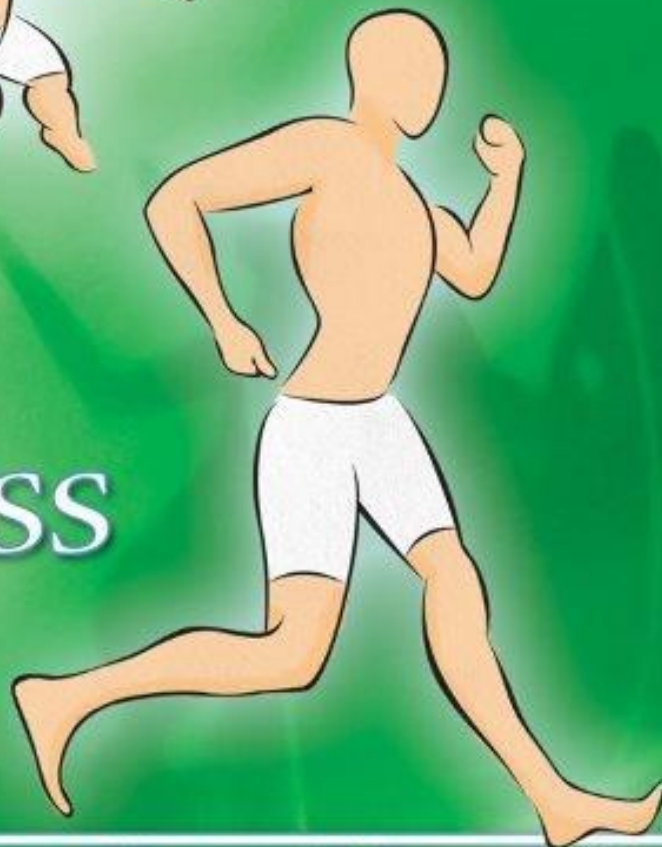


Growing Up



into
His
Likeness



Bill Joukhadar

Growing-Up into His Likeness

A basic-level Christian discipleship learning guide



Bill Joukhadar

billyj1949@outlook.com

Growing-Up Into His Likeness was developed by William Joukhadar, 1990. Current version revised January, 2020. The author gives unqualified permission for the use of any/all of the information contained in this discipleship learning guide.

Table of Contents

	Introduction	Page 1
Session 1	Growing Up – <i>The next step!</i>	Page 2
Session 2	Salvation – <i>Safe and sure</i>	Page 6
Session 3	Prime Time – <i>Time alone with God</i>	Page 9
Session 4	The Church – <i>Our spiritual home</i>	Page 13
Session 5	The Holy Spirit – <i>Empowers us for living</i>	Page 17
Session 6	Prayer – <i>Communication with God</i>	Page 21
Session 7	Obedience – <i>Keeping in step with God</i>	Page 25
Session 8	Temptation – <i>Overcoming its influence</i>	Page 29
Session 9	Guidance – <i>Discovering God's will</i>	Page 34
Session 10	Testimony – <i>Telling your story</i>	Page 38
Session 11	Baptism – <i>Going public with Jesus</i>	Page 43
Session 12	Church Membership – <i>Body building</i>	Page 47
Session 13	Communion – <i>Celebrating oneness</i>	Page 50
Session 14	Giving – <i>That pleases God</i>	Page 53
	Where to now?	Page 57
	Prayer Guide	Page 58

Introduction

A believer's "born again" experience in the Lord Jesus Christ marks the beginning, not the end, of an exciting new life.

Far too many Christians fail to progress beyond the *birth* phase of their spiritual experience, thinking they have arrived. Failing to progress beyond this starting point in their spiritual journey denies believers the reality of a dynamic, satisfying and fulfilling new life.

God wants His children to grow-up!

Spiritual *growth* follows spiritual *birth*. Spiritual growth is an ongoing life-long process that transforms us from who we are to who we can be in God's sight – mature character reflectors of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Growing-up into the likeness of Jesus Christ is God's ultimate plan for you and me. Romans 8:29a says ...

"For God knew His people in advance, and He chose them to become like His Son ..."

Spiritual growth, like physical growth, does not happen automatically - the right conditions must exist for this process to occur. God has provided us with everything we need to grow up in the Christian faith. All we need to do is decide within ourselves to seriously commit to following the steps God has clearly marked out for us in His Word (the Bible).

Two Corinthians 3:18 says ...

"And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more."

Take the next step

This learning guide highlights foundational steps, resulting in satisfying spiritual growth.

Each step taken will lead you further into a rich discovery of God and His special plan for your life. There is no journey more worthwhile in all of life than the journey that takes you forward through growing-up into the very likeness of the Lord, Jesus Christ. This is life-transforming! You won't regret having embarked on this amazing journey.

Constantly ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in the way you should go. Be like the Psalmist who asked the Lord... *"Make me walk along the paths of Your commands, for that is where my happiness is found"* (119:35).

Moving ahead in your faith, one step at a time, will give you reason to celebrate.

Warning: You can expect opposition from the enemy (satan), worldly distractions and inner fleshly desires.

Growing-Up – *The next step!*

1

Experiencing fulfilment

When believers do not progress beyond the stage of infancy in their Christian faith, they miss out on experiencing the reality of an exciting *fulfilled* life (John 10:10b), and will stumble and suffer unnecessarily in their lives on earth.

According to God's prophet, Hosea, why were His people suffering?

Hosea 4:6 _____

Ignorance of God and His will for you is an unnecessary obstacle that blocks your progress in life:

- Preventing you from growing-up in your faith
- Preventing you from reflecting God's character, and
- Preventing you from experiencing your potential in God and life.

What is your potential in God?

Romans 8:29 _____

One of the most enthusiastic believers of all time was the Apostle Paul. His life's energy was completely directed towards his passion in life. Wherever Paul went, he urged others to join with him in life's greatest and most satisfying pursuit.

What was Paul's pursuit in life?

1 Corinthians 11:1 _____

In your own words, what does it mean to *imitate* Christ?

What does it mean to *impersonate* Christ?

Imitate Christ

There is no greater pursuit in all of life than the pursuit of imitating Christ. Satisfaction of your innermost needs in life comes from you becoming like Christ.

Learning to imitate Christ is a life-long process called “sanctification”. Sanctification is the process of learning to live a sin-free life, and all learning begins with the mind.

What does Paul urge you to do with your mind that makes it possible for you to experience God’s *good, pleasing* and *perfect* plan for your life?

Romans 12:2 _____

His *mind*

To imitate the life of Christ you must first be like-minded with Him. God’s Word, the Bible, reveals to you the mind of Christ. All you need to know about the Lord is recorded for you in God’s Word.

How should you react to God’s Word?

1 Peter 2:2a _____

What should be your next step after taking God’s Word into your mind?

James 1:22 _____

What should happen to you when you live out God’s Word?

1 Peter 2:2b _____

The writer of the Book of Hebrews expressed concern about his spiritual “babes” (immature believers). What were his concerns?

Hebrews 5:12-14 _____

What does Peter urge believers to do?

2 Peter 3:18 _____

His actions

As you live-out God's Word in your daily life, your growing-up into Christ-likeness will continue. Christlikeness is the "fruit" of your obedience!

Having the mind of Christ makes it possible for you to act like Him; acting like Him ensures you will experience the special plan He has in mind for you.

What is the nature of God's plan for you?

Jeremiah 29:11 _____

What is Jesus' desire for each of us?

John 10:10b _____

His life

Growing-up into the likeness of Jesus Christ will give you a fresh and new outlook on life.

- You will be able to *see* life as God sees life.
- You will be able to *live* life as Christ lived amongst us – victoriously!
- You will be able to *enjoy* life more fully – as God intended for you.

Learning to live in the likeness of Christ is not easy. At times the Christian life will seem an impossible battle. Doubt and fear of failing may tempt you to retreat back into old ways of living - believing the lie that you will not be able to succeed in your journey. You may even feel like giving up! (Relax, this is normal for every growing believer.)

Whenever you find yourself in this situation you need to remember that striving forward in the likeness of Christ is not something that was ever intended to be accomplished in human strength alone. Jesus, through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit, will motivate, inspire and empower you to face and overcome each and every hurdle, obstacle and challenge you encounter. It's comforting to know that **all the challenges you will face in your daily walk with the Lord has been carefully chosen and calculated by Him, for your good** (Psalm 37:23-24).

What does Jesus invite you to do?

Matthew 11:29a _____

What can you expect when you accept His invitation?

Matthew 11:29b _____

Yes, there is nothing more worthwhile in all of life than learning to walk and grow-up into the likeness of Jesus Christ – your peace, satisfaction and fulfilment is at stake!

Your life no longer belongs to you – you now belong to Jesus Christ. He has sole right in the use of your life, for His purposes. And, His purposes are always good, and right!

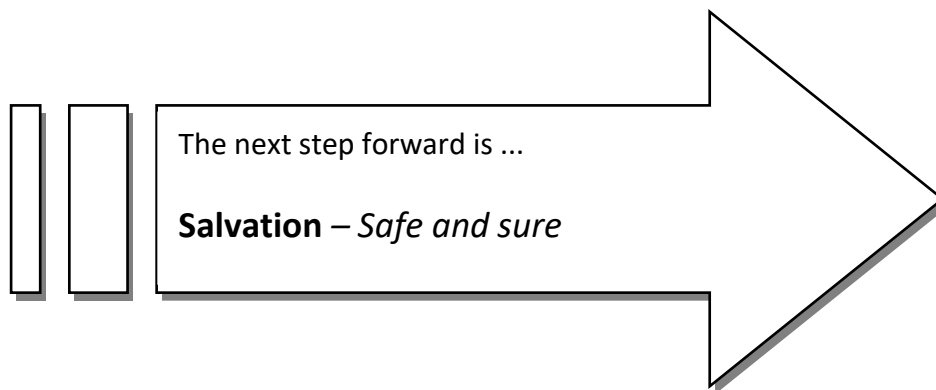
How did Paul state this truth?

