer is simply talking with God. Every believer has entered a relationship with God through faith in Christ and communication and time together are critical to the health and growth of any relationship. It is important for believers to spend time communicating with God in order for their relationship with Him to grow.

*Prayer is conversation
with God.*

-- St. Clement
of Alexandria

Nevertheless, followers of Christ sometimes have difficulty talking with God. There are several reasons for this. Unconfessed sin may be hindering our communication with God (Psalm 66:18), or we may just have difficulty talking with someone we cannot see. Some of us do not easily verbalize our thoughts, emotions, needs, or desires. Others of us may have had poor models of communication from family or friends. The Bible is clear, however, that God always desires to hear our prayers. Let's take a closer look at the nature of our communication with Him.

◆ **Our communication with God is like that of a child to his father.**

How do you view God? Check next to the words which describe your natural tendencies:

Aloof	Warm	Condescending	Caring
Approachable	Impatient	Demanding	Cruel
Uninvolved	Friendly	Unbending	Open
Loving	Closed	Empathetic	Cool

In Psalm 103:13, King David wrote, “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.” For some, the word “father” conjures up images of someone who is cruel, aloof, or emotionally detached. Scripture teaches, however, that God is not that kind of father to his children. Look at the following Bible passages to see how God is described.

1. God loves us and cares for us. Read Ephesians 2:4-7 and I Peter 5:6-7.
2. God wants to hear our prayers. Read Psalm 65:2 and Matthew 7:7-11.
3. God delights in us. Read Psalm 149:4 and Proverbs 15:9.

Discuss: How does it make you feel to know that God cares for you, delights in you, and wants to hear what you have to say?

How might these truths impact your communication with Him?

◆ **We can talk with God about anything at any time in any place.**

In Philippians 4:6-7, the apostle Paul wrote:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (NLT)

Whether things are going well or not so well, whether we are full of joy or full of anger, whether we need something specific or just need to listen, God always wants us to talk with Him. What are some things you can pray about or pray for?

*More things are wrought
by prayer than this world
dreams of.*

-- Alfred Lord Tennyson

- Pray about circumstances. Read Hebrews 4:16.
- Pray for people. Read Colossians 1:9-12.
- Pray about your feelings and troubles. Read Psalm 62:8, 1 Samuel 1:15.
- Pray for God's will to be done. Read Matthew 6:9-10.
- Pray for wisdom and understanding. Read Psalm 119:18, 34.
- Pray to experience the love of God. Read Ephesians 3:13-19.
- Pray for healing. Read James 5:16.

Reflect: What thought or need is most on your mind right now? Take some time right now to talk with God about it. Tell Him how you are feeling. Ask Him for wisdom. Ask Him for specific help and direction.

Why Is Prayer Important?

To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we desire to be conformed to Christ. To pray is to change.

-- Richard Foster

◆ **Prayer brings honor and glory to God.**

You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, because the work of the Son brings glory to the Father (John 14:13, NLT).

◆ **Prayer increases our intimacy with God.**

Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you (James 4:8a, NLT).

◆ **God commands us to pray.**

*Pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
Devote yourselves to prayer (Colossians 4:2a).*

◆ **Prayer unleashes God's power and enables us to impact others.**

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (James 5:16b).

How Are We to Pray?

Prayer involves our mind, our emotions, and our will, just as does any conversation. Also, according to the Bible, we pray to the person of God the Father (John 15:16), in the name and authority of Jesus (John 15:16), through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26-27).

What Guidelines Can We Follow in Prayer?

Since prayer is simply talking with God, there is no specific format which we must follow. There are, however, different types of prayers or different components to our communication with God. Some people find the acrostic A.C.T.S. (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication) helpful.

ADORATION

Adoration is praising someone for who he is or what he has done. It is giving someone the credit which he deserves.

Read Psalm 145. What do you see in this passage which causes your heart to respond in praise to God?

CONFESSION

The word confess means to agree with God about our sin. King David wrote in Psalm 66:18, "If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, my Lord would not have listened" (NLT). Since every sin we commit is ultimately against God, then we need to admit our sin to Him in order to have open and honest communication with Him. David also wrote the following words in Psalm 139:23-24:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life. (NLT)

Even though it is a good idea to admit our sins to God as soon as we are aware of them, it can also be helpful to ask God to search our hearts during times of prayer and reflection. When we are in a prayerful mindset, God will sometimes point out sins that we have overlooked in the *busy-ness* of life.

Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more disastrous is this isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person.

-- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Reflect: Take a moment right now to ask God to search your heart. If God brings to mind an unconfessed attitude or action that was displeasing to Him, simply confess it to Him, receive His cleansing, and move on.

THANKSGIVING

What do the following scriptures say about giving thanks to God?

- ◆ 1 Thessalonians 5:18
- ◆ Psalm 92:1

Discuss: How can you develop a thankful heart?

What keeps you from being thankful?

What does it mean to be thankful in all things?

SUPPLICATION

Supplication means making requests. We can pray for our own needs or the needs of others. We can pray for pre-Christians to begin a relationship with God. We can pray for believers to grow in their faith. We can pray for pastors or other leaders in the church. We can pray for our relationships and concerns at work or in our own neighborhood. We can pray in joy or in sorrow. The idea here is that nothing is off limits.

According to the following passages, what are some other requests we can make?

- ◆ Matthew 6:11
- ◆ Matthew 6:13
- ◆ Colossians 4:3

What Hinders You in Your Prayers?

Doubt (James 1:6-8)

Unconfessed sin (Psalm 66:18)

Relational tension (1 Peter 3:7)

Unhealthy fear of God (Hebrews 4:14-16)

***Discuss:* Which of the above hindrances, if any, tends to affect you the most? Place a check in the appropriate box(es).**

Application

Discuss the following with your discipleship partner:

1. In what ways was this material on prayer helpful to you?
2. How has God specifically answered a prayer of yours?
3. Discuss the importance and benefit of establishing regular prayer times with God.

Characteristics of a Disciple of Jesus

Overview

In our last session, we looked at the frequently misunderstood Christian discipline of prayer, the believer's communication with God. We first defined prayer; we learned that prayer is more than bringing a grocery list of requests to God. It involves listening to God as well. Then we discussed why prayer is such an important part of our growth as followers of Christ. Finally, we learned how we can be effective in our communication with God.

REAL FAITH

Jesus frequently referred to His followers as His *disciples*. In this session, We will look more closely at what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. First we will define the word disciple. Then we will answer the question, "What does a disciple of Jesus look like?" Finally, we will evaluate our own growth as disciples of Jesus. How do our own attitudes and actions align with being Jesus' disciples, and what are the next steps for our growth as His disciples?

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: Luke 6:40

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 says 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.*

"Disciple" Defined

One of the most common descriptive words used by Jesus for His followers was *disciple*. The Greek word for *disciple* is *mathetes*, which means "learner." A disciple is one who is learning from a leader, teacher, or someone he or she has deemed to be worthy of following. A disciple of Jesus is someone who possesses a heart for God and a teachable attitude

toward Jesus. He or she is ready to receive forgiveness, teaching, direction, help, love, and encouragement from Him.

This does not mean that the disciple of Jesus perfectly follows Him. The Bible is clear that every human being is sinful and in need of God's gift of unconditional forgiveness and acceptance. We receive this gift **by faith** when we place our trust in Christ. Then we start learning to follow Him, which means we will still sin during the process. God's plan, however, is that we take on the role of a disciple or learner. Because God created us, forgave our sins, and gave us eternal life, He is obviously worthy of our allegiance. It is clearly in the believer's best interest to commit to being a disciple of Jesus.

The research of George Gallup, George Barna, and other North American cultural analysts indicates, however, that there is very little difference between the behavior and attitudes of non-believers and that of born-again Christians. It seems that not only in our day, but throughout the history of the church, *believers in Christ* have had difficulty assuming the role of *disciples of Christ*.

Discuss: Why do you think Christians find it difficult to be disciples?

One of the reasons Christians have difficulty buying into the concept of being Jesus' disciples is that they lack understanding of what it means and what it would look like in daily life. Let's increase our understanding by looking at what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, learning what a disciple of Jesus looks like, and then evaluating our own growth as His disciples.

What It Means to Be a Disciple of Jesus

A disciple is, literally, a scholar, a learner, especially one who believes in the doctrine of his teacher and follows him . . . A disciple must spend time with his teacher in order to gain wisdom, knowledge, and understanding.

All of us who belong to Christ are (or ought to be) His disciples. Unlike the original disciples, we cannot physically spend time with Jesus. But we can hear Him speak and learn from Him just the same by reading what He said when He was here, by speaking to Him through prayer, and by determining to be obedient to His teachings. This is the ultimate proof that one is a disciple: if he follows the commands of his teacher.

-- Billy Graham

1. Disciples are learners.

- ◆ Disciples follow Jesus and learn from Him.

