

# Spiritual Growth Study Series



Fox Valley Church of Christ

# Spiritual Growth Study Series

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# Introduction

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In Matthew 28:18-19, Jesus called his disciples to go and make disciples of people of all nations. Part of that call to discipleship is for disciples to teach other disciples to obey everything that Jesus commanded. This call commits us to an ongoing lifestyle of both learning and teaching. There is never a time when we will have “arrived” and no longer need to learn, but only need to teach others. Of course, as Jesus’ disciples, we should always be teaching others in one way or another, but to follow Jesus is to commit to a lifelong ethic of learning as well.

We start that journey when others sit with us and begin to teach us what it means to follow Jesus as his disciple and to enter into his life. But that journey doesn’t end when we enter the water to be immersed into Christ. Through the pages of this Bible study series we continue that lifelong journey of learning to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

## How Should We Approach These Studies?

- These studies are intended to be flexible and user friendly
- There is no one way to approach these studies
  - You might want to sit down and go through these studies in a discipling partnership and mentor a new disciple through the series
  - You might want to start each study or do a quick overview and encourage the new disciple to work through the remainder of the study on their own and then come back and discuss the highlights of what you learned during your next time of meeting

## Which Studies Should We Do?

- Again, there is no one way to go through this study series
- The studies are written to follow a certain logical progression and you are encouraged to consider going through every study
- But you may find that it meets your needs to only go through some of the studies
  - There is a logical progression but each study stands alone as well and the studies of this series are suitable for flexibility of doing them in a different order or only choosing some
- You may find that some of the studies are longer than what you have time for in one sitting and discover that it takes you two or even three times to really dig into and discuss through just one study
  - Don’t worry about that
  - This isn’t a race
  - In fact, you have your whole life to learn to be Jesus’ disciple
  - Building well is far more important than building fast

## Didn’t We See That Already?

- As you go through the studies, you might begin to notice certain passages of Scripture or certain concepts popping up several times throughout the series
  - That is no accident
  - We believe that human beings learn best through subtle repetition
  - This means that important concepts and passages that are vital for the new disciple to know and live by are repeated liberally so as to help us really absorb the full meaning of that particular concept or passage

# Faith – Study 1

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There are different meanings to the word faith. In our culture we often times use “faith” to mean something more like “hope,” such as “I have faith that they will show up on time this week.” In the Bible there are two primary meanings to the word faith. One is a noun, as in they became believers in “the faith” or they were urged to stay strong in “the faith.” The other usage, the one that we will focus on today, is the action of living based on what we know to be true about God’s word. Faith is a fundamental and vital element to the believer because, among other reasons, Hebrews 11:6 reminds us sternly that without faith it is impossible to please God.

## **What is Faith?**

### **Hebrews 11:1-2**

- Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see
- Do you think that faith then applies to anything we want that we cannot see?
- The context of this passage is very important
  - This passage, in larger context, has to do with living by the reality of the resurrection age, which is the great Christian hope
  - We are called to be certain of that reality and live according to the values of that age now even though we do not yet see it
- By reading this in context, does this give a fuller understanding to your previous understanding of faith?

### **Romans 4:18-22**

- What is faith according to this passage?
- Abraham was credited as righteous because he had faith that what God promised was true and worth living by
- There is an important principle here that we should not overlook
  - We can only right have biblical faith in the things that God promises us and those things that God tells us we can have faith in
    - Can I rightly have faith in being resurrected?
    - Can I rightly have faith in the Spirit to guide me through difficult times?
    - Can I rightly have faith in God providing for my basic needs as long as I seek his kingdom first?
    - Can I rightly have faith that God will help me get the exact job or house that I want?
  - Which of the above four statements were something in which we cannot rightly have biblical faith?
- How does understanding this help adjust your previous understanding of faith?

### **2 Corinthians 5:7**

- What does it mean to walk by faith and not by sight?
- This is another passage where, in context, Paul was referring directly to the hope of resurrection
- What does it mean to be a people that walk by faith in the truth of resurrection rather than sight?

### **James 2:14-24**

- Faith is not just mentally agreeing with something
- It is acting on what we believe
- To have true faith, we must also “do”
- Faith is action induced by belief and gratitude

- Genuine faith does not involve thinking that I earn my status in Christ based on what I do because faith is completely reliant upon God

## **From Where Does Our Faith Come?**

### **Romans 10:17**

- From what does faith come?
- The fact that faith comes from God's word enforces the fact that we can only have faith in the things that God has promised through his word

### **Romans 12:3**

- God has distributed faith to each person
- Our faith comes directly as a result of the grace of God

### **1 Corinthians 2:4-5**

- Our faith must rest on God's power and God's word

### **Galatians 3:26**

- We enter into a life of faith by having faith in and entering into the life of Christ
- Dying to ourselves and being baptized into Christ is a declaration that we are going to join the people that live by faith

### **Matthew 9:1-2**

- What does this verse teach us about faith?
- Notice that it says that Jesus "saw" their faith? What does this teach us about faith?
- They believed in Jesus but they also took action on that belief?

## **What Can Lack of Faith do?**

### **Matthew 13:53-58**

- What kept the people from experiencing the fullness of God's power?
- If we don't believe in God's word or don't act on that belief then we can keep the power of God from working in our life?
- Why is it important to understand that lack of faith can inhibit God's power in our lives?

## **Ongoing Faith**

### **Ephesians 3:10-12**

- We develop our relationship with God and continue in the community of Christ, the church, through faith in what God said rather than what we see or feel
- What does this mean in practical terms as it relates to being part of a family of believers?

### **Ephesians 6:16**

- Faith often times does not make sense but it draws us into our relationship with God and protects us from the attacks of Satan
- Faith protects us not because it always makes sense or is the most comfortable course of action but because we are obedient and take action in what God has guided us to do
- What do you think might be challenging to you about living a life of ongoing faith?

### **Hebrews 10:38-39**

- The righteous will live by faith in the life of Christ

- We are called to live by faith and not shrink back, regardless of what our sight or feelings might be telling us
- As we continue on our journey of discipleship, it will demand us to walk by faith in God and believe the things that the Word of God says to be true, oftentimes despite appearances

### **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about faith that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# The Balance of Faith & Works – Study 2

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What is more important in the life of disciple? To live by faith or to live by works of righteousness? Which one saves us? Which one keeps us saved? Which is more important? Sometimes we can begin to think that these are two opposing forces as though we must either rely on faith and God's grace or on our own works. This can be especially tricky for new Christians, because older Christians often pass along the mindset of giving lip-service to God's grace but then in reality live by a mentality that lives and dies on their own performance and works. The key is to find a healthy and biblical common ground between a mentality that chalks even the most lukewarm and disobedient behavior up the warm embrace of God's grace and the mentality that believes that one must constantly be working and succeeding spiritually to earn and keep God's favor. A biblical balance must be found.

## What is the Role of Faith?

### Hebrews 11:6

- Our last study focused in quite directly on what faith is
- It is important to know what exactly faith is because we will be unable to please God and follow the resurrection life that he has laid out for us if we do not have faith
- What two important elements of faith are mentioned here?
  - We must believe that God exists but what else must we do to have true faith?
- Faith is not simply to have intellectual agreement with the word of God in some vague way that demands nothing of my life other than that little change in one area of my belief system
- In your own words, define faith according to the truths that we studied in our last Bible study on faith

### James 1:22-27; 2:16-24

- True faith results in genuine action
- That is why Jesus followed the call to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength with the command to love one another
  - How we love others is the demonstration and action point of our love for God
- What is the inter-relationship between faith and obedience according to this passage?

### John 8:31-32

- Can you have true faith without obedience?
- Why did Jesus challenge the Jews who had "believed" or agreed with him up to that point to abide in or hold firmly to his teachings?

## What is the Role of Works?

### Ephesians 2:8-10

- By what are we saved according to this passage?
- Why is it important to know that we are not saved by our own works and efforts?
- What should our salvation result in our part, though?
- Our obedience and works are the verifier or evidence of the genuineness of our faith

### 2 Kings 5:1-15

- In what ways does this incident serve as a wonderful picture of the role of God's grace in our salvation and the necessity of our obedience?
- Naaman's healing was by the grace of God but he still needed to be obedient in his efforts

- If he was not obedient, he would have kept himself from receiving God's unmerited favor

## **What is the Role of Grace?**

### **Titus 3:4-8**

- By what are we saved?
- By what are we not saved?
- Through the grace and mercy shown to us at our baptism, we were saved
  - Mercy is the act of not giving a negative consequence that has been earned
  - Grace is earning something negative and being given something positive that we did not earn instead; it is an act of unmerited favor
- Why is it important to know that we are not saved by our own works and efforts?
- What should our salvation result in our part, though?
- Why is it important to know that God's merciful salvation should result in our gratitude and willingness to engage in works of righteousness?

### **Romans 8:1**

- Why does this say that there is no condemnation in Christ?
- As long as we remain in Christ, we have no guilt or condemnation. Our sin is forgiven once-for-all in Christ and we are hidden in him (Col. 3:3) so that when God looks at us he sees Christ
- Remaining in Christ means that we have been given his life and are seated in the heavenly realms with him (Ephesians 2:6) and are called to live up to that gift (Philippians 3:16)

### **Romans 6:1-4; Jude 1:4**

- Grace can be abused; the grace of God is not a license to continue in sin
- Why do you think it can be so dangerous to misunderstand God's grace and take advantage of it?