Galatians 2:20 _____

Summary

Moving ahead in the Christian faith is a life-long journey that promises satisfaction, fulfillment, wonder, amazement and miraculous outcomes. However, such a journey requires a serious, selfless commitment and discipline in taking certain steps that will take you forward into increasing Christ-likeness.

The following sessions in this book will reveal additional steps that guarantee progress in your “growth” journey.



Living with confidence

Spiritual growth is impossible for believers who lack confidence in their salvation.

The Bible warns us of our adversary, satan, whose constant effort is to stop or retard our spiritual growth, robbing us of our potential in Christ and minimising our godly influence in the world.

Whenever we allow satan freedom to move in our minds he will do his best to create *doubt, distortion* and *deception* (three deadly Ds) concerning all that is true about the Lord, ourselves, others, and of the world in which we live. Falling into satan's hands makes it possible for him to accomplish his diabolical schemes *in* and *through* our lives.

To safeguard you from this happening, you need to *fix your mind* on the powerful truths of God's promises (Philippians 4:8), thereby making it possible for you to stand firm in your faith and to progress as you should in the growth of your Christian faith.

Believers in Jesus Christ have been given essential promises from God, enabling them to live confidently and victoriously in the world. Standing on these promises will give you a firm footing in your salvation that is rock-solid and will more than adequately safeguard your life from the enemy's relentless attacks.

Safeguarded by the WORD of God

What does God's Word promise you if you *go-on* "believing" in Jesus Christ?

John 1:12 _____

John 3:16 _____

Colossians 2:13-14 "F _____ for all your sins" (past)

1 John 1:9 "F _____ you each time you confess your sins" (Present/Future)

1 John 5:11-13 _____

Safeguarded by the PROMISES of Christ

What safeguard does Jesus promise to those who "belong" to Him?

John 10:28-29 _____

John 5:24 (a) _____

(b) _____

(c) _____

Safeguarded by the WORK of the Holy Spirit

How does the Holy Spirit safeguard those who believe in Christ?

Romans 8:16 _____

Ephesians 1:13, 14 _____

The WORD of God, the PROMISES of Christ, and the WORK of the Holy Spirit combine together, forming a firm foundation of your salvation - keeping you safe and sure against all satanic attacks.

What does the following verse *caution* you **not** to do?

Proverbs 3:5b _____

And what does the same verse *advise* you **to** do?

Proverbs 3:5a _____

Proverbs 3:6a _____

The Apostle Paul knew what it was like to face persecution, hardship and trials in his life's ministry for Christ. He knew too well of Satan's relentless attacks aimed at producing doubt, discouragement and despair in his life. No matter how tough life became for Paul his salvation's stand remained confident, steady, safe and sure.

What important *question* does Paul ask concerning the security of your salvation?

Romans 8:35a _____

What *answer* does Paul give concerning that question?

Romans 8:38-39 _____

(Keep in balance the truth of Romans 8:38-39 with Romans 11:22... *if you stop trusting, you also will be cut off.*)

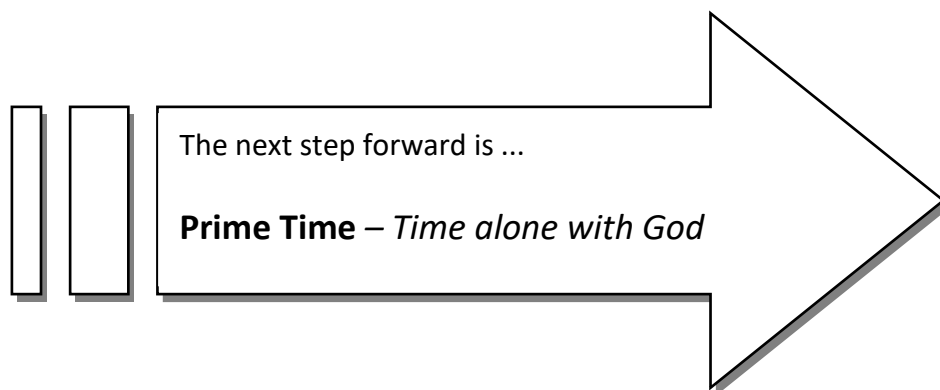
The late Russell Kelso Carter, a Methodist minister, authored a hymn that embraces the essence of this session. Verse two of this hymn, entitled “Standing On the Promises”, declares:

*Standing on the promises that cannot fail,
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
By the living Word of God I shall prevail,
Standing on the promises of God.*

Summary

Knowing and standing on the promises of God is a two-part prerequisite to experiencing a rock-solid salvation that is steady, safe and sure.

Standing on the promises of God means obedient action of all that God says – never acting on what you, the world or anyone else thinks or feels (Proverbs 3:5-6)!



Prime Time – *Time alone with God*

Staying close to God

The most important time in the life of a believer is the time that is dedicated to meeting *alone* with God. This special time is essential to developing a close walk with God and ensures steady spiritual growth and a well-being that is second to none!

In this special time of intimate communion with God you will learn:

- More about the uniqueness of “you”
- More of His plan for your life
- More of His guidance, and
- More of His nature.

Christians who live victoriously agree that having a “prime time” with God is the most vital part of their day – it sets the stage for victory, not disaster.

The Bible implies in many places the need for us to discipline and devote ourselves to setting aside time, every day, alone with God and His Word. Note: This discipline is for our benefit, not God’s!

What do the following references say to you about having a special time with God?

Psalm 1:1-2 _____

2 Timothy 2:15 _____

1 Peter 2:2 _____

Having a special time with God does not happen naturally. It requires commitment and dedication to the following *prime-time* disciplines:

- Plan
- Place
- Bible study, and
- Prayer.

Plan

Without proper planning; distractions, interruptions and conflicts will prevent you from having a special time with God. Satan is the master of distractions and disruptions, and will do everything in his power to keep you from keeping this important time of intimacy with God. So, planning to meet with God alone is crucial to your journey with Him.

Some Christians have found that early morning is the best time for them to meet with God, others prefer late at night. There is no right or wrong time for this special meeting. The important thing is to plan a time when you can be alert and able to think clearly. As a starting point, set aside twenty to thirty minutes (twenty minutes for Bible reading and ten minutes for prayer). During this time, it is important to firstly listen to the Lord, and secondly for Him to hear from you – that’s what is needed for your relationship to grow with the Lord!

When did the psalmist and Daniel meet with God?

Psalm 55:17 _____

Psalm 119:97, 164 _____

Daniel 6:10 _____

Note: Begin slowly, be consistent, and expect this time to grow naturally.

Place

Finding a place that is free from distractions and interruptions is the next key to enjoying a special time with God. If possible, find a place where you can pray aloud. This will help to keep your mind focused, guarding you from distractions.

What was Jesus’ discipline concerning prime-time with His Father?

Mark 1:35 _____

Bible study

The winning combination of prime-time with God is Bible study and prayer. There are several ways to go about Bible study during your devotional time. One way is to use a Bible-based devotional book that is recommended to you.

The Journey Series[®] books are excellent choices. This wide selection of 40+ titles contain easy to understand Bible “treasure maps” that will help you make amazing spiritual discoveries in God’s Word that will guide you safely and successfully in your daily walk with the Lord in every area of your life.

These study guides may be obtained through accessing the *Journey Series* website: www.journeyseries.com (at a reasonable cost).

You can also benefit greatly through listening-viewing to world renowned Bible commentator, David Pawson, through the website: **YouTube David Pawson Unlocking the Bible**. This is a “free” teaching ministry of David Pawson.

Another way is to have an independent study program. Following this approach, you would study one particular book of the Bible - one paragraph or chapter at a time... reading the passage slowly several times while considering such questions as:

- a) Does this reveal to me any sins I should forsake?
- b) Are there promises to claim?
- c) Are there examples to follow?
- d) Are there warnings to consider?
- e) What does it teach me about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
- f) What should I do about these things?

Recording daily discoveries will help to strengthen learning and aid progress and faithfulness in your walk with God. You may like to record any discoveries and decisions you make to live differently for God.

Two Timothy 3:16-17 gives four practical reasons why you should develop a keen interest in God’s Word.

List these reasons in the space below:

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____

Prayer

God’s Word is *bread* and prayer is *breath* for the soul. Prayer is simply speaking to God with words that are natural and comfortable to you. Prayer is of equal importance with God’s Word in your prime-time with Him and must be an essential discipline in your spiritual growth. God wants to speak with you throughout the day, every day – “without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Here are some prayer tips to consider:

- As a starting point, ten minutes of your time each day should be invested in speaking with God, through prayer... talk to Him!
- Pray aloud if this helps to keep your thoughts focused.
- Use the Prayer Guide shown on the last page of this book to aid your memory (cut along the line and store it in your Bible).

Remember: *Quality* prayer is more important than *quantity* prayer.

Practice

The following Bible passages are ideal for practicing prime-time sessions with God. Having chosen a passage, follow the above Bible study suggested steps and share the results with the person who is coaching you in your growth journey.

- Romans 12:9-21
- 1 Corinthians 13:1-7
- 2 Corinthians 5:16-21
- Philippians 4:4-13
- Colossians 3:5-17.

After you have gained some experience in the investigation of Bible passages and have been able to appreciate worthwhile discoveries you can then set your sights on tackling whole books of the Bible. The following books are suggested:

Genesis – the first book of the Bible (the beginning of life!)

John – the personhood of Jesus

Acts – the formation and world-wide expansion of the Church

Revelation – the last book of the Bible (the end of this world, and the beginning of a new world!)

The “whole book” study approach is of greater benefit to gaining the “whole picture” of what God is saying instead of gleaning bits-n-pieces through the selection of random passages. The person aiding you with your learning can help you with Bible commentaries and other helpful, learning resources.

Summary

Your spiritual growth is largely dependent upon the quality and consistency of your prime-time sessions with God. As you meet with God for this special time, the Holy Spirit will reveal to you all you need to know, understand and see, *the next step* forward in your growth journey with Him.