Read Matthew 11:28-30. What words and phrases in this passage describe the disciples' attitude and orientation toward Jesus?

How does Jesus describe Himself as a leader?

What will be the result in my life if I follow Him?

How important is a teachable attitude?

- ◆ Discipleship is a life-long process.

Read Philippians 3:12-14. How does the Apostle Paul describe his own discipleship process?

**Discuss: When do you have difficulty pressing on as a disciple?
What causes you to lose focus?**

What do you find most encouraging from Paul's words?

Jesus is not looking for perfection on the part of His disciples. He is looking for a heart attitude of teachability and dependence on Him. He simply asks that we confess our sins to Him when we fail, that we receive His forgiveness and empowering **by faith**, and that we get back up and keep on going.

2. Disciples are in the process of becoming like their Master.

Read Jesus' words in Luke 6:40. In what other arenas of life do we find this principle to be true?

Give an example you have seen recently in your home, family, or work environment.

Children often try to be like their parents. Smaller children frequently imitate their older siblings. Students may strive to be like their teachers. In a similar way, God has planted in each believer the desire to become more like Christ. The disciple of Jesus strives to be like Jesus, and Jesus' desire for His disciples is that they become like Him.

What Does a Disciple of Jesus Look Like?

How can you tell if you are experiencing growth as a disciple of Jesus? Look for the following:

1. A growing love for God and for people

Read Matthew 22:36-40. What are the two greatest commandments? What did Jesus mean when He said, "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments?"

- ◆ **God calls us to love Him with our entire heart, soul, and mind.**
The disciple of Jesus possesses a growing passion to love God above all else. The more the disciple understands God's love for him, the more he wants to respond by loving God in return. Is your heart for God growing, or is it shrinking?

- ◆ **God calls us to love others as we love ourselves.**
The apostle John wrote in I John 4:19-21 that our love for God is demonstrated in our love for others. John bluntly states,

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar.

Look at your heart attitude toward others. Do you see an increase in concern for others? Is there bitterness and animosity in some relationships?

2. A growing desire to let Jesus have leadership of your life

Read Luke 14:25-33.

Jesus wants us to submit to His leadership in:

- ◆ **our relationships** (see verse 26). Here we ask, "God, how do You want me to treat my friends, my spouse, my co-workers, my siblings, my children, my parents, my neighbors, and the people I do not naturally like or get along with?"

- ◆ **our possessions** (see verse 33). Here we say, “God, all my possessions actually belong to You. Show me how to wisely manage what You have entrusted to me.”
- ◆ **every other area of our lives as well** (see verses 26-27). Finally we say, “God, I give you leadership of every aspect of my life. I know that You have my best interests in mind at all times and I know that Your agenda is always the best one.”

Reflect: Do you find it difficult to submit to His leadership in your relationships and/or with your possessions? Why or why not?

3. A growing desire to make God’s kingdom work your first priority

Read Luke 9:57-62.

What do you see in this passage which emphasizes the priority believers are to place on the work of God’s kingdom?

What did each of the three people have to leave behind in order to follow Jesus?

Why is single-mindedness a necessity?

Note on Verse 59: The father of the man was not yet dead. If his father had already died, the man would not have been talking with Jesus. He would have already been occupied with his father’s burial. He evidently wanted to wait until after his father died to decide whether he wanted to follow Jesus or not.

4. An internal motivation to follow and serve God

What do the following passages say about a disciple’s internal motivation to serve God?

- ◆ 2 Corinthians 5:14-15
- ◆ 1 Corinthians 15:58
- ◆ 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Jesus calls us to a ministry of eternal significance. Our labor as His disciples is never in vain. Every disciple of Jesus has the opportunity to be used of God to see lives changed for eternity. As disciples of Jesus, we are investing our lives in the two things that will last forever--God's Word and people.

Reflect: What are the things that motivate people in our culture?

What motivates you?

On a scale of 1-5 (1 = low motivation, 5 = high motivation), how would you assess your motivation to follow and serve God?

Discipleship Check Up

This is your opportunity to do a heart check. Reflect on the following questions:

- What does it mean for me to be a disciple of Jesus?**

- What might it cost me to follow Jesus?**

- What reservations do I have regarding Jesus' call to be His disciple?
What can I do to address these reservations?**

- How closely are my priorities aligned with God's kingdom priorities?**

- What steps am I taking in extending God's kingdom to others?**

Re-Kindling Your Passion for the Great Commission

Overview

In our last session, we looked at what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. First we defined the word disciple. Then we answered the question, “What does a disciple of Jesus look like?” Finally, we evaluated our own growth as disciples of Jesus. How do our own attitudes and actions align with being Jesus’ disciples, and what are the next steps for our growth as His disciples?