### **2 Corinthians 5:16-19**

- Why is it important to remember that God does not count our sins against in when we are in Christ?
- How does knowing this help us to avoid guilt and rely on his grace?

### **2 Corinthians 12:6-10**

- We certainly should not choose to continue in sin so as to bring about God's grace but what does this passage demonstrate about the importance of understanding God's grace?
- When we find weakness and inability in our lives, why is it vital to remember God's grace?

### **Titus 2:11-14**

- What does God's grace call us to do in response?

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about faith, works, grace and the balance between those three things that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Knowing God – Study 3

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The last thing that God wants from his people is for us to muddle around in blind obedience to his word without knowing why we obey and without having a relationship with him and his people. Obeying rules without knowing why is really the essence of what religion is. Christianity is most certainly not a religion. At least true Christianity is not. God wants us to know him and have a relationship with him. That is his desire and that should be our desire as well.

## What Does God Want From His People?

### Jeremiah 9:23-24

- A “boast” in the ancient world was something in which you trusted and relied on to bring you status and identity. How does this help you understand what these verses are saying?
- Why does God not want his people to rely on some of the things listed in these verses?
- Why does God want our “boast” to be in him?

### Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Hebrews 8:11)

- God promised that a New Covenant would come with an identifying characteristic that his people would know him intimately because they had chosen to be in relationship with him
- This doesn’t mean that we don’t need to be taught things about following Jesus or having a relationship with God but that at his people we don’t need to be taught about who he is
- God wants us to go beyond just following rules and being religious
- He wants us to be in relationship with him and his people
- Why do you think this is a desire of God’s?

## How Can We Know God?

### Through His Word

#### Matthew 4:4

- We can know God through his word by completely relying on it as the source of our thoughts, beliefs, actions, and direction in life
- What are some of the things in our world that compete for our attention as the source of our thoughts, beliefs, actions, and direction in life?

### Romans 16:25-26

- We can come to an intimate knowledge of God through his word which enables us to obey him
- We obey God because of our relationship with him
- Why is it important that our relationship with God is the source of our obedience?
- What do you think the following sentence means: “Rules without relationship leads to rebellion”
- We want to move past just obeying God without knowing why or without knowing him; that is religion
- God want us to have a relationship with him and his people not religion

### Through Jesus

#### John 10:2-5, 14

- If a stranger walked in and claimed to be your best friend and gave the name of your best friend as his own name, you would know better because you know your friend

- If a stranger walked in and introduced himself but used some other fake name that you had never heard, then you probably wouldn't know the difference because you don't that stranger
- In the same way, we should know Jesus so well that we immediately know his voice whether it comes through his word, the godly advice of another person, or anything else; we should also know when hear things that claim to be from Jesus but are not

### **John 14:7**

- As we come to know Jesus through our relationship with him, we will also know the Father

### **Through Prayer Philippians 4:6-7**

- What sorts of things can we take to God in prayer?
- As we pray we will get to know God better and he will reveal himself and his nature to us
- We should not be discouraged that this is a process that takes time, just like any relationship
- We can know God immediately as our Father but it does take time to truly know him and be known at the deepest intimate levels

### **Matthew 6:9-13**

- What are the things that we can learn about our relationship with God by praying like this (Jesus did not mean for us to just recite this prayer word-for-word but to pray in this manner)
  - Our relationship with God as our Father (v. 9)
  - How holy he is and how much we should appreciate and revere that (v. 9)
  - To value his kingship and desire to know and carry out his will rather than our own (v. 10)
  - That we need to rely on him for our daily needs (v. 11)
  - That we need to become like him and take on his nature and character in every part of our lives (v. 12)
  - That we need to rely on him to keep us secure in the life of Christ (v. 13)
- When we get to know God on all of those levels then we can truly have a deep relationship with him

### **John 15:7**

- When we walk with God and remain in Christ's life and live by his will then we will get to a point where whatever we ask will be given to us because our will is in lock-step with his will
- Do you feel that there are still areas in which God's will and your will are completely aligned? What are those areas?
- Being in lock-step with God's will is to have true relationship with him

### **Through His People**

#### **John 21:15-17; Matthew 25:34-46; 1 John 4:20-21**

- Being in a restored relationship with God means that what is true for God is true of his people
- We love God mostly clearly by the way we love other Christians and we will most tangibly experience God's love through the love of other Christians
- Why is it so vital to understand that our relationship with God is the clearest indicator of our relationship with the Father?

### **By Stepping out in Faith**

- One way that we can truly know God that is often overlooked is to experience him directly by trusting him. Great athletes come to be known as great because someone trusted them to perform and they have come through time and time again. This develops trust and the knowledge that they can be relied on again in the future. In the same way, we can get to know God at a certain level only when we step out in faith and give him the opportunity to provide for us and show himself to be faithful

- When we see God work in answer to our faith we learn to trust him and know him intimately
- The Bible is full of example of people stepping out in faith in response to God and learning to know God
- Take time this week to study out these examples of this principle:
  - Genesis 22:10
  - Exodus 18:10-11
  - 1 Kings 17:7-24
  - 2 Kings 5:1-15
  - Acts 12:5-11
  - Romans 4:17-21
  - 2 Timothy 1:12

### **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about knowing God that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Speaking With God – Study 4

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One of the most important aspects of a relationship with anyone is communication. It is no different in our relationship with God. Speaking with God, prayer, is vital to both our spiritual growth and our ongoing depth and understanding of our relationship with God.

## **The Importance of Prayer**

### **Mark 1:35**

- Jesus was extremely busy but even he found time to pray because he knew he needed it to strengthen his flesh (Luke 6:12; Hebrews 5:7)
- He consistently found times and places that were free from distraction and focused on his time with the Father

### **Psalm 63:1**

- Do you have this kind of earnestness for your time to speak with God each day? Do you truly rely on him?

## **Learning to Pray**

### **Luke 11:1-13**

- Jesus' disciples had to be taught much about prayer
- Learning to pray is a process
- What important truths about prayer and how to go about it do we learn from this passage?
- What are some ways that you could go about learning to pray effectively and consistently?

### **Matthew 6:8**

- One extremely important element of learning to pray is knowing why we pray
- Why pray if our Father already knows what we need?
- Think of a parent and a child
  - Would you give a child absolutely everything that they want before they even ask?
    - You wouldn't because then they would never learn gratitude for you meeting their needs after asking
    - They would never learn recognition of the parent as their provider
    - They would never learn to appropriately rely on their parents
    - They would never learn the boundaries of what they should and should not ask for
    - They would never learn to not be selfish as they see how much they actually ask for things and the cost of meeting those needs
    - They would never have the opportunity to learn what they can do on their own without needing the parent to do it for them

### **Luke 8:9-14**

- What attitude does God want us to learn to have as we pray?
- What happens to those who exalt themselves?
- What happens to those who humble themselves?
- What does this teach us about prayer?

### **1 Corinthians 14:15**

- What are two things that we are called to pray with?
- What does it mean to pray with our spirit?

- What does it mean to pray with our mind?

## **Obstacles to Prayer**

### **1 Peter 4:7**

- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here?
- What can you do to overcome a lack of alertness or concentration when you pray?

### **Psalm 66:18**

- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here? How do you think this can hinder our prayers?
- What can we do to overcome cherishing sin in our heart?

### **Mark 11:24**

- What potential obstacle to prayer is alluded to here?
- What can be done to overcome a lack of faith?

### **Mark 11:25**

- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here?
- How can a lack of forgiveness for others hinder our prayers?

### **1 Peter 3:7**

- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here?
- How do you think that unresolved sin and problems within a marriage (or close relationship) can hinder our prayer?

### **Luke 18:1-8**

- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here?
- How can a lack of faith and/or perseverance be a hindrance to prayer? What can we do about it?

### **1 John 5:14**

- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here?
- How can praying contrary to God's will be such a potential hindrance?

## **What God Wants**

### **Philippians 4:6-7**

- What can we pray about?
- God wants us to cast our anxieties and worries upon him (1 Peter 5:7). What does this mean for you?
- What anxieties and worries do you need to turn over to God?

### **1 Thessalonians 5:17-18**

- What do you think it means to pray continually or "without ceasing"?
- Why does God want us to give thanks to him in all circumstances?

### **Psalm 5:3**

- Why is it a good idea to pray in the morning (not that this is the only time we can pray)?
- Why is it important to have a specific time of prayer each day (Matthew 6:11)?