Remember: *“The steps of the godly are directed by the Lord”* (Psalm 37:23a).



The Church – *Our spiritual home*

4

God's family to which you now belong

Have you heard the saying, "You don't have to go to church to be a Christian?" Do you agree with that? How does that line-up with what God thinks?

As God's primary interest in your life is to grow you to full maturity in Christ-likeness (Romans 8:29), you will discover in this growth step that the "Church" is God's family to which you now belong, specially designed for your spiritual nurture, development and wellbeing (Acts 2:41-47).

- The church is not a place to visit dutifully each week but is your *family* to which you now belong – it's where you draw support for living your new life in Christ.
- The church is indispensable for the care and growth of all believers.
- The church is God's means for reaching a lost world with the Good News of Jesus Christ. (He doesn't want anyone to perish!)

The Bible teaches that church involvement is not an option for believers who:

- Desire to experience spiritual growth
- Desire to experience meaning and purpose in their lives
- Desire to be channels of blessing to others
- Desire to live lives that are pleasing to God.

This discovery session looks at:

- What is the church?
- Why is the church necessary?
- Signs of a healthy church

What is the church?

The word church is used in two ways in the Bible:

At times, "Church" refers to the entire *universal* body of Christians, and, at other times "church" refers to a *specific group* of believers meeting in a specific place (i.e., your local church).

The church is known as the "Body of Christ" as every true believer is a living, functioning, and essential part of Christ's body as it ministers in our world today.

What term is given to refer to *individual* believers in the church?

1 Corinthians 12:18 _____

What term is given to refer to the *collective* believers in the church?

1 Corinthians 12:27 _____

New believers are incorporated into the Body of Christ as life-members through their baptism in the Holy Spirit, at the time of their conversion to Christ.

Why is the church necessary?

The church is necessary for the following reasons:

1. It provides opportunity for group WORSHIP

God created you to live in a worshipful relationship with Him, individually and within the context of His family (the church). Worship of God is to be both personal and corporate. Group worship can be practiced in small group contexts and the wider church body through reverent-silence, surrender, Scripture, singing, supplication (personal prayer requests) and willing service. Worship is about honouring God for who He is and is crucial to your spiritual growth.

What do the following references say about worshipping God?

Matthew 4:10 _____

Hebrews 13:15 _____

2. It provides FELLOWSHIP

We have been created to worship God and fellowship with one another.

What do the following references say about our fellowship responsibility towards other believers in the church?

Galatians 6:2 "We are to _____"

Ephesians 4:3b "We are to _____"

Ephesians 4:15a "We are to _____"

Ephesians 4:16b "We are to _____"

Hebrews 10:24 "We are to _____"

Hebrews 10:25 "We are to _____"

3. It provides sound TEACHING

A healthy church provides sound biblical teaching for its members and offers a variety of spiritual training and leadership development opportunities. God’s truth points us in the right way to go and grow.

To what did the three thousand new believers devote their lives?

Acts 2:42a - *“They devoted themselves to the Apostles _____”*

4. It provides an opportunity for SERVICE

A healthy church motivates its members to take up positions of service.

God gives spiritual gifts (special abilities) to every believer to exercise within the life of the church for the mutual nurturing and development of its members, and the growth of the church through ministry and mission service opportunities. Small groups are ideal contexts to discover, practice and develop your special God-given gifts.

What does God say about our service to others in the church?

Hebrews 6:10 _____

Through serving others; we grow, our church grows and the Kingdom of God grows!

5. It provides ORGANISATION

An orderly and effective home functions with a certain degree of organisation.

A healthy church is a well organised body for enabling the nurture, growth and development of all believers and allows for effective and efficient operation of ministry and mission to the unsaved community.

What do the following verses say about this?

1 Corinthians 14:33 _____

1 Corinthians 14:40 _____

Signs of a healthy church

The following are “healthy” signs to look for when considering a church to call “my home”...

- The church is “Kingdom of God” minded, not denominationally minded
- God’s Word is the standard for faith and practice
- Prayer is keenly encouraged
- Fellowship is promoted, and community building is achieved by the members through a coordinated network of Spirit-empowered small groups
- Practice of sin is not tolerated – It’s diligently *carefronted* and lovingly disciplined
- Is compassionate to the unsaved – and outreaches in practical ways to them
- Encourages its members to develop to the fullness of their leadership potential
- The Good News of the church is always about the Lord, Jesus Christ
- Ministry opportunities are provided for people of all age groups
- Church belief is matched by the behaviour of its members
- Personal spiritual growth is fostered
- Every person is highly valued for who they are, not for what they do.

Summary

Believers who are serious about growing-up into the likeness of Jesus Christ see that having a right involvement in the church is of crucial importance to their spiritual growth and the care and growth of other believers. Why? Because ...

- Spiritual growth stifles and stagnates *outside* of church life
- God designed the church as “the” place where you can experience a true sense of belonging to Him and others in His family.

The church is your spiritual home – designed by God for your well-being and growth, for the well-being and growth of other believers, and for the expansion of His Kingdom.

Although the church is not perfect, God is at work... making it perfect!



Strength beyond your own

It's impossible for any person to live the Christian life victoriously and grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ in human strength alone.

Supernatural ability is needed if believers are to stand firm in their Christian faith and be able to confidently follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, as He inspires and leads them through the many challenges of life. Believers struggle unnecessarily and fail in their Christian lives because they rely completely on their "natural" strength instead of drawing upon "supernatural" strength that God supplies.

Taking hold of the following biblical truths will prevent frustration and defeat in your life as you seek to follow after Jesus Christ – desiring to grow-up into His likeness.

Power SOURCE

Firstly, you need to understand the *nature* of the power source for Christian living.

In your own words, write down what Jesus says in Acts 1:8 concerning your source of power.

"Who" is the power source for Christian living?

Acts 1:8 _____

Believers have been called by God to live their lives as full-time witnesses of Jesus Christ, made possible only by the Holy Spirit who is their inner power source.

When Jesus said, "*You shall receive **power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you ...*" He is saying, when the Holy Spirit came into your life you received His **ability** so you can live powerfully and unashamedly for Him in your private and public life.

This being the case, no Christian has a valid excuse for not stepping forward in their lives by living as an authentic witness of Jesus Christ for the entire world to see. In the context of living wisely, and with regards to the Holy Spirit, what does the Apostle Paul strongly urge you to do?

Ephesians 5:18b _____

Power EXPLAINED

“Be filled with the Holy Spirit” is the clear command of Ephesians 5:18. What does the term *be filled* with the Holy Spirit mean?

The verb *be filled* is present tense, which means a continuous action. This means you are to be filled continuously with God’s Spirit – a constant, everyday filling experience!

To be filled with the Person of Holy Spirit in a very real sense means to be filled with the very nature of Christ – His power working *in* you and *through* you.

What does Galatians 2:20 say about this?

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul compares the effect of being filled with the Holy Spirit with drunkenness. The intention of his comparison is to show that “being filled” is basically a matter of *control*. The person who is drunk is controlled by alcohol in their bloodstream and is no longer behaving normally or with self-control. The person filled with the Holy Spirit is controlled by the Spirit and is also not behaving normally. Either way the person is no longer living their life controlled by self. *Self*-control is a recipe for disaster. Note what Jesus says in Luke 9:23 that you should do about “self”.

Even though you have been saved from your past sins, and now belong to God, you do not live on “auto pilot” with God making life decisions for you. The decisions affecting your life are yours to make. You have been given the freedom to choose to live a worldly life through your natural self-control, or a godly life through Holy Spirit-control.

Choosing to “be filled” with the Holy Spirit’ is choosing to “be controlled by God”. Making this wise decision enables you to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord – following after Him confidently and victoriously through every challenge you face in life.

Power PROMISES

As you live under the control of the Holy Spirit you will experience and enjoy all the promises of God according to His perfect plan for your life (Yes, He has a pleasing and perfect plan for your life! More about this later.)

Read through the following Scripture references and note the promises contained for you to claim. The Bible is a treasure chest full of God’s promises, waiting to be discovered and enjoyed by you.

John 10:10b _____

John 14:26 _____

John 15:7, 16b _____

Acts 1:8 "Power (ability) to _____"

2 Corinthians 3:18b _____

Power CONDITIONS

There are certain conditions which must be met before you can be filled with God's Holy Spirit – filling you with His infinite power for victorious Christian living.

Note: Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a continuous act. It is not so much the product of "asking" but rather of "meeting certain conditions".

These conditions are: Desire, Surrender, Obedience, and Confession.

a. Desire

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a voluntary act – without any pressure or bullying from God. Unless you express a personal desire, God will not fill you with His Spirit.

Who are those who Jesus says... "God blesses"?

Matthew 5:6 _____

b. Surrender

Also, without surrender you cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit.

In the following verse, what does Paul urge you to surrender (present) to God "...that is your reasonable act of worship"?

Romans 12:1 _____

c. Obedience

Without obedient living in *all* that has been revealed to you by God, you cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit. Obedience is not for God's benefit, but yours!

When you obey God, what does that "prove" to Him?

1 John 2:3 _____

d. Confession

Without confession you cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Whenever you sin you take-back control of your life. When this happens, you are no longer filled with the Holy Spirit and therefore you forfeit the guidance and power of God in your life. **Corrective action is needed if supernatural power is to be restored!**

What does God promise to do whenever you confess your sins to Him (includes repenting of your sins)?

1 John 1:9 _____

Note: Every time you realise the step of confession needs to be taken, the steps of desire, surrender and obedience must also be retaken if you are to experience complete restoration of God's power.

Honest confession of sins diminishes pride and increases humility in your life. Confession is indeed "great medicine for a troubled mind and an unwell soul".

Summary

Living in a Spirit-filled state is tremendously satisfying and rewarding – ensuring victory and effectiveness in your life.