REAL FAITH

In this session, we will look at Jesus’ words to His disciples in Matthew 28:18-20. These words are commonly referred to as the *Great Commission*. We will answer three questions regarding the *Great Commission*: What is it? Why should I be passionate about it? How can I help fulfill it?

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: Matthew 28:18-20

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.*

What Stirs Your Passion?

We all express our emotions differently. Still, for each of us there are certain activating events or experiences which touch us emotionally and increase our intensity. There are things that make us laugh, things that make us angry, and things that make us weep. Look over the list below. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being low and 5 being high), rate the level of passion you feel for each activating event.

- ___ Your team wins the Super Bowl, the Stanley Cup, or the World Series.
- ___ Your car is vandalized in the parking lot of the grocery store.
- ___ A family member receives a promotion at work.
- ___ A friend tells you about a relative who has become a follower of Christ.
- ___ A well-respected local politician is convicted in a financial scandal.
- ___ Your child or sibling does well on an exam at school.
- ___ A Christian friend takes steps to prioritize her relationship with God.
- ___ You see a news report about a tragic earthquake in another country.

Whether or not we outwardly express our passions, there are events, ideas, and experiences which stir us emotionally and move us to action. Certainly there are times in life when it seems like the flame has gone out; there are times we feel “passionless.” There may be many reasons for this lack of passion. Frequently, however, our passions wane because we have lost sight of the significance of our lives. For believers in Christ, we forget who we are, and we forget the significant purpose to which we have been called. Would it not be thrilling to re-ignite your passion? Would it not be exciting to have a reason to get out of bed in the morning?

Let’s take a fresh look at the greatest plan ever given, by the greatest Person who ever lived, concerning the greatest power ever revealed, and with the greatest promise ever recorded. Let’s take a look at Christ’s Great Commission.

What Is the Great Commission?

Just prior to His ascension into heaven, Jesus speaks these words to His followers:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

None of us has a long time here on planet Earth. It's kind of a staging ground. It's our split second in eternity when we have an opportunity to invest our lives, our time, our talent, and our treasure to fulfill what our Lord came into this world to do and commissioned us to do.

--Bill Bright

Last words are usually important words. In this case, Jesus is giving His final charge to His disciples. In just three short sentences, He crystallizes the mission of His body, the Church: **to make disciples of all nations.** A disciple is a learner or a follower. God's desire is that everyone in the world has the chance to become a disciple, or follower, of Christ. Nevertheless, believers can sometimes slip into a mentality that goes something like this:

If I can just get this person to pray the prayer to accept Christ, then I've done my job. I'll let someone else take it from there. The main thing God wants me to do is to go and preach the Gospel.

A closer look at Matthew 28:18-20, however, reveals that the main verb of the passage is *make disciples*. Jesus commands that we are to make disciples of all nations. We do it by:

- *Going:* As you are going, in your daily activities be intentional about making disciples.
- *Baptizing:* Baptism is an external expression of an internal commitment to the person of Jesus Christ. Our responsibility as disciples is to help others learn what it means to make a commitment to follow Christ by receiving Him and following Him in believer's baptism.
- *Teaching:* Teaching must take place to help the disciple learn what it means to obey Christ.

Two other observations are critical as we look at this passage:

1. Jesus, the One who gave this charge, possesses all authority in heaven and on earth.
2. Jesus promises to be with believers as they carry out the Great Commission.

***Discuss:* What relevance does Jesus' authority have to the Great Commission?**

Why is it important for believers to know that Jesus is with them as they carry out the Great Commission?

In another passage, the Apostle Paul gives further insight into our mission of making disciples. In his letter to the church in Colossae, Paul writes:

And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete (mature) in Christ (Colossians 1:28, NAS).

Not only was Paul passionate about giving everyone in the world the opportunity to enter a relationship with Christ, he was equally committed to helping every believer become mature, or built up, in his or her faith. Paul realized that if his objective was to simply make converts, then the fledgling church would quickly be eaten alive by a Roman culture focused on pleasure and prosperity. On the other hand, if he could teach, encourage, build up, and equip believers to be Christ-centered and Great Commission-focused, then the church would continue to extend Christ's love to every person on the planet.