## Practical Points for Praying Matthew 6:9-13

- What is commonly called the Lord's prayer was given by Jesus to his disciples, not as a prayer that should necessarily just be blindly repeated over and over again but it was a model for them how to pray
  - "Our Father in heaven, your name honored as holy"
    - Praise and Honor:
      - Jesus opened the model prayer by recognizing the greatness of God as our Father and praising him
      - When we pray we can spend a few minutes at the beginning showing our gratitude for all that God has done and praising him for his greatness
  - "Your kingdom come, you will be done on earth as it is in heaven"
    - Kingdom Living
      - For us, the kingdom has come in many ways, although we still wait its final consummation, thus we can pray that it continues to come and that more and more people would submit to the reign and authority of God's kingship
      - This is the time to pray for God's will to be done by us and others
      - We want to make a list of the people, things, and events that we would like to pray for regularly just so that we don't forget
      - Don't forget as well to keep a journal of some kind of answered prayers; this will encourage you as you go along in your kingdom living
      - Prayer is when we align ourselves with God's will and ask that he continue his work of expanding his kingdom more and more
  - "Give us today our daily bread"
    - Needs
      - We are told that we can take everything to God as our Father; this is the time to do that
      - We should be certain, however, that we are praying for things in such a way so as to align with God's will and not ask for things for selfish benefit
      - We can also ask that God provide for others whether it be through us or various other methods
  - "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors"
    - Confession and Forgiveness
      - It is important to confess our sin to God and seek to remain in his forgiveness in Christ
      - This is also a good time to ask God to show us if we need to confess to others, ask their forgiveness, or make amends for something that we have done
      - We should continue to pray that God continues to help us grow in our mercy, patience and forgiveness of others
  - "Do not bring us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one"
    - Deliverance and Purity
      - Ask God to keep us from harm and temptation
      - We should know that God will keep us from much temptation but that he will allow us to go through other times of testing
      - When that happens we should ask that he deliver us, show us how to remain in him, and remain faithful to his will

## Action Points

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about prayer that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# A Different Kind of People – Study 5

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In 1 Corinthians 5:15 we are told that one of the primary reasons that Jesus died on the Cross for his people was so that we could be part of a community of people that no longer live for themselves but for one another. To do so takes a radical change of mind and of way of life (Romans 12:1-2) to which you have already committed yourself. It means becoming part of a people who live not for our own selfish interests but for the interests of our new family in Christ (Philippians 2:1-5). This is not an automatic process, however. It takes constant thought and study so that we can re-train ourselves out of selfish mindsets, individual personal spiritual mindsets, or even religious traditional mindsets. Church is not a building or something we go to once or twice a week. It is the collection of God's called out people, called to live a different way from the world around us. This study will look at some of the key aspects of being God's family.

## **Living Like Family**

### **Acts 2:42-27**

- This is not a picture of a typical religious group in the first century; this was a group that was living like a family did with one another
- What important elements do you see being embraced by this community that we can apply to our own time?

## **Family Identity**

### **Luke 14:25-27; Mark 10:28-30**

- In certain contexts, such as this one, "love" and "hate" were used in Jesus' day as part of inheritance language
  - They took on the meaning of "embrace" as part of one's covenant family markers or "reject"
- Thus, Jesus was saying that we must reject all the things of the world whether they be family, wealth, worldly inheritance, or even our own merits as markers of our relationship with God
- The family of God found in Christ is the marker of our spiritual identity and status as God's people
- This means that we find our security, comfort, identity, and source of honor from being part of God's family and nothing else
- Is this still a challenge for you or something that find exciting and encouraging?

## **Loving Like Family**

### **John 13:34-35**

- Jesus calls his people to love (which according to 1 John 3:16 means that we lay our lives down for one another) each other
- This will be the mark of who Jesus' true family is
- In what ways can you love other disciples right now?

## **Caring for One Another**

### **Acts 4:34**

- Families in New Testament times expected to care for another by sharing possessions with each other as each had need
- This is the way that the early church lived and it is the expectation for God's people to provide for one another

## **James 2:15-17**

- What does James say about one who calls other Christians “brother and sister” but is unwilling to care for their physical and material needs?
- Of course, this should be a relationship of mutual love and those who attempt to manipulate or abuse the situation should be lovingly dealt with (see 2 Thessalonians 3:10-13)
- Does this still seem challenging for you? Why?

## **Making Decisions as Family**

### **Philippians 1:23-26**

- Paul was torn between what he wanted to do for his own benefit and what would benefit the Christian family
- He made his decision based on what was best for the entire family
- When we truly embrace that God has given us a new family and that we belong to one another (Romans 12:5) we will desire to make decisions based on the benefit of the whole family and not just what seems best for us
- What does this mean practically as it applies to you?

## **Bearing With One Another**

### **Ephesians 4:2-3; 16**

- Although we will be like Christ one day, what we will be has not been made entirely known yet and we are still in the process of being transformed (1 John 3:2)
- This means that as imperfect, albeit well-meaning people, we will sin against one another, hurt one another, and disappoint one another
- What should our response be at those times?

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about being part of God’s people that you didn’t previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# One Another Relationships – Study 6

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Jesus came to create a family that would enter into his life and become transformed into his image (Romans 8:28-29). Christianity is not a solo sport but is, rather, a team sport. We are called to live together as a loving family that demonstrates to the world, as best we can in this present age, what it will look like to live in the age to come and to live by God's values of that age. This is the underlying ethic of the one another relationships that we seek to develop.

## **The Nature of Our Relationships**

### **John 13:34-35**

- As members of God's family we are called to love one another
- The defining characteristic of God's people is that we have sacrificial love (1 John 3:16) for one another
- Why is this such an important passage for a Christian community to constantly remind ourselves of?

### **Romans 12:1-16**

- What are we called to be in view of God's incredible mercy that he has shown us?
- Why do you think that Paul connects being a living sacrifice with the concept of belonging to one another and being devoted to one another?
- What do you think that Paul meant by saying that we belong to one another or, to put it another way, are "members of one another"?

### **Galatians 5:13-15**

- What type of behavior are we called to here rather than indulging our own selfish interests?
- We don't have to worry about a bunch of rules or laws if we simply love one another
- Why is the simple call to love one another more demanding than following a bunch of religious rules?

### **1 Corinthians 12:25-26**

- A true family is connected and shares both honor and identity with one another
- What we do within the body, even if that includes not coming to a gathering, affects everyone else in the body
- What sort of characteristics and values must we have in ourselves in order to embrace this kind of life?
- What sort of characteristics and values must we rid ourselves of so as to not stand in the way of living like this?

## **Caring for One Another**

### **Romans 13:8**

- What debt do we have in our relationships with one another?
- To whom do we owe this debt? Who is the recipient of our paying off this debt?
- How do we fulfill the law of Christ?

### **Romans 14:13-19**

- It's easy to be judgmental towards one another but we are called to avoid that type of attitude
- Freedom in Christ means that we are free from the power of sin but it also means that we are free to work out with God what it means to love him and love others on an ongoing basis
- If our freedoms should come in conflict with the sincere convictions of another brother or sister, which one should take priority?
- Why do you think that God values unity within our relationships above personal freedom?

## **Romans 15:1-7**

- All of our relationships with each other should be with the best interest of one another in mind
- Even the words we speak to one another should be measured carefully to ensure that they are with the interests of one another placed in the highest priority and to build one another up into Christ (Ephesians 4:29)

## **Colossians 3:12-14**

- There is an assumption here, and a reality, that we will have opportunities to have grievances towards one another
- Our goal is to be prepared to forgive, love and live in peace with one another as much as is within our control (Hebrews 12:14-15)

## **Hebrews 3:12-14**

- What responsibility do we bear towards one another according to this passage?
- What are some practical ways that we can do this as brothers and sisters in Christ?

## **Hebrews 10:22-25**

- This passage calls us to draw near to God and to hold to our faith unswervingly
- It immediately goes into practical ways of how to do that
- What are we called to do in order to continue to draw near to God and hold firmly to the hope that we profess?
- Why do you think that it is important to not give up meeting together?

## **1 Peter 4:9-10**

- We should constantly look for ways to be hospitable towards one another, to give to one another, and to use our gifts to build one another up
- When we use our gifts what does that enable God to pass through us to others?
- If we do not use the gifts that God has given us we are denying that portion of God's grace to the rest of the body

## **Philemon 1:6**

- How do we understand every good thing that we have in the life of Christ?
- Why do you think this would be true?

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about being part of God's people that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Radical Forgiveness – Study 7

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Genuine forgiveness is one of the most difficult things for a human being to do. Yet it is an absolutely vital aspect of life for those in Christ. Forgiveness is not only necessary for the Christian community to function as God intends and for us to remain unified in Christ, it is also indispensable because it is one of those things that God says determines how he will act towards us. If we refuse to forgive others then God will show us that same treatment. Forgiveness, then, is not only something that we should understand well but something that we should embrace wholeheartedly and live out lavishly.

## **A God of Forgiveness**

### **2 Chronicles 7:14**

- God has always set an example of forgiveness
- Forgiveness is important because God forgives and calls his people to be likewise forgiving

### **Micah 7:18**

- What does this passage tell us about the nature of God?

## **Radical Forgiveness**

### **Matthew 18:21-35**

- What important principle about forgiveness and mercy does this parable teach us?
- What is most difficult for you about forgiving others?
- How many times are we to forgive others?
- Why do you think Jesus used such an incredible number?
- It is important to remember that the sins that others perpetrate against us, could never match up to the severity of our debts and sin against God

### **Mark 11:25-26**

- We forgive others so that the reality of stepping into God's presence and connecting with his will through prayer is not interrupted
- If we are not living a life of forgiveness then we step out of God's reality and his forgiveness

### **Matthew 18:15-17**

- This passage is directly addressed to situations in which we are personally sinned against
- First, we are to talk to the other person, which often times means putting their interests ahead of our own because confronting someone can be extremely uncomfortable
- This should always be done with an attitude of love
- If the person does not listen, sit down in love with others, again for the benefit of helping the one who has sinned
- If they still do not repent then the matter should be brought before the church
- At each step the willingness to put their interests first, find reconciliation, and offer genuine forgiveness are to have priority

### **Colossians 3:12-14**

- We forgive because it is part of the life of Christ that we have put on when we died to self
- We have a portion of that life because Christ forgave us

- Refusing to forgive others demonstrates that we haven't really entered into the reality of the life in Christ and fully understood what God has done for us
- This doesn't mean that we just quickly give lip service forgiveness to others
  - It demands that we deal with the depths of our hurt and bitterness and keep working towards true forgiveness from the heart

## **It Is Up To Us**

### **Ephesians 4:31-32; Luke 17:3-4**

- What does it mean that we are told to get rid of anger, rage, and bitterness?
  - We have responsibility in this
- We can only truly forgive those who repent or acknowledge their guilt because forgiveness is the act of releasing a repentant person from the guilt and punishment of their offense (this is true for both God and us)
  - If someone doesn't repent, we cannot technically forgive them, but that doesn't mean that we get to hang onto anger and bitterness
  - We are still called to release that and wait for the time when they do repent so that we can forgive them
- It is important to note that forgiveness doesn't mean acting like something never happened or removing the consequences of their sin but it means that we don't continue to judge a person based on past behavior of which they have repented
  - For Example: If someone steals money in a situation where they were trusted but then genuinely repents from that sin, they can and should be forgiven and no longer be judged or looked down upon for their past action or treated as an offender. They might, however, need to serve a punishment such as jail time and should do so without fighting the consequences of their crime. They also should probably not be put in a similar position of trust and access to money for a long time to protect them from temptation. There is no simple answer as to how long such a period of time should last but love and wise discernment should be applied.