Caution: Avoid power failure in your life by remaining properly connected to God. Be filled, and continue being filled, with the Holy Spirit!



Prayer – *Communication with God*

Vital key

Prayer is another vital key to victorious Christian living. It is impossible for believers to grow in their relationship with Christ if prayer is absent or weak in their lives.

Consider these biblical truths:

- Prayer satisfies the deepest needs of the human heart (Psalm 42:1-2)
- Prayer aids your fight against sin and temptation (Matthew 26:41)
- Prayer is the way God has given you to deal with worry (Philippians 4:6-9)
- Prayer is a means of discovering God's guidance (James 1:5)

Prayer is the second part of your line of communication with God. God speaks to you through His Word (and by His Spirit) and you respond to Him through prayer.

Prayer is simply talking with God from the heart in a language that is natural and comfortable to you. As breathing is necessary for your physical life, prayer is necessary for your spiritual life.

While breathing is an automatic function, prayer is not. You therefore need to learn the discipline of daily prayer if you are to enjoy the benefits that come from regularly communicating with God.

The following four elements will help you to pray "prayers that work".

1. Direction

For prayer to be effective in your life it must be aimed in the right direction.

What do the following references tell you about where to direct your prayers?

Matthew 6:9 _____

Philippians 4:6 _____

2. Self-Preparation

The following elements of self-preparation are prerequisites for an effective prayer life.

a) Right heart

How will a wrong heart (unconfessed sins) affect your prayers?

Psalm 66:18 _____

b) Right motive

What does this verse reveal about praying with a wrong motive?

James 4:3 _____

c) Right relationships

The state of health of your relationship with others has a large bearing on your prayers being actioned by God without hinderance. What does the following verse say about this?

1 Peter 3:7 _____

d) Right confidence

In whom should you place your confidence when you pray?

1 John 5:14a _____

e) Right condition

What condition does God place upon your prayers before He will hear you?

1 John 5:14b _____

3. Message preparation

Here are several suggestions for preparing your prayers (messages).

a) Be balanced

Avoid praying the same prayer all the time. Vary and balance your prayers using the three essential elements stated in Philippians 4:6-7. These elements are:

- **Personal requests:** Personal needs and desires you express to God
- **Petitions:** Requests you make for other people and projects
- **Thanksgiving:** Thank the Lord in advance for His answers and provision for your needs.

(Read Philippians 4:6-7.)

b) Be specific

A common mistake is to be too general in prayer. Be specific about everything. This is the type of prayer you will be able to see when answered by God.

What specifics does Jesus teach in the prayer He modelled to His disciples?

Matthew 6:7-13 _____

c) Be persistent

Many Christians often pray once for something and no more, or they become discouraged and stop praying for something after just a short time. Keep in mind that the Lord often delays answers to our prayers for good reasons.

Patient persistence demonstrates your willingness to trust God and His perfect timing for answers.

Why did the judge finally give in and satisfy the woman's grievance?

Luke 18:1-8 _____

d) Be systematic

Using a simple prayer list will help you to remember each of your prayer concerns.

Note: Satan will do his best to steal away the memory of your prayer points.

What did Paul boast about in the following verse?

1Thessalonians 1:2b _____

e) Be consistent

Consistency is a vital element in effective prayer. Praying short prayers throughout the day as concerns come to mind is what being consistent is all about.

What do the following references say about this?

Romans 12:12b _____

1 Thessalonians 5:17 _____

4. Message ending

Your prayer requests need to be made "in the name of Jesus Christ". To pray in Christ's name is to express a prayer that is consistent with His life and teaching – such a prayer that Jesus would pray if He were in your situation.

Jesus says in John 14:13: *"... Whatever you ask in my name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."*

Summary

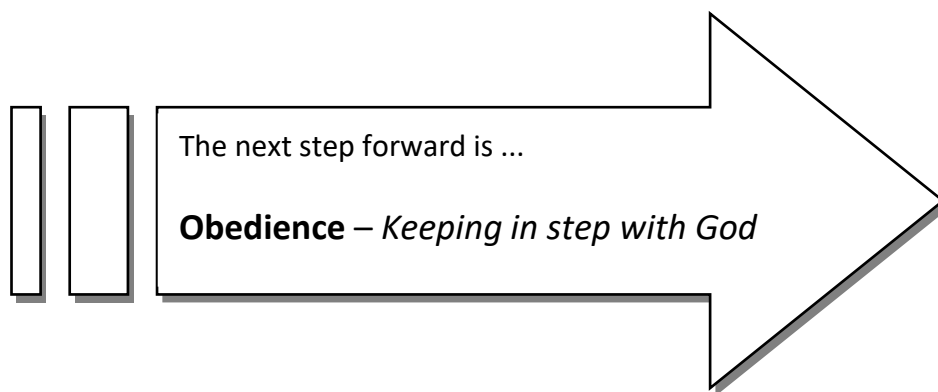
When your prayers have the right direction, preparation, presentation and ending you can be confident that God will always answer your prayers in ways that are best for you... in ways that line-up with His perfect plan for your life.

Remember: For your benefit, the Lord may answer you in one of the following ways:

- No (1 Chronicles 28:2, 3; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9)
- Not now (Psalm 27:14, 40:1)
- Yes, or (1 Kings 3:12; Matthew 8:5-13)
- Yes, plus! (1 Kings 3:13,14; Ephesians 3:20)

It's worthwhile committing to memory the following promise ...

"The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results"
(James 5:16b).



Obedience – Keeping in step with God

7

Experiencing God's promises

Keeping in step with God through obedience is crucial to your experiencing His promises of safety, wellbeing, peace, joy, provision and much more. The world in which you live is a spiritual war zone, heavily mined with diabolical explosive devices set in place and camouflaged by satan to harm you.

Through obedience you can walk safely in step with the Lord Jesus as His Holy Spirit leads you through each and every circumstance of life, with absolute confidence that His way is the right way – the best and safest way to go!

The Bible says in 1 John 2:3 ...

*“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we **keep** His commandments”* (walking in step with Him).

Your life's journey in “this” world is fraught with dangers you cannot possibly see. The Lord, however, knows exactly where each and every danger lies and He invites you to follow closely in His footsteps. He wants you to grow-up into His character likeness, that you may begin to experience the depth and breadth of His promise of an abundant life, right now (John 10:10b)!

Remember:

- Living in obedience to God does not come naturally – it has to be learned.
- Living in obedience to God is often not easy to do and requires discipline and commitment on your part to say “no” to anyone or anything that will cause you to fall out of step with Him.
- Living in obedience to God glorifies Him and blesses you and others.

The following Scripture references focus on the *why* and *how* to live a life of obedience to God.

Obedience – Why?

There are a number of practical reasons that should motivate a strong desire within you to live an obedient life.

Read the following Scripture references and write in your own words the reasons why you should obey God.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 _____

Jeremiah 29:11 _____

Jeremiah 42:6 _____

Luke 8:21 _____

Matthew 28:20 _____

Obedience – *How?*

The following four suggestions will show you how you can succeed in living an obedient life.

1. Knowing God's commands

It is important to have a sound knowledge of God's Word so that you may know what He desires for you. Throughout the Bible, God's truth lights up the way ahead in this darkened world for you to see correctly and walk safely, saving you from stumbling or heading in the wrong direction.

What do the following Scripture references say about this?

Psalms 119:11 _____

Psalms 119:105 _____

Psalms 119:130 _____

2 Timothy 3:16-17

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

d) _____

2. Operating in God's power

It's impossible to obey God in all things and at all times in your own strength. God strengthens you through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. Session 5 of this study revealed to you the following conditions for being filled with the Holy Spirit, daily ...

- You must first have the desire, and then ask the Holy Spirit to *control* your life
- You must willingly surrender control of your life to God
- You must be willing to obey all of God's commands; and
- You must be cleansed whenever you sin through confession, and repentance.

What do the following Scripture references say about God’s provision of supernatural power for believers?

Acts 1:8 _____

3. Having the right attitude

Having a right attitude towards serving God will do much in helping you enjoy an obedient life. The Word of God lists several attitudes you can develop which will help you in your desire to live in obedience to God.

What right attitudes are expressed in the following references?

Deuteronomy 26:16 _____

Psalms 40:8 _____

Luke 8:15 _____

4. Remaining alert to temptations

Experiencing success in your life through obedience requires you to remain alert to temptations – a real and present threat to your walk with God.

In the next study you will learn how to experience victory over temptations. In the meantime, see what God says about temptations when you face them in your life on earth?

1 Corinthians 10:13 _____

Summary

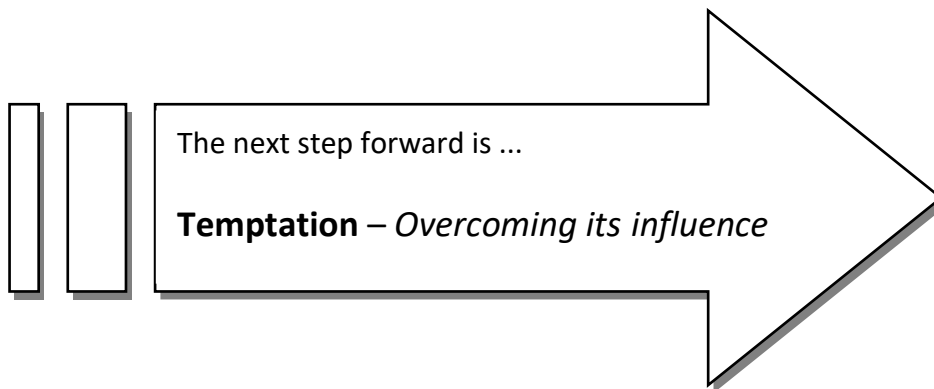
It is to your advantage to strive to live obediently in every area of your life. You can succeed in every circumstance of life if you keep in step with God through obedience; in thoughts, attitudes and actions – in your home, at school or work, at church and places of sport and recreation.