***Discuss:* What are some of the main barriers that prevent believers from making disciples?**

What is the greatest hindrance for you in making disciples?

Why Should I Be Passionate about Helping to Fulfill the Great Commission?

Read the following passages. As you read, note the following principles about why believers are to give their lives to helping fulfill the Great Commission.

1. Matthew 28:18-19 -- Jesus commanded us to make disciples.

Discuss: How do people in our culture respond to commands from those in authority?

Have you ever had difficulty in responding to someone's direction? Why or why not?

What fears have you experienced in following Jesus' commands?

2. John 14:6; Acts 4:12 -- Jesus is the *only* source of forgiveness and eternal life.

Evaluate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = never, 3 = sometimes, 5 = constantly):

_____ I think of my non-believing co-workers, neighbors, friends, and family members as being separated from God forever without Christ.

_____ I pray for the salvation of those I know who do not yet know Christ.

_____ I look for opportunities to influence others for Christ.

_____ I prioritize helping believers be effective in evangelism and discipleship.

3. 2 Corinthians 3:1-3; 2 John 4 -- There is incredible fulfillment in reaching and discipling others.

Discuss: Who has had a positive impact in your life? Describe what he or she did and how it affected you.

How have you had a positive impact on someone else?
How does it make you feel knowing that you affected someone else for the better?

4. **Matthew 9:35-38 -- People are longing to have a relationship with God.**

Reflect: When have you talked with someone who seemed very open to knowing Christ? How could you tell he or she was interested in Christ?

How Can I Help Fulfill the Great Commission?

1. **Keep the overall strategy in mind.**

Read Acts 1:6-9.

Jesus spoke these words to His followers after He had risen from death, just prior to His ascension into heaven. He had already given the charge to make disciples of all nations by going, baptizing, and teaching. Now He gives them, and us, a strategy to implement.

◆ ***Begin with those in your immediate spheres of influence: your Jerusalem.***

What people do you know at work, in your neighborhood, or at school who need to begin a relationship with God?

What believers do you know who are not involved in reaching and discipling others?

◆ ***Be available to influence those outside of your Jerusalem: your Judea and Samaria.***

When do you come in contact with people outside of your neighborhood, school, or work environment?

How would your influence with these people be different from the influence you have with those in your Jerusalem?

- ◆ **Remember that the entire world is our objective, *the ends of the earth*.**

How could you impact the ends of the earth for Christ without leaving your community?

Jesus said that “the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few” (Matthew 9:37). How might God use you to raise up more workers?

There is no magic in small plans. When I consider my ministry, I think of the world. Anything less than that would not be worthy of Christ nor of His will for my life.

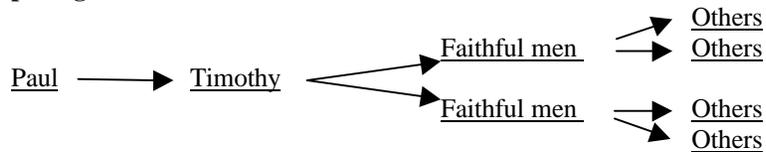
--Dr. Henrietta Mears
(the discipleship mentor of Bill Bright)

2. Make it your goal to raise up more workers . . . one at a time.

When you introduce someone to Christ, you have done *spiritual addition*. When you disciple this new believer and equip him or her to reach and disciple others who will reach and disciple still others, you have done *spiritual multiplication*.

You expand your effectiveness by narrowing your focus.

One of the letters that the Apostle Paul wrote was to Timothy, a young leader he had disciplined. Read Paul’s charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1-2. How many spiritual generations do you see in this passage?



If you were to do *spiritual addition*, bringing 10 people per year to faith in Christ for the next 10 years, you would have added 100 new people to the church. If you were to do *spiritual multiplication* for the next 10 years, discipling one person per year who then was equipped to reach and disciple one other person, who would reach and disciple another (etc.), you would have raised up over 1,000 trained workers for the body of Christ in a ten-year period of time.

Discuss: If spiritual multiplication is so effective, why is it not done more often?

What gets in the way of spiritual multiplication in the body of Christ?

What are your greatest hindrances to multiplying spiritually?

Application

1. What am I currently doing to reach those in my Jerusalem?

If I make evangelism and discipleship a greater priority, what specific changes might I need to make to my schedule?

2. Is there one believer I know that I could invite to be involved in being discipled and discipling others one-to-one?

Talk through with your discipleship partner a plan to disciple one or two people per year.