### **Matthew 26:27-28**

- When we forgive others we announce to the world the ministry of reconciliation and forgiveness that God has made available to everyone

### **Mark 2:5-7**

- Only God can forgive sins
- We don't forgive sins because sins are ultimately against God
- We forgive the wrong that has been done to us
- What we do is to offer forgiveness for the hurts done to us; this points to, and is a picture of, the ultimate forgiveness for sin that we have in Christ

## **Forgiveness in Action**

### **2 Corinthians 2:5-11**

- Paul gives a wonderful demonstration of the attitude of forgiveness in action
- He had been wronged but is far more concerned with the good of the Corinthian's community from which the offender against him came and with the offender himself
- Notice that Paul had embraced a heart of forgiveness so deeply that he wasn't even sure if had anything to forgive
- What can you learn specifically from Paul's example here?

### **Acts 9:26-28**

- Less than three years before this Paul had been a persecutor of the church and had Stephen, a beloved brother in this church, killed before their very eyes

- Despite all of that, the Jerusalem church quickly forgave and accepted Paul, allowing him to move around among them as one of them
- This is a picture of God's loving and forgiving family of which we are called to be a part
- What would it take for you to be willing to embrace that kind of radical forgiveness?

### **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about forgiveness that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# The Life and Needs of the Church – Study 8

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One curious aspect of Christians is that we tend to be people who will do things on a consistent basis without ever really understanding why we do them. That's not what God wants us and it isn't the best scenario for us in order to remain faithful in the things that we do as part of God's family in the long run. In one aspect, these studies are aimed at helping us understand why we do what we do. This study in particular is aimed at helping us to understand the meaning behind two important ways that we worship God together each week: Through the taking of communion (the Lord's Supper), and contributing financially to the common fund of the church family.

## **Communion**

### **Exodus 12:1-16; Matthew 26:26-29**

- Passover was a meal of commemoration for God's people to remember and thank God for what he had done in freeing them from slavery and creating them as his people
  - Passover was a meal that was to primarily be eaten and celebrated in families
- Jesus called together his disciples to eat this meal with them to show them that they were his true family, the family of God
- He made some vital changes to the meal to demonstrate for them that Jesus was the true fulfillment of Passover; Passover was merely a shadow and a pointer to the true Passover lamb, Jesus the Messiah
- The Lord's Supper then was, just as Passover was, a meal to remember and thank God for what he had done through Jesus to free them from the slavery of sin and create them as his family
- The bread signified the sacrifice of Jesus' body
- The cup signified the sacrifice of Jesus' blood

### **1 Corinthians 10:16-17**

- Partaking in communion is a participation in the sacrifice that Christ made to create us as one body
- Taking communion together proclaims that we are one body, one family, taking this meal of participation together
- It is a meal that the family of God takes together to remember and thank God for what he has done to free us from the slavery of sin and create us as his family
- Although Passover and the Lord's Supper were taken as full meals, there is no biblical command that it must be taken this way
  - A small amount to represent the action of a meal is fully appropriate as the important part is the meaning of the meal and not the amount of the meal

### **1 Corinthians 11:18-34**

- The Corinthian church was taking communion whenever they came together as the central element of their gatherings on the Lord's Day (Acts 20:7)
- Paul, however, had harsh criticism for them because the rich among them were bringing their own bread and drink and partaking in it quickly, not waiting for the poorer members who worked long days and were late arriving, nor sharing with those who did not have their own supplies
- He makes it clear that they were to take this as a meal that demonstrated their unity in Christ
  - Not considering one another meant that they were not really considering what this meal was all about at all
  - They were pretending to be God's family but not really living that way
  - They were taking communion without really discerning what it meant to be the body of Christ and were thus taking on themselves the judgment of hypocrisy

- When we partake in the Lord's Supper it is important for us to consider whether we are really living as part of God's family and declaring that truly through this action, or if we have just been play-acting and taking the body of Christ lightly

## **Contribution to the Common Fund**

### **Matthew 6:21, 24, 33**

- What is significant about the fact that Jesus says that our hearts will follow wherever we put our treasure?
- Why do you think that it is impossible to serve both God and money, wealth, and possessions (which is the full meaning of the word that is often translated as just "money")?
- What does it mean to seek first the kingdom as it relates to the topic of finances and possessions?

### **Proverbs 3:9**

- Are you honoring God with your wealth?
- Do you give him the firstfruits or the leftovers?
- This calls for us to be responsible in our giving
- If we are gone, the needs of the church still exist
  - Make plans to contribute even if you are gone for a week

### **1 Corinthians 16:1-2**

- We are called to take up a collection to meet the needs of the Lord's people
- But how much should each person give?

### **2 Corinthians 9:6-8**

- According to this passage, how much are we to contribute to the needs of the church? What is our standard?
- Many Christians just assume that we are required to give a tenth (a tithe) but that was an Old Testament standard
- The standard of giving here is not what you have decided in your heart
- The standard is to give generously, even sacrificially (2 Corinthians 8:1-2,) and then to do that willingly and with a glad heart
  - We should not give under compulsion or pressure
  - But if we're not giving it is a clear sign of a problem in our heart that needs to be worked out with God

### **2 Corinthians 8:1-15**

- Regular collections to meet the needs of the church are appropriate but so are special collections to assist with the special needs of brothers in sisters in spreading the gospel around the world and assisting those in less fortunate situations to meet the needs within their church family
- Planning ahead for this is wise
- In God's family we are to live to a standard of sufficiency for all (not necessarily equality but sufficiency for everyone) rather than surplus and lack

### **1 Timothy 6:5-10; 17**

- What important warnings are we given here?

### **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about communion and contribution to the common fund that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Discipling Partners – Study 9

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In Matthew 28, Jesus called his disciples to not only go and make disciples but he also commanded them to an ongoing lifestyle of discipleship, which involved both continual learning from and teaching of one another. The Bible offers no specific, detailed plan of how to go about that but simply urges us within our own churches, cultures, and situations to be committed to some form of ongoing discipling or mentoring of one another. “Disciple” is a term that referred to being a learner so discipling is simply a form of ongoing learning.

## Sources of Learning

### Hebrews 3:12-13; 2 Timothy 2:2

- What is the source of learning and ongoing discipleship in these passages?
- What are different ways that we can learn from one another?
- As young Christians a discipling relationship will most likely take on the form of a mentor and mentee relationship
  - As you mature in the faith, discipling relationships take on more of a mutual learning form
- What are your feelings about the process of continually learning from others and preparing to teach and mentor others as you mature in your faith and understanding?

### Hebrews 4:12; 2 timothy 3:16

- What is the source of learning and ongoing discipleship in these passages?
- What are some of the different ways that we can learn from the Bible and grow in our understanding of it?

### Titus 2:11-12

- What is the source of learning and ongoing discipleship in this passage?
- Learning to be led by the Spirit is such a vital aspect of our Christian life and discipleship that we will devote an entire study to that later on in this series

### Hebrews 5:11-14; 1 Timothy 4:7; 1 Timothy 6:11

- What is the source of learning and ongoing discipleship in these passages?
- What role do we play in our own learning and spiritual growth?
- Although we have many sources for spiritual growth, the ultimate responsibility lies with us
  - We cannot put the blame on others if we fail to grow spiritually

## The Heart of Being Discipled

### Colossians 1:28-2:1

- The goal of discipling is to become fully mature (“perfect”) in the life of Christ
- There will be times of difficult and disagreement in any relationship but we must remain focused on the goal and operate from a motivation of genuine love for one another
- Discipleship is challenging and will never be easy, but it will be rewarding

### 1 Corinthians 11:1

- We want to follow the example of those that are showing us practically how to follow the example of Christ
- No person is perfect and so we should only imitate them in the areas that they are following Christ

- As we saw in 2 Timothy 2:2; discipling is a process of passing it on
- We not only want to imitate those who are imitating Christ but we also want to be learning to set an example that others can follow

### **Proverbs 10:17**

- What does this verse call us to value?
- What warning does it give us?
- Have you valued a process like mentoring or discipling in your past or have you tended to stay away from such things?
- Why is it so important as a follower of Christ?

### **Proverbs 11:14**

- Why is it important to have advisors?
- Why is it important to have many advisors?
- How often do you seek out advice and ask questions?
- How much of a part does humility play in all of this?
- What types of things do you think would be profitable to get advice on and learn to approach in a godly manner?