The first verse of the well-known hymn, “Trust and Obey”, says it well:

*When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will, He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.*

Keeping in step with God through wholehearted obedience is the surest, safest and most satisfying way to journey through your *temporal* life on earth, leading you to experience *eternal* life in a new world the Lord is creating (Revelation, Chapters 21-22).

I hope you now understand that obedience is for YOUR benefit, not God's!



Temptation – Overcoming its influence

8

The lure to sin

The next step in your spiritual growth journey is for you to have an adequate understanding of temptation and how to overcome its power to lure you into sin.

What is temptation?

Temptation is a “lure” that influences you from within to commit sin. In itself, temptation is not sin. However, if not dealt with correctly and speedily it can easily draw you into sin.

What does the following reference say about temptation?

James 1:14-15 _____

Satan is the author of all temptation and is relentless in his efforts to use old and new ways to bait you with attractive lures that are aimed at snaring you with sin’s harmful and destructive barbs.

How does the following reference characterise satan and reveal his intentions?

1 Peter 5:8 _____

Although temptation itself cannot take away your salvation, it can have a serious effect on your spiritual well-being and growth; causing disharmony with God, with others, and with the world in which you live.

God’s desire and plan for you is the enjoyment and celebration of His gift of an abundant life (John 10:10b) by guarding yourself against the power of temptation that abounds about you.

This session focuses on the:

- *Sources* of temptation, and
- *Conditions* for overcoming its power.

Flow of temptation

The Bible teaches that temptation to sin comes to us from three directions, but from the one source (satan):

- Satan
- The flesh; and
- The world

Satan

Satan is clearly shown in Scripture as the chief source of temptation to sin. From the Bible's opening book of Genesis to the closing book of Revelation we see satan at work, deceiving and tempting people to sin.

How did satan succeed in tempting Eve? Look carefully at what he said to her.

Genesis 3:1-5 _____

Throughout your earthly life, you can expect satan to be relentless in tempting you to *think* and *do* wrong through creating **D**oubt, **D**istortion and **D**eception in your mind... using his scripted "propaganda" (deliberate lies that are packaged to look like truth).

The flesh

This source refers to the old sin nature within every person. This old flesh-nature fights a life-long battle with your new Spirit-nature, seeking to draw you into old habits that are sinful (Galatians 5:17).

What are the characteristics of your *old* nature?

Galatians 5:19-21 _____

What are the characteristics of your *new* nature?

Galatians 5:22-23 _____

The world

This source of temptation involves the constant, subtle promptings that influence you to conform to the values and attitudes of our ever-changing earthly system. The following are worldly temptations to look-out for:

- Striving for security from position, power, possessions or accomplishments
- Viewing life as harmoniously-liveable apart from a vital relationship with God
- Believing that truth is not absolute, but is relative to every individual
- Adopting immoral standards of our everchanging godless world.

What important instructions do the following verses give concerning this matter?

Romans 12:2 _____

1 John 2:15-17 _____

Overcoming temptations power

The Bible outlines a number of general conditions for overcoming the power of temptation. Consider the following advice:

a) Be alert

We live in an environment of constant temptation. You need to be on-guard and alert at all times.

What caution is found in 1 Peter 5:8a? _____

b) Be filled

You cannot defeat temptation in your own strength - you need to be filled with supernatural power!

What is the source of this special power?

Acts 1:8 and Ephesians 5:18 _____

c) Be quick

You can't afford to delay when tempted - you need to act immediately! The longer you entertain temptation the weaker you become to its lure.

Describe the stages of progression into sin.

James 1:14-15 _____

d) Know biblical escapes

The good news is this: With every temptation God promises you a way of escape. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, the Lord says how you can gain victory over temptation. The Bible is filled with His ways of escape. For this reason, a growing knowledge of God's Word is essential to your success in this critical area of life.

What advice is given in the following references about escaping from the lure of temptation?

Matthew 4:1-11 _____

James 4:7 _____

e) Act by faith

It's important to always take biblical escape routes whether you *feel* like it or not. If you rely on feelings to motivate you to deal with temptations you will have already lost the battle.

What should be the motivation of your actions in life?

Philippians 2:13 _____

f) Prayer

Prayer plays an essential role in achieving victory in the fight against succumbing to temptation. The Bible clearly commands prayer for both your personal victory and the victory of others.

What do the following references instruct you to do?

Matthew 26:41 _____

Philippians 1:9-10 _____

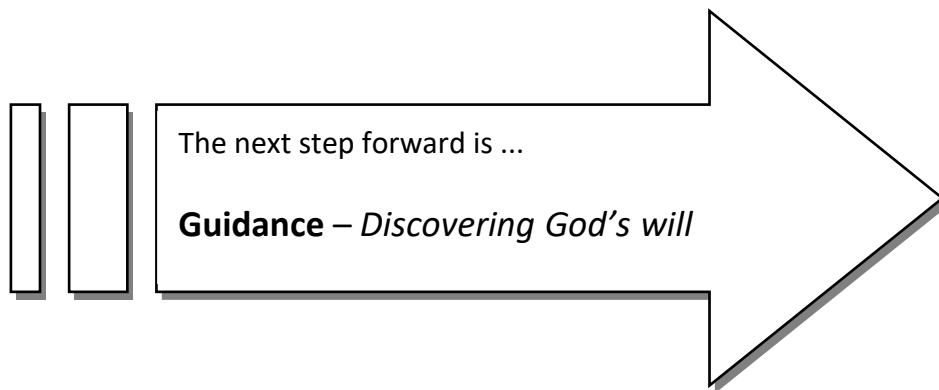
Summary

Trustworthy conditions for overcoming the power of temptation are...

- Be alert
- Be filled
- Be quick
- Know biblical escapes

- Act by faith; and
- Prayer.

Respect these conditions and you can be sure to live confidently and safely against the destructive forces of sin.



Privileged travellers

Life can be a painful and futile “hit-and-miss” journey of aimless wanderings or it can be a fulfilling journey that is divinely directed for purpose, satisfaction, and victory. Christians are privileged travellers who have been promised faithful and perfect guidance in life by their loving Heavenly Father.

God says to us [you] in Isaiah 42:16 ...

*“I will lead blind Israel [you] down a new path,
Guiding them [you] along an unfamiliar way.
I will make the darkness bright before them [you]
And smooth out the road ahead of them [you].
Yes, I will indeed do these things; I will not forsake them [you].”*

You don’t have to live as a victim of blind chance or be reliant upon your human ability for knowing the right way forward for your life. Through God’s guidance you can know how to stay in the centre of His will and enjoy a most satisfying life.

What do the following verses say about the quality of life you can expect from following God’s guidance?

Jeremiah 29:11 _____

Romans 8:28, 29 _____

Romans 12:2 _____

God has a *perfect* plan for you. Following His *general* and *special* guidance will lead you to experience His *good*, *pleasing* and *perfect* plan for your life.

Promises about finding God’s will

Consider these four promises the Bible gives regarding finding God’s will – *His plan for your life*.

1. God will give you precise *guidance* and *direction*

God promises to show you the right way to journey ahead in your life.

What do the following verses say about this?

Psalm 37:23-24 _____

Proverbs 3:5-6 _____

2. God will give you *wisdom* to discover His will

While God will not hide the knowing of His will from you, it's up to you to seek after it.

What do the following verses say about this?

Ephesians 5:17 _____

James 1:5 _____

3. God gives you a *desire* to do His will

From the moment you became a Christian, God's Holy Spirit began to work within you, helping you to live a life that is pleasing to God, to you, and others in your life.

What has God done to help you know His will?

Philippians 2:13 _____

4. God *warns* you when you depart from His will

As a Christian, you are blessed with a built-in warning device, called the "peace of Christ". Whenever you sense the loss of this peace you need to stop and look at where and how you have strayed/drifted from God's will.

How is this truth expressed in the following verse?

Colossians 3:15a _____

Note: The word "rule" comes from a Greek word that refers to the decision of a judge in an athletic event. It is the final deciding factor of knowing when you are in or out of God's will. Sensing the loss of His inner peace is not to *condemn* you but is to help *correct* you in some way .

Steps to finding God's will

There are certain steps that must be taken if you are to know God's leading in particular situations. The following five steps are vital in this matter.

1. Present your “body” to the Lord as a living sacrifice

God must be positioned and honoured as No. 1 in every area of your life. You do this through the willing surrender (and re-surrender) of your life to living for Him, and serving Him. You must give (gift) your life completely to Him before He will guide you in the discovery of His will for your life.

How does Paul present this truth?

Romans 12:1 _____

Presenting your life sacrificially to the Lord is a daily act of worship. As *living* sacrifices, we have a tendency of crawling off the altar of sacrifice whenever “things get too hot”. (The world in which we live is hostile to the truth and righteousness of God.)

2. Study God’s Word

God’s *general* will concerning living with right attitudes and actions is revealed in the Bible. You need to discover these truths and store them in your mind for actioning.

The following verses reinforce the role of Scripture in the discovery of God’s will.

Consider the following Scripture references and note the benefits that come from following God’s Word?

Joshua 1:8 _____

Psalms 119:105 _____

3. Obey what is shown to you

It is important that you obey every instruction, warning, direction and command given by God.

Your obedience is a test of your love of God, and proves your desire to understand and follow His will for your life. It is important to act on what the Holy Spirit reveals to you. God will not reveal the next step until you obey what He has already revealed!

God seldom shows us the end from the beginning before we make a move. He reveals only as much as you can respond-to, safely and precisely. Discovering more of God’s will is dependent on your readiness and willingness to obey.

What element is conditional to “receiving from God whatever you ask”?

1 John 3:21-22 _____

4. Counsel with mature Christians

In seeking to know God's will in certain matters, it is wise to consult with mature Christians who know you. Their counsel can be helpful because of their knowledge of God's Word and their sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's voice. Although you must not look to your counsellors to make your decisions, their advice can be very helpful.

How does the following verse state this truth?