### **Proverbs 15:12**

- What motivation does this verse give us to go after discipling in our lives and make sure that we get it consistently?

## **A Practical Approach**

### **Hebrews 10:24-25**

- We should try to maintain contact with one another in one form or another on a daily basis
  - Why is that important?
- As part of that, we should also have a regular time (even as often as weekly) to meet with a discipling partner

### **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about spiritual discipling and mentoring that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Battling Temptation – Study 10

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We will all face temptation on a daily, if not hourly basis. Temptation is inducement to do something appealing that we know to be wrong or harmful. The reality is that every sin and rebellious action that we take against God starts with temptation of one sort or another. We are constantly at war with temptation but to be successful in that battle we must know what we are fighting and where we need to fight it.

## The Battleground Ephesians 6:10-18

- We are in a spiritual battle whether we like it or not
- We will all fight a spiritual battle and we need to know the truth that knowledge and its proper use wins battles (Hosea 4:6)
- God gives us the tools to defeat Satan but that doesn't mean that we use them
- Where does Satan most often attack us?
  - Satan attacks us in the battlefield of the mind
- His flaming arrows come in the form of:
  - Thoughts; Ideas; Conclusions, and Suggestions (T.I.C.S.)
- Every action that you have ever taken is a result of your thoughts
  - Actions result from these T.I.C.S.
- We must be aware that our spiritual battle is going to take place in the mind so that we can fight the battle well

## 1 Peter 5:8

- What does this tell us about Satan?
- Lions tend to hunt by separating one individual from the pack
  - The quickest way that Satan will do this is through our thought life

## Mind Control 2 Corinthians 11:3

- How was Eve led astray?
- Every unfortunate or sinful action that we have taken goes back to T.I.C.S. that we acted on
- It is impossible to sin without first thinking wrongly about God
- There is an old but true saying that says:
  - Sow a thought, reap an action*
  - Sow an action, reap a habit*
  - Sow a habit, reap a character*
  - Sow a character, and reap a destiny*
  - But it all begins with a thought*
- If we don't control our thought life we will be devoured
- What areas of your thought life can be the most difficult or tempting for you:
  - Anger over circumstances
  - Bitterness towards others
  - Lust
  - Etc.

## Ephesians 4:22-24

- Satan deceives us through T.I.C.S.

- Every sin that we takes has its genesis with wrong thinking about God, about ourselves, and about the truth of the thing that is tempting us
- To be Christ-like involves controlling our thought life
  - When we don't do that we become enemies of God (Colossians 1:21)
- Jesus tells us in Matthew 5 that sins of the heart and mind are just as serious as sins of action
- What is the connection here between dying to self and putting on the life of Christ and the way that we think and control our mind?

## **2 Corinthians 10:4-5**

- What does this passage urge us to do with our thoughts?
- We have to measure every thought against the word of God like a ruler
- We cannot keep thoughts from coming but we can keep from dwelling on them
  - "We cannot keep the birds from flying above our head, but we can keep them from nesting in our hair"
- We have to be extremely careful with our thoughts because most of the time they sound rational and appeal to our emotions
- Most of us go to great lengths to protect ourselves from viruses and we lock our doors to protect our belongings and yet we naively assume that we can expose our minds to anything we desire without having any negative effects whatsoever on us
  - What sorts of potentially dangerous things do you expose your mind to (TV, movies, music, friends, books, worldly ways of thinking)?
  - It's not that these things are wrong in and of themselves but they can be dangerous if they contain things that expose our minds to ungodly ways of thinking and influence
- Taking every thought captive and measuring it can be time consuming but which takes more time:
  - To consider every thought and make sure that it is righteous
  - Or to clean up the mess from not controlling our thoughts

## **Romans 12:2**

- A large part of the Christian life is transforming the way we think in every area of our lives

## **Think on the Right Things**

### **Philippians 4:8**

- Before we allow ourselves to dwell on any thoughts they should meet the standards of all eight of these things
  - Something could be "true" (at least in our mind) and not meet the other seven criterion
- Keeping our minds focused is a full-time and difficult job
- Here are seven practical ways to keep our thoughts focused on the right things:
  - Read the Word
    - Our minds will never be more holy than our knowledge of the Scripture will allow
  - Memorize the Word
  - Use the Word and obey it
  - Watch and pray
    - Use prayer as an inoculation (used to keep you from infection) rather than an antibiotic (used after an infection)
  - Substitute evil thoughts for righteous ones
    - Romans 12:21
  - Be honest
    - Be realistic about your temptations, the truth of them, and the reality of obtaining them
  - Confess to one another
    - James 5:16
    - Get in the habit of confessing our sinful thoughts and not just our sinful actions

### **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about battling temptation that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Led by the Spirit – Study 11

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One of the greatest gifts of being immersed into Christ is the promise of receiving the Holy Spirit within us. That is indeed good news but what does it really mean? How does that help to transform us on a day-by-day basis and be successful in living the life of Christ? In short, what does it mean to be led by the Spirit in this new life in Christ? This is the subject of this study and the following two studies.

## **The Problem**

### **Isaiah 55:8**

- We do not think like God
- Our minds, heart, and emotions, if left to themselves, will work and operate according to the pattern of the world

### **Jeremiah 17:9**

- The “heart” in biblical times was considered to be the seat of emotions and the will, it was the deepest and most inner part of a person
- What does this passage teach us about the normal human “heart”?
- We cannot trust purely our heart or emotions because they can be deceptive

### **Romans 1:18-32**

- What we allow to influence us (where we place our trust/security) determines the consequences of whether we are led by the Spirit or our flesh
- When we fail to acknowledge and show appreciation to God and then fail to seek him we enter into a pattern of distorted thinking that leads us further and further away from God
- When we are not in Christ we are blinded in our thinking by Satan (2 Corinthians 4:4)

### **Romans 7:14-25**

- Paul uses the hypothetical “I” here to represent a people that are still under the law and ruled by their flesh to demonstrate that rules and religion can only show us how incapable we are to meet God’s standards and be led by the Spirit
- Verse 18 stresses that our flesh (sinful nature) keeps us from being able to please God and do his will

### **Romans 8:5-8**

- How can we walk according to the Spirit and have our mind set on the things of the Spirit if we do not have the mind of God and do typically conform to the patterns of the world?
- What we have our minds set on is important
  - If we have our minds set on things of the world such as happiness, comfort, or security we will not be able to please God or follow the leading of the Spirit
  - We must have our minds set on the things of the Spirit and becoming like Christ

## **The Solution**

### **Ezekiel 36:26-27**

- This passage is part of a prophecy of the coming of the New Covenant
- What does it promise that God will do for those that are part of his New Covenant?

## **Psalm 37:4**

- What promise is given here to the one who commits himself to the Lord?
- People often read this as though it says that God will give us anything we want, but the promise here is that God will give us new desires in our heart; he will transform our hearts so that we want what he wants and can be led by the Spirit

## **Romans 6:16-18**

- Learning to be led by the Spirit involves obeying God's word and overcoming obstacles through prayer
- This life will run contrary to the desires of our flesh

## **Romans 12:1-2**

- What do we have to do in order to change our thinking and be led by the Spirit rather than our flesh?

## **Acts 2:38**

- At the time of our immersion God came through on his promise to place his Spirit within his people
- Why is this so huge in our efforts to be led by the Spirit?

## **Romans 8:9-17**

- In Christ we are able to be led by the Spirit
- Trying to be led by the Spirit while still clinging to the fundamental desires of the flesh is like running into a brick wall
- We must embrace the new mindset of becoming like Christ in order to be led by the Spirit

## **1 Corinthians 2:11-16**

- What we could do without the Spirit we now can
- Through the Spirit we have the mind of Christ and are able to be led by the Spirit

## **Ephesians 4:17-32**

- The goal of the life in Christ is to allow the Spirit to direct us in putting off the old life, our life in the flesh, and put on the new life of Christ
- Paul gives us numerous examples of how are led by the Spirit to put off the old behaviors but also to replace them with the new behavior, led by the Spirit in the life of Christ

## **Ephesians 5:18**

- Another way to understand this is "Don't allow yourself to be animated or influenced by alcohol, which leads to reaping the fruits of the flesh, rather allow yourself to be animated or influenced by the Spirit and so yield the fruit of the Spirit
- When someone is drunk, the whole person is drunk
- In the same way, Christianity is not simply a moral reform system that works on the outside and visible person
  - It is an entire transformational way of living that effects the entire person
- The ability to be transformed is given by the Holy Spirit and affects everything: our behavior, attitude & outlook, worldview, where we place our hope and security, what captures our passions, etc.
- But how are we led by the Spirit?
  - Through God's Word
  - Through prayer
  - Through godly advice
  - Through the inner prompting of the Spirit (that will never contradict the word of God)
- If any of those areas seems difficult or confusing, like the inner prompting of the Spirit for example, then ask your discipling partner or other mature Christians to explain what they have learned about following this aspect of the Holy Spirit

## **Location, Location, Location**

### **John 15:1-17**

- “Fruit” here refers to the ability to keep God’s covenant and please God (the background for this passage comes from Isaiah 5:1-7)
- We must remain in Christ to bear the fruit of the Spirit of keeping God’s covenant and pleasing God
- This requires changing the way that we think
- Note that Jesus says that one of the primary means of doing this is through actively and sacrificially loving one another

### **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about being led by the Spirit that you didn’t previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Trained by the Spirit – Study 12

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We saw in our previous study that our goal is to learn to be led by the Holy Spirit rather than our flesh but how does that work on a practical basis? Do we achieve this transformation in character through our own hard work or through nothing other than the work of the Holy Spirit? One truth that we must embrace in order to truly be able to be transformed by the Spirit is that both are necessary. We must have the transforming work of the Spirit to direct us and do things that we cannot on our own, but he also demands hard work and discipline from us.