Proverbs 11:14 _____

5. Pray consistently

Through prayer you can experience intimate communion with God and be more alert and open to His guidance. As you pray, much can be revealed to you.

You must be patient, however, allowing God to reveal His will for you. His perfect will involves His perfect timing!

What advice is given through the following verses concerning prayer?

Matthew 7:7-8 _____

James 1:5 _____

Summary

As you apply the truths of this lesson you will increasingly discover God's direction for your life.

Stepping out in faith and doing all that God directs will keep you satisfied and safe in His good, pleasing and perfect plan.



Testimony – *Telling your story*

Your life's mission

One of the most exciting moments in the life of a Christian is when asked by an unsaved friend to give an explanation of their Christian faith. Such a privileged moment should not be thought of as an uncommon event in the life of a committed believer.

When the Lord said to His disciples in Acts 1:8, “*You will **tell people about Me everywhere***”, He revealed to them their primary, life’s mission on earth. Our “story-telling” is not to be a one-time isolated event in life. Telling others about Jesus and the difference He has made in your life is why you are still here on earth. You are to live your life as His witness – “His-story” teller.

Most people become believers through Christian friends who explained their faith to them in ways that were non-threatening, simple and clear... resulting in understanding.

What two things does the Lord instruct you to do that will make it possible for you to *be* an effective witness?

1 Peter 3:15 _____

God has instructed you to always “be ready” (equipped, willing and available) to give an appropriate explanation of the Good News of your Lord Jesus Christ to those who ask. This is called sharing your testimony. Your personal testimony consists of the facts surrounding your first encounter with Jesus, your subsequent conversion and ways your life has changed.

This session is dedicated to showing you how you can prepare “your story”, expressing in simple and clear terms how the Lord drew you to Himself and the wonderful changes He has subsequently brought about in your life.

This session focusses on:

- Biblical examples
- Preparing your story
- Outlining your story; and
- Ted’s story.

Biblical example

The Apostle Paul was someone who was always ready to give an explanation of his faith in Christ. Wherever he went, no matter what was happening around him, he constantly looked for opportunities to share his faith. The incident recorded in Acts 26:1-23 demonstrates Paul's readiness and capability to share his faith in Christ.

While reading this passage you will see that Paul's testimony consisted of three parts:

Part 1: Paul's life – **before** knowing Christ (v1-11)

Part 2: Paul's life – his **conversion** encounter with Christ (v12-18)

Part 3: Paul's life – his **post-conversion** life (v19-23)

Preparing your story

Your faith story is as unique as you – there is no other story like your story! That makes your story very special, and worth telling.

The following is a list of things to consider that will help you in the preparation of your Good News story.

- a. Pray and ask God for wisdom before you begin writing (James 1:5)
- b. Develop your testimony around a three-point outline:
 - 1) Note your attitudes and actions *before* you became a Christian
 - 2) Relate your growing understanding and circumstances leading to your conversion encounter with Christ
 - 3) List changes in your attitudes and actions *after* you repented of your sins and surrendered your life to Christ.
- c. Keep your testimony brief (a maximum of one hand written A4 page).
 - 1) If you became a Christian as a child, emphasise point "b. 3)" above
 - 2) Be specific
 - 3) Give enough details to arouse interest
 - 4) Use Scripture only if it strengthens your testimony (don't preach)
 - 5) Edit and rewrite until it communicates simply, clearly and logically
 - 6) Be sure to define Christian terms that unsaved people might not understand.
 - 7) Read sample testimonies if available, and listen to others give their testimonies to help you find ways to improve yours
 - 8) Memorise it
 - 9) Keep copies handy to give to others when opportunities arise (be expectant that opportunities will arise).

Outlining your story

List in point form:

A. Your attitudes and actions before you became a Christian

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____
- f) _____
- g) _____

B. Circumstances that led to you surrendering your life to Christ (your conversion)

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____
- f) _____
- g) _____

C. Changes that took place in your life after receiving God's Holy Spirit – new attitudes and behaviour!

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____
- e) _____
- f) _____
- g) _____

The next step is to string together the above points; forming a smooth, free-flowing story that stirs interest in the minds of listeners. Invite your "Growing-Up" helper to offer fine tuning suggestions. When you think your story is ready to go public, make

copies and ask close friends to read your story and evaluate it for simplicity, clarity and understanding.

When no other improvements can be made to your story, make copies and keep them on hand for use at God-arranged opportunities.

Ted's story

Some time ago at the Gold Coast (Australia), the Holy Spirit led me to share "my story" with Ted Hodgson, a cleaner at Southport Police Station. (At that time, I was a serving police officer in Queensland.)

My friendship with Ted had grown quite quickly and he subsequently yielded his life to the Lord, and welcomed God's Spirit into his life. Ted followed the above "your story" suggestions in preparing his story.

Ted wrote...

As a child I went to church and Sunday school. I didn't really understand what it was all about. My past life was full of ups and downs with moments of joy and disappointment. There wasn't any real purpose in my life. I used to enjoy most forms of gambling very much.

A person I came to know at work told me about Jesus and His love for me. One day he asked me if I would like to invite God's Spirit to come into my life and I said, "Yes." So, on that day I was 'born again' (spiritually) and my whole life began to change.

Since that day I no longer have the desire to gamble. I read the Bible every day and I enjoy it very much. I try to obey God at all times and I have discovered that He answers all my prayers. I have been baptised and I now belong to a loving church family. I read a prayer that tells of how I feel about the Lord Jesus Christ. It reads:

*Lord Jesus Christ, my heart is yours,
My mind is yours; my whole being is yours,
You are my King, my Creator,
And my everlasting Lord, Amen.*

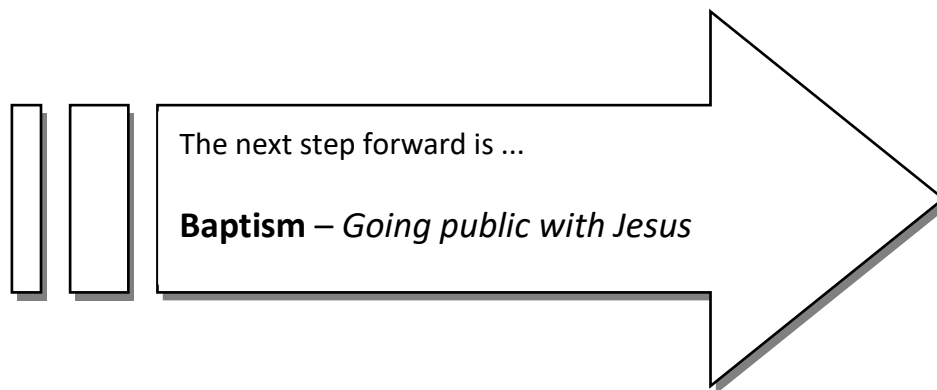
I am very happy in my new life and so glad that God accepted me into His family.

Ted Hodgson
(Ted has since gone to be with the Lord)

Summary

By God's grace and through His guidance, your readiness and willingness to tell your story can help and inspire someone else to take their own steps towards experiencing a new life in Jesus Christ.

When you have prepared your story, do your best to remain "at the ready" to give an explanation of your faith to someone who asks. Wherever you may be, the Holy Spirit will arrange such exciting opportunities for you.



Stepping-out in faith

Spiritual growth demands a private and public commitment to Jesus Christ through obedience to His revealed Word. This next step in your spiritual growth journey is the need for you to “go public” with your profession of faith. Jesus publicly identified with you (a sinner) and now, through baptism, He expects you to publicly identify with Him, and His church. The Lord says in Mark 8:38, if you are ever ashamed of Him in your life, He will be ashamed of you when He returns with His holy angels!

Although baptism is a *symbolic* act of your salvation, it remains a very important step for you to take in your commitment to live obediently to Christ.

How important is obedience in your relationship with God?

1 John 2:3 _____

Six aspects of baptism

- Commanded
- Symbolic
- Form
- Responsibility
- Biblical examples; and
- Your example

1. Commanded

Through obedience to His Father, Jesus began His public ministry by travelling to the Jordan River where He was baptised by John, the Baptist (Matthew 3:13).

What instruction did Jesus give to His disciples concerning baptism?

Matthew 28:19 _____

Baptism is commanded of those who are truly “born-again” – that is, those who have;

1. Repented of their sins
2. Believed in the Lord Jesus, and
3. Received the Holy Spirit into their lives, and who follow Him with their lives.

What did Peter instruct those who responded to his preaching to do?

Acts 2:38 _____

What was the result of Phillip’s message about the Kingdom of God and Jesus?

Acts 8:12 _____

What did the eunuch say immediately after he believed that Jesus is the Son of God?

Acts 8:36-37

2. Symbolic

Baptism is pictured in the New Testament in three ways:

Firstly, baptism symbolised imitating Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

(Read Romans 6:3-6.)

Baptism is symbolic of a watery grave. In the act of baptism, you bury your dead/sinful nature and, as just like Jesus, you are resurrected to live a new and eternal life – a life lived completely for God, in total obedience to Him.

Secondly, baptism is a picture of being submerged into God, just as a fish lives completely submerged in water. You are baptised into the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) and then live your life completely surrounded by and filled with God. This is often referred to as “putting on Christ”, like wearing a new and permanent piece of clothing (the righteousness of Christ).

(Read Matthew 28:19; Acts 8:16, 19:5; 1 Corinthians 1:13, 10:2; and Galatians 3:27.)

Thirdly, another picture of baptism is one of a new baby being welcomed into the Family of God. Just as a baby is born in a burst of water, so the believer’s spirit is reborn and they become a new child of God. In the Jewish faith into which Jesus was born, the new member of the family was initiated with a rite of circumcision, which was for boys only. But Jesus replaced this initiation rite with baptism which is inclusive of women and men, girls and boys.

(Read John 3:3-8, Galatians 3:27-29 and 1 Peter 1:23.)

3. Form

There are two basic forms baptism takes in Christian churches: Immersion and Pouring (or sprinkling).

Immersion

In churches that focus on the symbolism of dying and rising with Christ, similar to going down into the grave and rising again, baptism is usually performed by complete immersion of the believer in water. This is also an apt and beautiful picture of being immersed in the Holy Trinity.

Pouring (or sprinkling)

In churches that focus more on the symbolism of initiating the new believer into the Family of God, baptism is usually performed by *pouring* or *sprinkling* water on the head of the new believer.

What should you do?

I advise you to look entirely to Scripture, asking the Holy Spirit, who resides within you, to make clear to you the particular form of baptism He is instructing you to follow.

Whichever form you choose, your baptism should declare all three symbols:

- 1) Death and resurrection,
- 2) Immersion in the Holy Trinity, and
- 3) Initiation into the New Covenant Family of God (His church).

4. Responsibility

- a. Baptism symbolises your union with Christ. This union carries a responsibility. What is this responsibility?

John 15:16 _____

What does the following reference say?

Galatians 3:27 _____

- b. Baptism also symbolises your union with the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). This too carries a responsibility for every believer. What is this responsibility?

Ephesians 4:16 _____

5. Biblical examples

The following biblical references show that immediately *after* a person professed belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, baptism **followed**. There was no waiting time to analyse feelings or gauge public opinion. God commanded, and they obeyed!

Acts 2:41; 8:12-13; 8:36-39; 9:17-18
Acts 10:47-48; 16:14-15; 16:31-33; and 18:8.

However, as the church grew, it became apparent that some people were not living the Christian life, even though they'd been baptised. They were causing much confusion and problems in the church. They hadn't really understood what they had committing to – that becoming a follower of Jesus Christ demanded a radical change in lifestyle. So, the church instituted a particular teaching, making clear what following

Christ meant... before baptising new believers. In pagan cultures (like Australia), this can take as much as one year or more of instruction.

Read the following Scripture references to make sure you understand the nature of your new life in Christ before going through with your baptism.

Matthew 19:29-30; 22:37-39; Mark 8:34-37 and Luke 14:25-33.

6. Your example

Jesus went public with His life and love for you and every other true believer. He went as far as the cross and beyond.

Have you gone public with your life and love for Jesus through baptism?

To know Jesus is to love Him. And, as you grow in your love for Him you should be glad to obey Him in all things, at all times (1 John 5:3).

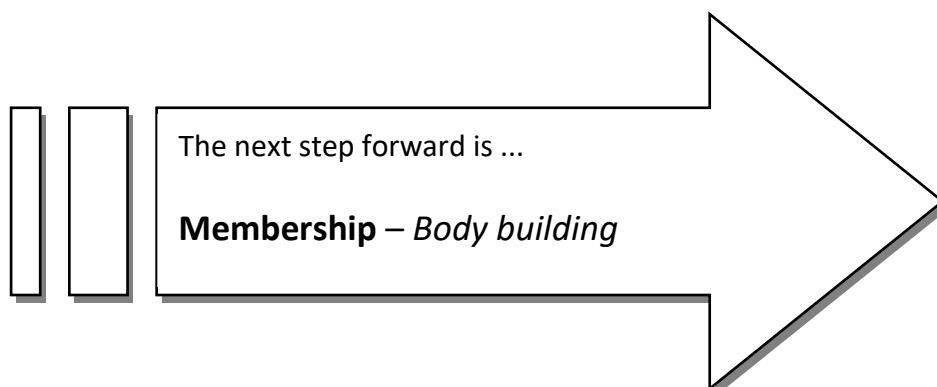
Note on “Confirmation”

People who were baptised by their parents as babies, but who, until now, have not been true followers of Jesus Christ, wonder if their baptisms were valid, or if they should be baptised again, now that they have made their own free-will decision to follow the Lord.

The Bible references shown above make clear that baptism always “followed” belief... never preceded it! Before a person is baptised, they need to publicly declare their newfound faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ - A baby/infant cannot do this!

Summary

Baptism is the first step of obedience commanded by the Lord of those who profess a genuine belief in Him. Baptism also is a “public” act of identification of faith in Jesus Christ, and professes a “belonging” to His church. When should a believer be baptised? Scripture implies: NOW is always the best time to obey the Lord! NOW is the best time to *go public with Jesus* through your baptism!



You must play your part well

The moment you surrendered your life to Jesus Christ He received you into His Body – His *universal* and *local* church as an eternal-life member.

Membership into the church is a privileged gift to all believers. However, with membership comes responsibility. Membership into the church means much more than just receiving a handshake and having your name entered in a church register.

Membership is all about responsible function – *playing your part well* in the everyday life of your church. Through active proper membership the following is accomplished:

- Your personal growth
- Growth of other believers in your church
- Kingdom of God growth, by reaching out to unsaved friends through practical expressions of love and sharing with them the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The following is helpful to gaining a better understanding of what membership is about and should motivate you to want to serve as an active member of your church - serving others through your unique personality, character, spiritual gifts, experiences and talents. Note: Nothing in your past, present or future life is of waste!

Biblical Perspective

What term does Paul use to depict *believers* in the church?

1 Corinthians 12:12 _____

What term does Paul use to depict the *church*?

1 Corinthians 12:12 _____

List the different things Paul says in the following references about members in the church.

a. 1 Corinthians 12:14 _____

b. 1 Corinthians 12:18 _____

c. 1 Corinthians 12:25 _____

d. 1 Corinthians 12:26 _____

e. 1 Corinthians 12:27 _____

How is the *joining* and *knitting* together of different members in the whole body of the church accomplished?

Ephesians 4:16 _____

What is the goal of active membership in your church?

Ephesians 4:12, 13 _____

Biblical Practice

The New Testament church exploded in size after Peter's open-air sermon at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (annual Jewish festival). At that time, God added about 3,000 new believers to the existing 120 disciples.

Following this large addition to the existing church of 120, how did the new believers express their on-going commitment to God and each other through membership?

Acts 2:42 tells us ... "*They continued steadfastly in ...*"

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

What else did the members of this new church do?

Acts 2:44 _____

Summary

Your new life in Christ is not to be an isolated experience. By God's design you are to function as a committed, "community" member of His Body, the Church – contributing to the Body what is needed for growth – contributing your uniqueness and God-given gifts, time, talents and treasure to this aim.

You are, and have, what the Church of Jesus Christ needs to grow!

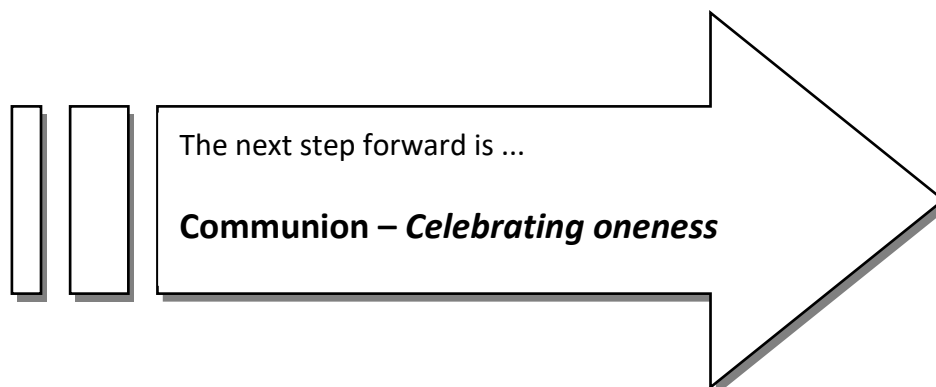
Through a responsible involvement in the church, you and other believers can enjoy unity, harmony, peace and spiritual growth through a commitment of mutual love toward each other. In His Church (universal and local) membership is:

- Ordained by God,
- About serving and honouring God,
- Good for you and others; and
- Not an option for those who desire spiritual growth!

If you're not a member of your church, take urgent steps as soon as possible and become one. Have your membership acknowledged publicly in the presence of your church family. Begin serving the Body of Christ, your church, through using your special gifts, talents, personality, education and experiences. Your growth, and the growth of your church, depends upon your membership being active and righteous.

Right now, commit to being a God-honouring *server* in your church, not a self-gratifying, jelly-belly *observer*.

Take this important step in your spiritual growth - Be a determined and dedicated Body-Builder of the Body of Christ, through conscientious service in your church.



Remembering Jesus

Jesus left His followers two ordinances to help them to “remember” Him: *Baptism* and the *Lord’s Supper* (sometimes called Communion or Eucharist). These two ordinances are purely symbolic and can be defined as *outward* rituals commanded by the Lord to be observed by all believers throughout their lives on earth.

The Lord’s Supper should be understood by all believers as being a very special event in their lives and the life of their church, reminding them of their hope which is in Christ’s life, death and resurrection.

Having a right understanding of what Communion is about makes it possible for you to share in the joy and blessings of this victory celebration. It also helps to deepen your relationship with God and with other believers in your church.

In this session, we will consider five aspects of the Communion Supper:

- Authority
- Symbolism
- Reflection
- Benefit; and
- Frequency.

1. Authority

The Lord’s Supper was instituted by Jesus and celebrated with His disciples on the night of His betrayal and arrest. It was Jesus who commanded His followers, “*Do this to remember Me*” (Matthew 26:26-30 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

2. Symbolism

According to 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, what do the symbols, “the bread” and “the cup”, used in the Lord’s Supper represent?

The Bread (v. 23-24) _____

The Cup (v. 25) _____

Both together (v. 26) _____

Note: Several Christian denominations teach what is called “Transubstantiation”... meaning that at the time of their celebration of the Communion the bread used becomes the actual *body* of Christ, and the wine becomes the actual *blood* of Christ. They do not hold on to the view that the bread and wine are mere symbols.

3. Reflection

When celebrating the Lord's Supper, you are able to experience the Lord in a number of unique ways. At this time, you have an ideal opportunity to reflect ...