## The Goal

### 1 Timothy 6:11-12

- If we are called to take hold of this eternal life or, in other words, “a life characteristic of the life of the age to come” then how can we do that?
- How can we be led by the Spirit to actually pursue righteousness, godliness, and faith

### Revelation 21:1-5

- What is the goal of our faith?
- Is it just salvation?
- Is it just to get to heaven?
- Or is to be transformed to become like Christ so that we may dwell with God in his age to come for eternity?
  - Of course this is the correct answer
- Why is it important to know that this is the goal of our faith rather than mere salvation or just getting to heaven?

### Galatians 5:13-26

- Our next study will focus in on the fruits of the Spirit given here but it is important to understand a few things up front
- The lie that we often buy into is that “the flesh” is who we really are, that is the “real me”
- That’s not true; the acts of our flesh might seem natural and be our “default” mode but they are not the real us
- We have trained ourselves in those things
- For example, we can be lazy without much effort (like default mode) but as we give into laziness we train ourselves in being lazy and so we stay that way
- The flesh is often the path of least resistance but we still train ourselves to live that way and we grow accustomed to it

### 2 Peter 2:14

- The word “gymnazo” is translated as “train”
  - It is the word from which we get our word gymnasium and it referred to training as in the kind that an athlete would do to discipline themselves and train themselves in a sport
- These people had trained themselves in the fleshly act of being greedy
- It is important to understand that we will train ourselves to live one way or the other
- This is also where it is vital to understand the goal of our faith
  - If we think that mere salvation is the goal (to avoid punishment) then we will typically become overly focused on just not doing wrong things

- If we think that the goal of our faith is to get to heaven then we can focus on skirting by, taking the path of least resistance so that we can make it. The idea of changing can seem difficult and unpleasant and be avoided; all we care about is getting to heaven
- But if we understand that the goal of our faith is to become like Christ then we will embrace transformation
  - But how do we do that?

## **Romans 12:1-2**

- Once again, we return to this pivotal passage
- How do we transform?
  - Does God do it all?
  - Do we just pray for transformation and then sit back and let God do the work?
  - It is easy to fall into this mindset of entitlement but it doesn't really work well

## **Spiritual Training**

### **John 14:15-18; 25-26**

- The Spirit will act as our counselor, or to put it in a modern setting, our personal trainer
- What do personal trainers do?
  - They motivate us
  - They guide us
  - They push us to do new things that we would not have thought of or would not have done on our own
  - They teach us how to transform
- But trainers don't do it for us do they?
  - Trainers guide us but we must partner with them
  - We must do the hard work of listening to the trainer and doing what they tell us to
  - It is a true partnership

### **1 Timothy 4:7-10**

- What are we called to train ourselves in here specifically?
- In general terms this tells us that we can be trained in mindset and attitude

### **Hebrews 5:13-14**

- We can have our minds trained to discern, understand, and perceive
- We can be trained in our actions

### **Hebrews 12:4-11**

- Throughout this passage, the word that is translated as "discipline" doesn't carry the negative way that we can tend to understand the word "discipline"
  - The word actually refers to the teaching or discipline that might be given to a soldier or student
  - Hebrews is telling us that God "trains" us through difficult situations in life
- All of this "discipline" training leads to us being fully "trained" (v. 12) which is the first and only time in this passage that "gymnazo" is used
- We can be trained in our perseverance

## **The Gymnazo Principle**

- The gymnazo principle of being led by the Spirit simply means this:
  - We follow the guidance of the Spirit and the word of God to correct wrong behavior by practicing godly behavior, with the right attitude and for the right reasons, until the godly behavior becomes habitual

- Because of the work of the Spirit, however, this isn't just conforming or training our behavior; the Spirit actually partners with us to transform us into these new people

### **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about being training by the Spirit that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# The Fruit of the Spirit – Study 13

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When we go into strict physical training we want to see the fruit of that. We look for things like a change in our body, a loss of weight, or increased stamina and strength. When we go into spiritual training we also want to look for the fruit of our efforts and to make sure that we are truly listening to our trainer, the Holy Spirit. In other words, we want to see the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. To see the evidence of the Spirit in our life, however, we must be familiar with the fruit of the Spirit so that we can recognize it.

## Two Opposing Forces

### Galatians 5:16-18

- What is the relationship here between the Spirit and the flesh (sinful nature)?
- There are two competing ways of life that we can choose; we either live being influenced by our flesh or by the Holy Spirit within us
- As Christians we want to live according to the Spirit but how can we truly know if we are?
- The symptoms of a life in the flesh are listed next so that we can take stock and see if the works of the flesh are continuing to exhibit themselves as the predominant characteristic in our lives
  - If they are then we can be alerted (like an engine warning light) that we are walking in the flesh

## The Works of the Flesh

### Galatians 5:19-21

- We studied out these kinds of ongoing behaviors before immersion but they are still lurking out there if we don't consistently and constantly partner with the Spirit, our personal trainer, to put down the desires of the flesh
- Do you see any of these warning lights still flashing in your life
  - If so, what does 1 John 1:5-10 tell us about this?

## The Fruit of the Spirit

### Galatians 5:22-26

- Our desire in being trained by the Spirit is to embrace these qualities and see them growing in our lives
- We should be quite familiar with each of these aspects of the fruit of the Spirit so that we can follow the Spirit's prompting in our lives in each of these areas

### Love

- This does not refer to romantic or affectionate love but the perfect and complete love that comes from God himself
- It is the sacrificial love that Jesus demonstrated to the world and that we are to embrace in our own lives
- What does this kind of love look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of love?

### Joy

- This is the joy that comes from within based on relationship with God and does not rely on external circumstances
- This is different than worldly happiness which does rely on pleasing external circumstances
- What does this kind of joy look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of joy?

## **Peace**

- This refers to living in a state of harmony and concord with others rather than in constant friction with and annoyance by others
- What does this kind of peace look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of peace?

## **Patience**

- This patience actually refers to patient endurance, steadfastness, and perseverance, often in response to wrongs done against us
- What does this kind of patience look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of patience?

## **Kindness**

- This kindness refers to a moral integrity in every aspect of one's life
- What does this kind of kindness look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of kindness?

## **Goodness**

- This goodness refers to uprightness of heart and overwhelming good intentions to act for the benefit of others
- What does this kind of goodness look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of goodness?

## **Faith**

- Faith refers to both the conviction that God's promises are reliable and worthy of living by as well as having the character of one who lives this way and can be relied upon
- What does this kind of faith look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of faith?

## **Gentleness**

- Gentleness is not being "soft" or "weak" but refers to a powerful force that is kept under control and restrained intentionally
- What does this kind of gentleness look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of gentleness?

## **Self-Control**

- Self-control refers to one who masters his desires and passions according to the leading of the Spirit
- What does this kind of self-control look like in your life?
- What things in your life or flesh can keep you from this kind of self-control?

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about the fruit of the Spirit that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# When Our Heart Gets in the Way – Study 14

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Our world constantly sends us the message that the best thing we can do for ourselves is to follow our heart and trust our own feelings. This is certainly a popular sentiment, but is it true? Are our hearts something that we can trust to follow or are can our hearts actually hinder us from following the Spirit if we're not careful?

## **The Problem of the Heart**

### **Jeremiah 17:9**

- The "heart" referred to the seat of will and emotions
- What does this passage tell us about the problem of following our heart or emotions
- I have learned that my emotions are some of the most inaccurate sources of information that exist
- We don't have to believe everything we think

### **Proverbs 14:12**

- There is a way that can seem right deep down within us but what does that lead to?
- The consequences of following our heart or emotions when they don't align with God's word can be disastrous

### **Proverbs 28:26**

- What does this passage tell us about trusting in ourselves and our own emotions?

### **Mark 7:21**

- From where do things like evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, theft, greed, etc., come from
- What does that tell us about the problem of trusting our heart and feelings?

### **Hebrews 3:12**

- Our hearts can become hard, sinful, and unbelieving, or skeptical and turn from God even after we can received the Holy Spirit
- We must continue to follow God's word and the Spirit rather than our hearts so that our heart can be transformed

### **1 Samuel 16:7**

- What goes on in our heart is important because God looks at the heart
- Blindly following our heart as the world tells us to can be dangerous
- We need to learn to not follow our heart but follow the Spirit so that he can transform our heart
- We need to train our hearts so that it can be transformed to follow the Spirit

## **The Cure for the Heart**

### **Jeremiah 29:13**

- What does this passage tell us about our heart?
- We need to continue to seek God with all of our heart rather than the desires of our flesh

### **Psalms 51:17**

- We need to have hearts that are sensitive to God's word

### **Psalm 119:11**

- What does it mean to treasure God's word in your heart?

### **Proverbs 3:5-6**

- What three things do these verses urge us to do?
- What each of those things mean practically?
- What is the truth given for those who do those three things?

### **Proverbs 4:23**

- Why do you think we are urged to guard our heart (and feelings and emotions)?

### **Matthew 6:19-21**

- What is the treasure principle that Jesus gives in verse 21?
- Jesus says that our heart follows our treasure
  - We tend to think that we put our time, energy, and resources into the areas that we have given our heart
  - But Jesus says to put our efforts, energy, and resources, in other words our treasure, in the right place and our hearts will follow
- What does this mean for you in practical areas of following God?

### **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about the heart, emotions, and feelings that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Laziness and Discipline – Study 15

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As we have already seen in previous studies, training and discipline are an important part of our Christian lives whether it comes to growing in the Spirit or continuing to be a learning disciple. We need to be disciplined and for most people, that is something that we need to learn at one level or another. If discipline is a key then that means we must be on guard against laziness and idleness in our lives.

## **A Reminder for Training**

### **1 Timothy 4:7**

- We are called to train ourselves to be godly according to the training plan of the Holy Spirit, our personal trainer
- The Christian life is a life that demands discipline and commitment

## **Laziness**

### **Proverbs 24:30-34**

- What are the dangers of living a lazy lifestyle?
- Are there any areas in your life in which you can tend towards or be tempted to laziness?

### **1 Thessalonians 5:14**

- Why do you think Paul gave such a straightforward warning about allowing laziness within the Christian community?
- What dangers could a group of lazy people within the church community present for the people of God who are attempting to live the kingdom life?

### **Hebrews 6:11-12**

- According to this verse, what is one of the things that can lead to laziness?
  - The point is that if we lose sight of the hope of resurrection and living the resurrected life now, we can become quite lazy
  - If lazy here is used as in the opposite of the resurrected life, then what might the author mean by laziness specifically in this context?
- What are some of the other ways that we can be lazy and what can cause those types of laziness?

## **Idleness**

### **1 Thessalonians 4:10-12**

- We are called to be communities of people that work hard avoid idleness as a way of life
- What are ways that we can be idle in our day?

### **2 Thessalonians 3:6-13**

- The word that is at the heart of this passage can be translated “idle,” “irresponsible,” or “out of step”
  - It was actually a word that referred to a marching soldier or dancer being out of step with everyone else
- What does this passage teach us about the dangers of being idle?

## **Discipline**

### **Hebrews 12:11-12**

- What fruit does discipline and training bring into our life?

## **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**

- What does this passage teach us about self-control and discipline?
- Why is discipline necessary in the life of Christ and following the Spirit?

## **Proverbs 12:24**

- What is the difference in outcome between the diligent person and the lazy person?

## **2 Timothy 2:15**

- What goes into being “diligent” here?

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about laziness, idleness, and discipline that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# The Life of a Servant – Study 16

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The idea of being a servant doesn't exactly have the greatest connotations in our culture and time. When we think of servants we tend to think of a rather lowly position in life. That's okay, though, the same is true of Bible times. Jesus called his followers to be servants but that has never been a call that would be impressive to the world. Yet, he did call us to exactly that, the life of a servant. We need to study this out because it is not a concept that comes naturally to any of us.

## **Our Model for Being a Servant**

### **Matthew 20:25-28**

- What did Jesus come to earth to be?
- To enter into the life of Christ is to enter into the life of a servant
- In what ways do the Christian attitude towards authority, status and service differ from the world around us?

### **Philippians 2:1-8**

- The world tells us to do whatever it takes to meet our own needs and to think of ourselves first
- What does this call us to do?
- How does this challenge you?
- What is our motivation for taking on the nature of a servant?
- When we humble ourselves and consider others, and realize that a servant is something we are to become (as opposed to being something that we do) then we will be able to see and find ways to serve others

### **Mark 10:45**

- Christ's love was characterized by service
- He serves as the ultimate example of what we are becoming and aspire to
- Jesus was the creator of the world and yet humbled himself to be a servant to all
  - Is it reasonable for us, then, to think of ourselves as too high or important to be a servant?

### **John 13:1-7; 14-15**

- Jesus had all power and authority and was in his very nature God (John 1:1-4) and yet he was a servant
- What does that tell us about the nature of God as revealed in the life of Jesus Christ?
- Why do you think that Jesus called his disciples to emulate his nature of being a servant?

## **Our Life as Servants**

### **Luke 17:7-10**

- When we have served others our attitude should be that we have but done our duty with no expectation of reward or recognition
  - How do you usually feel if you do something and receive no special notice for it?
- Being a servant can be difficult if we don't embrace it as something we become rather than something we do
  - If it is merely something we do, then we will be much more likely to expect praise or get prideful about the things that we do
- A true servant is a servant in nature and has no expectations for praise, and doesn't get prideful about simply doing their duty

## **Romans 12:1-8**

- In worship to God, we offer ourselves as living sacrifices, putting off our old ways of thinking that include self-seeking, pleasure-seeking, independence, self-importance, etc.
  - Instead we are to put on Christ's thoughts such as "how can I use the gifts that God has given me to serve the Church and others?"
- Part of our spiritual act of worship is that we serve and belong to one another as the body of Christ

## **Ephesians 6:7-8**

- When we serve others, who are we really serving?
- Why is this helpful motivation?

## **Galatians 5:13-14**

- We are free in Christ but what does God desire that we do with our freedom?

## **John 15:9-17**

- The way that we fulfill Jesus' commands is through self-sacrificial love for others

## **2 Corinthians 9:12-14**

- Our service not only meets the needs of others but show God our gratitude of all that he has done for us
- Serving is a way that our faith is put into action
  - Our faith-in-action will point others to God
  - Being a servant is another way to share our faith with others

## **Galatians 6:10**

- We should seek to serve everyone that we can but be realistic that our resources and time are limited
- What important principle do we find here?

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about being a servant that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Confession – Study 17

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One of the most important ongoing actions that we can take as Christians is regularly confessing our sin both before God and other Christians. The problem is that this action, especially to other Christians, is one of the most unnatural things that we can do. Human instinct tends toward self-preservation and rationalization not humility and confession. Yet, God tells us that if we regularly confess our sin, he will forgive us. Confession is vitally important to understand and to engage in as a regular discipline.

## **Luke 11:1-4**

- When Jesus taught us how to pray, it included confessing our sins to God. Confession is a part of our life in Christ.
- Confessing our sins to God shows that we recognize our own sin and our constant need for him

## **Why Confess Our Sin?**

### **Proverbs 28:13**

- When we confess our sins honestly, we renounce them and show that we want to get rid of them
- We find mercy and are able to grow in our relationship with God

### **Psalms 32:1-5**

- We remain in God's forgiveness when we confess
- When we don't confess our sins we show that we are still clinging to them (and some aspect of our old lives outside of Christ) and put ourselves in danger of moving outside of the life of Christ where we have forgiveness

### **1 John 1:5-10**

- When we have fellowship with one another, the blood of Jesus cleanses us and the word comes to life
- If we do not confess, it is the same as saying that we are without sin. Our lives in Christ should be transparent –there is no hiding (darkness) in God
- Confession should be a part of our daily life – in our prayers and in our conversations with one another

### **James 5:16**

- Confess to one another so we can pray for each other and find healing
- It is God's plan for us to confess to each other
- Outside of Christ there is fear of being transparent and talking about sin for fear people will hold it against us or feel differently about us. In Christ, we help each other with our struggles and sin through prayer, the word and relationship
- A refusal to confess our sins to other believers often demonstrates that we fear what man thinks of us over what God knows of us

### **Acts 19:18-20**

- A community of believers that engages regularly in confession shows that they value God's will over the perceptions of man
- A community that confesses will put itself into position to be used powerfully by God

### **Ecclesiastes 12:13**

- Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10)

- When we are afraid or ashamed to confess sins to other humans, it demonstrates that we fear their opinions more than God's
  - We have repeated that thought several times throughout the study but that is because it is such a vital thought that is so difficult to truly embrace

### **Psalm 44:20-21**

- God knows the secrets of our hearts?
- He knows what we do and the motives behind them.
- We cannot hide our sins from God and God is whom we should be concerned about, so there is no benefit to hiding them from other Christians

### **Philemon 1:6**

- We are called to share in the partnership or sharing of our faith as a community with other believers
- Part of that partnering is confessing our sins to one another
- It is only when we share in the faith with others that we can truly understand all of the good things that are available in Christ

### **Philippians 2:1-8**

- It takes humility to confess our sins to God and one another
- If we imitate Christ and consider ourselves nothing, we will have nothing to hide
- We won't concern ourselves with reputation or what people think, but we'll have the same concern that Jesus did...doing God's will (John 17:4)

### **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about confession of God that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Suffering, Trials, Persecution – Study 18

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Who wants to go through trials, or suffer, or undergo persecution? Not many people would choose such things in life, primarily because we typically see things like that as meaningless. Jesus told his followers, though, that we would likely have all of those things at various times in our lives, many of them precisely because we chose to follow him. Can we find meaning behind these things, though, or are they just something to endure? This is what we will look at in this study.