- **Backward:** Gratefully remembering Christ who suffered and died for you (a sinner)
- **Forward:** Reminding yourself of Jesus' promise to return for you; one day you will be with Him in Heaven
- **Inward:** Examining your life – confessing any sins, repenting and re-dedicating your life to the Lord
- **Outward:** The Lord's Supper is a communion celebration - an honest sharing in *oneness* with Him and with other believers. We have been united through Jesus! A question to ask yourself at such times is: *"How is my relationship with the Lord and with others?"*

4. Benefit

The benefits of sharing in the Lord's Supper are both spiritual and physical:

Spiritual

By eating and drinking the Communion elements you show your acceptance of all that is signified by the body and blood (death and resurrection) of Jesus.

What does 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 says about this?

Physical

The Communion elements also represent the physical dimension of food and drink, necessary to sustain your physical life. Remembering your need of physical food can remind you of your greater need for the Lord, Jesus Christ – your spiritual food.

What does Jesus say about this in John 6:35?

5. Frequency

Scripture does not say how often we should practice the Lord's Supper. Some churches celebrate Communion weekly, some bi-monthly, and others monthly.

Frequency is therefore a matter of personal choice of each individual church. However, care must be taken to prevent the Holy Communion from becoming a boring, meaningless ritual... full of religious glitter but empty of reverence of the Lord and gratitude for His gracious, sacrificial love.

The elements commonly used to symbolise the body and blood of Christ are bread and grape juice, or wine (according to the tradition of your church).

Summary

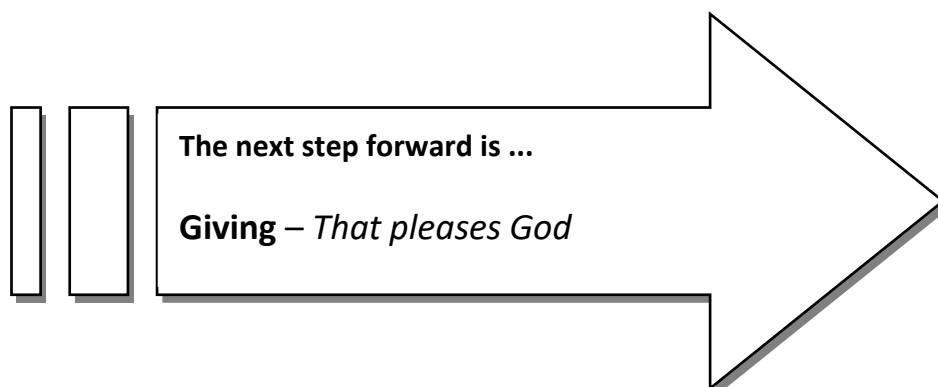
The Lord's Supper should be celebrated as a special event in the life of every believer and church:

- It's a special time to express your heart felt thanks and gratitude to your Heavenly Father for the sacrificial gift offering of His Son, through His death on the cross, His burial, and His resurrection
- It's also a special time to remember your eternal hope which is in Christ. You are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- It's also an opportune time to be honest about your relationship with others in your life. Communion with the Lord demands communion with one another!

Sharing our Communion in the Lord is a privilege and should always be taken very seriously.

Look forward to this special time with a sincere heart of thanks and with a spirit of celebration because, through Jesus, you are being reminded that you *have* the victory over sin and death right now!

Communion can also remind you of your eternal *oneness* with Jesus, your God and Saviour, and with other believers.



Becoming a giver like Him

The next step forward in your spiritual growth journey looks at the discipline of becoming a “giver”... just like God!

Perhaps nothing else in life makes us more uncomfortable than the matter of giving something of value - in particular, money. Why?

Because of our sinful nature, selfishness has us reluctant and hesitant to give in ways that are right and pleasing to God. Whenever this happens, selfishness robs us from experiencing one of life’s most wonderful and satisfying joys and prevents God from blessing others through our lives. We lose – everyone loses!

God’s nature is quite different - He is a giver, and He delights to give! He delights to give good things to those who belong to Him – those who purposefully choose to live in ways that are pleasing to Him.

Growing-up into the likeness of Jesus Christ requires that you take this next step forward in the matter of giving in a way that pleases God. God wants you to *be* like Him – and therefore wants you to learn to *give* like Him.

The following five aspects of giving are necessary to your understanding before you know how, when, and why to give in ways that are pleasing to the Lord:

- Authority
- Amount
- Attitude
- Purpose; and
- Promises.

1. Authority

The practice of giving a portion of one’s income to God is an ancient, Jewish practice found in the Old Testament.

What instruction about giving did God give to the Nation of Israel?

Deuteronomy 14:22 _____

Giving to God is based on the belief that we are stewards of His property. Everything we have, including our lives, comes from the hand of God. Money and material possessions that we gain are not ours. They belong to God. They are given to us in trust as His stewards to manage in accordance to His will and pleasure.

God is the Supreme authority for giving.

2. Amount

The Old Testament is the only place in the Bible that actually specifies an *amount* (percentage) concerning how much of their income the Israelites had to give to God.

What amount did Jacob and Abraham pledge to God?

Genesis 28:22 _____

Hebrews 7:2, 4 _____

What amount did God expect from His people?

Malachi 3:10 _____

Tithing means the giving of 10% of one's income to God (before government tax!).

What accusation did God make against His people?

Malachi 3:8 _____

Today we live in the New Testament age of *grace* and therefore are not bound by the Old Testament *law* of tithing. Although you don't *have to* give 10% of your income as a steward of all that God has entrusted into your care it's important for you to see that giving is now a blessed, free-will offering... a privilege!

Many Christians today use the principle of tithing as a good "starting" point for how much to give to God's work on earth. The amount you decide to give to God is a personal, confidential matter between you and Him.

A good principle to live by is: *Give in proportion to what the Lord has/is giving to you.*

3. Attitude

Giving that pleases God must also result from a right attitude.

Read the following verses and identify the attitudes that should be present in your giving.

1 Chronicles 29:17 _____

Ezra 2:68 _____

Matthew 6:4 _____

2 Corinthians 9:7 _____

Whenever you give *willingly, generously, discreetly* and *cheerfully* your giving will be pleasing to God.

Remember: With God, *attitude* is always more important than *amount*!

4. Purpose

Psalm 50:10-12 makes it abundantly clear that God is the owner of everything in the world in which we live. The purpose of your giving, therefore, cannot be because God has need of your money and possessions... things of which He already owns!

We learn from God's Word that the purpose of our giving is to teach us to have a right view of money, material things, and our God. Having a right perspective of God and the material world gives you a right perspective to live righteously on earth.

What does Jesus say about living with a right priority – and what does He promise you if you choose to maintain such a priority in your life?

Matthew 6:33 _____

Remember: Your No. 1 priority in life must be the pursuit of God, not things!

The main purpose of your giving is to grow your faith and dependence on God's promises to meet **all** your "needs". When you trust God in your giving, your faith will grow in other areas of your life. Each time you give to God with a willing heart you demonstrate the quality and quantity of your trust in Him.

Another important purpose of your financial giving is to enable the planned ministries of your church to be accomplished. God has given you gifts of time, talent and treasure and has placed you in His church to help meet her needs according to His leading and purposes.

In 1 Chronicles 29:3 and Nehemiah 10:38-39, the people of God were directed to give to the work of rebuilding the House (Temple) of God.

According to the following reference what is the House of God?

1 Timothy 3:15 _____

The financial needs of your church are the responsibility of her believer-members. God has entrusted into your management His resources for the life, ministry and mission of the church. Your church cannot grow and function as it should without your faithful, free-will offering.

5. Promises

When believers give in ways that please God, they can expect to enjoy tremendous promises from Him.

What promises are expressed in the following references?

Luke 6:38 _____

Acts 20:35 _____

2 Corinthians 9:6 _____

What general challenge does God make in the matter of giving?

Malachi 3:10 _____

Summary

God has entrusted much in your care. As God's steward, you are to manage (invest, not store away) His things wisely as one day you will have to give an account to God of your management of everything He has blessed you with.

If you truly desire much out of the Christian life you must be willing to give much, but remember: your giving must always be in ways that are pleasing to God – always according to His:

- Authority
- Amount
- Attitude
- Purpose; and
- Promises.

It is so blessed to give in ways that are pleasing to God! Whenever you *give* to God, you will always *get* more in return from Him (not limited to monetary or material blessings). This should be your experience! If not, re-examine your mode and motivation of giving to Him... something may be amiss.

Where to now?

The fourteen steps you have taken through these topical studies represent the *foundation* phase of your spiritual growth journey. Remember: You haven't arrived, but you have made a great start.

Beware of the temptation to stop at this point in your journey. There is much more of your new life in Christ waiting ahead for you to experience and enjoy.

Remember that your goal in life is to grow-up fully, spiritually mature, so that your life may become more and more an 'imitation' of the life of our Lord, Jesus Christ - That is God's ultimate plan for you. Remember what the Lord says in Romans 8:29 ...

"For God knew His people [you] in advance, and He chose them [you] to become like His Son ..."

Progress in your spiritual growth is dependent upon your commitment to remain enthusiastic, ready and willing to take the next step forward in your faith journey. This journey is life-long!

Additional growing steps for your consideration:

- Discover and develop your spiritual gifts through service in the life of your church
- Learn how to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in a simple, clear and friendly manner
- Maintain healthy connections with your unchurched friends
- Deepen your spiritual walk through good devotional studies
- Join a healthy, purposeful small group in your church
- Undergo training to be a facilitator of a small group in your church.

As you journey in your faith, be sure to keep hold of God's promise ...

"The steps of the godly are directed by the Lord, He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will not fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand" (Psalm 37:23-24).

Growing-up into the likeness of Jesus Christ happens as you continue following in His footsteps.

I wish you well in this most satisfying and rewarding life-transforming journey.

Bill

Prayer Guide

*“Always be joyful. **Keep on praying.** No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus”*
(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Promise: “The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results” (James 5:16).