## **The Nature of Suffering in the Old Testament**

- The primary view of suffering in the Old Testament was that obedience would bring blessing and disobedience to God would result in suffering
  - This was not always the case, but was the normal view and order of things under the Old Covenant
- We can see many examples of this in the Old Testament:
  - Numbers 14:31-35
  - Deuteronomy 28 (blessings for obedience, suffering for disobedience)
  - Psalm 107:17
  - Proverbs 13:20

## **He Must Suffer Many Things**

- The picture of the promised Messiah was quite different from that
- The Messiah would perfectly obey God's will but yet he would still suffer greatly
  - Psalm 22:22-24
    - How could the Messiah praise God but still suffer and be scorned by God?
  - Isaiah 53:3
  - Luke 17:25
    - Jesus said that he must suffer many things and be rejected
- Up until that time, suffering was always seen as a result of being disobedient to God but Christ changed that
  - Suffering for the Messiah and his people took on a new meaning

## **Our Participation**

### **Acts 5:41; 9:16**

- Saul (Paul) would follow Jesus but doing so meant that he would suffer a great deal

### **1 Peter 2:19-23**

- We suffer because he suffered
- Jesus' suffering was not a result of his wrongdoing
  - Quite the opposite, in fact

### **Philippians 1:29-30**

- Following Christ means laying down our lives for others and suffering

## **The New Nature of Suffering**

### **Hebrews 2:10**

- Jesus was made complete through suffering

## **Hebrews 5:7-10**

- Jesus learned obedience in the sense that he became fully familiar with what it meant to do God's will through suffering and persecution
- We also are made more mature and complete in Christ when we learn to be obedient during the hard times

## **The Purpose of Suffering, Trials, and Persecution**

### **2 Timothy 2:3-12**

- Christ suffered for the benefit of others and that is our calling as well
- We will have hard times and get hurt (emotionally or otherwise) following Christ
  - We shouldn't expect life to be fair to us as followers of Christ
- Everyone gets hurt or goes through trials; the question is what are we going to do with those times
- We will get scars from following Christ but don't be ashamed of those scars (Jesus wasn't)
- Scars are evidence that:
  - You got hurt
  - You overcame it
  - You have empathy for others

### **1 Peter 4:12-19**

- There is no shame in suffering for Christ
- It is a sign of our obedience rather than disobedience
- This does not include bad situations that we get ourselves into because we are not being like Christ

## **The Result of Suffering**

### **Romans 5:1-5**

- We are often willing to serve or follow Christ as long as it doesn't cause us discomfort but as soon as hard times hit that can change quickly
- We tend to want to end the trial immediately rather than consider what God might be teaching us through that time

### **James 1:2-3**

- What do trials produce in us?
- In what, do you think, do trials and perseverance make us complete?

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about suffering, trials, and persecution that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Stewardship – Study 19

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We live in a world where the pursuit of wealth and possession is considered to be among the highest pursuits possible. With all of that focus on wealth and possessions, though, we generally tend to make one very vital mistake. Nothing in the world belongs to us. None of our possessions is really our own. We are nothing more than stewards of what God has made available to us. It is a huge problem to think that resources belong to us when we are nothing more than stewards. Recognizing our role as God's stewards, then, is vital.

## **The Vocation of Humans**

### **Genesis 1:26-30**

- The vocation of humans that are in right relationship with God is to serve as stewards over God's creation
- A sure sign of being in rebellion against God is the need to provide for ourselves (Genesis 3:17-19) rather than acting on his behalf as a steward and allowing him to provide for us (Matthew 6:19-33)
- Psalm 8:4-9 demonstrates what humans, made in the image of God, were intended to be, but failed to live up to because of sin

### **Genesis 4:3-5; Genesis 14:17-20**

- Offering a portion of our resources to God as a recognition of his provision goes back beyond the law given in Exodus
- Giving part of our resources to God is part of our stewardship because it is a recognition that we are but stewards, someone that is managing someone else's resources, rather than our own

### **Luke 19:11-27**

- The context of this passage has to do with Jesus' criticism of Israel for being poor stewards of God's gifts to them
- The principle of stewardship, however, applies to the stewardship that is expected of all of God's people now
- Being a good steward means to manage someone else's resources well as if they were your own
- We are called to be stewards of everything that God has given us
- We are to live as ones who recognize that nothing we have is ours; it all comes from God

## **Stewardship in the Christian Life**

### **Matthew 28:18-20**

- Part of Adam and Eve's original call to stewardship was to be fruitful and multiply and to subdue the whole earth, managing it well as God's stewards
- Jesus calls his disciples to take on that original role that was designated for all humans as God's stewards
- We are to be stewards of his creation and expand his kingdom and rule
- To do this properly we must remember that we need to seek his kingdom first; anything less would be to be poor stewards

### **Luke 12:35-46**

- All Christians have been called to be stewards (servants) of God's resources
- Good stewards are always ready and always living in view of the reality to which we belong in Christ
- When we are selfish, self-focused, or not good managers we demonstrate a lack of belief in the reality of God's ownership and rule over all creation and our role as mere stewards of all to which he has entrusted us

- Do you recognize your role as a steward?
- What does it mean to recognize that everything you have belongs to God and you are just a steward?

## **1 Peter 4:10**

- We are called to be stewards of the grace that God has given us
- It may be gifts, talents, abilities, time, knowledge, resources, etc.
- What are the things that God has given you and called you to be a good steward of?
- What does it mean for you to be a good steward of:
  - Gifts, talents, abilities
  - Time
  - The word of God
  - The Gospel of Jesus Christ
  - Resources and possessions

## **Malachi 3:7-12**

- This passage was written to the Old Covenant people of God but the principles of giving and stewardship came before the Old Covenant Law and continue to apply to God's people in the New Covenant
- They had demonstrated that they had drifted from God by being poor stewards and by refusing to give to God what was his in the first place
- God asked them for a mere tenth of all that he had given them as a reminder to them that everything had come from him and that they were simple stewards ("tithes" literally means "tenth")
- The difference in covenant means that our blessings come in the life of Christ rather than in physical and material blessings but we are still called to be stewards in every area of our lives, including our finances
- Being a good steward means more than just giving ten percent to God, though, it means managing all of our resources well and being good stewards so that we can give generously and lavishly to God and those in need

## **Luke 17:18-30**

- The problem for this young man was not that he was wealthy?
- The problem was that he was a poor steward because he wasn't willing to recognize that everything he had came from God
- God doesn't call everyone to give up everything we have, but as stewards we should be willing to if that is what he calls us to
- Are you a good steward with everything that God has given you?

## **Luke 21:1-4**

- Being a good steward is more about giving all that we have than it is just having a lot or even giving a lot
- It is being willing to recognize that everything we have (whether it be a lot or a little) comes from God
- What convictions about being a steward in all areas of your life have you gained from this study?

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about stewardship that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Announcing the Kingdom – Study 20

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Once we entered into Christ we received a life of salvation, the life of the kingdom of God. But we didn't just receive that life to lounge around in it and enjoy it. We are called to announce the kingdom of God to others, through our words and our lives and call them to be disciples of Jesus as well.

## **Genesis 1:26-30**

- Part of God's design for humans was that we would represent him by working for him
- We are made to be in an intimate relationship with God and represent by spreading his rule

## **Genesis 3:17-19**

- Sin not only stripped man of the full image of God, it left men and women incapable of ruling over God's creation and expanding his rule

## **Exodus 19:3-6**

- God chose Israel, the descendants of Abraham, to be the restored humanity – the people that would do his will and rule with him in his kingdom
- A priest was someone who could go directly into the presence of God and represent others
- The Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God within us
- Israel, in the Old Testament, pointed to God's Kingdom but was never the realization of it
- The words "Kingdom of God" never occur in the Old Testament
- The few times that God says "My Kingdom" are references to the coming of the Messiah

## **Isaiah 11:1-9**

- God begins to promise the coming of this kingdom that would be brought about by the Messiah
- It would be characterized by concern for the spiritually poor, and by righteousness
- It was also intended for all people of all nations

## **Joel 2:28-32**

- The Jews thought that when God sent the Messiah and his Kingdom that it would end history
- They missed the point that God was going to break into history, not end it (Dan. 2:44-45)
- God is transforming this present age through his Kingdom, preparing it for the age to come

## **Mark 1:14-18**

- Jesus came to usher the Kingdom of God into the present age in a new way through his ministry, and more fully through his death and resurrection
- His entire ministry was about announcing that the Kingdom of God was breaking into the present age

## **Matthew 28:18-20**

- Following Jesus' resurrection he offers this charge to his disciples – words that clearly parallel the original instructions to Adam and Eve to be fruitful, fill the earth, and take charge of it
- In Christ, the Kingdom of God is restored
- What is one of the primary activities, according to this verse, of the Kingdom of God?
- Of whom are we to make disciples? It's not just the people like us but all people

## **Luke 9:23-26**

- In order to truly announce the Kingdom of God, we have to leave our old lives fully behind (see Galatians 2:20)

## **2 Corinthians 5:15-21**

- We are called to be ambassadors of the Kingdom of God
- This involves evangelism and sharing our testimony, but it also embraces all aspects of our life
- The Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God in every area of life
- Spreading that Kingdom is important but simply announcing it is not the sole area in which we engage in spreading the Kingdom

## **Matthew 6:9-15**

- Our lives should reflect our prayers
- This means that our lives should involve allowing the Kingdom of God to break into the present age constantly through our lives everywhere we go
- We should live the Kingdom daily and let others see what it looks like
- We anticipate God's age to come by living it in the present

## **Romans 10:14-15**

- We don't reduce God's Kingdom to just the way we live
- We must also announce it
- People cannot come to faith in the life of Christ and enter into the Kingdom of God without hearing the Gospel preached to them from another person – that is the way that God has set up his plan

## **Ephesians 2:8-10**

- Notice the three aspects of "work" here
  - We are the work of God in Christ, meaning we are saved by God
  - We are not saved by our own works or efforts because we could never earn the life of Christ
  - We are saved in Christ, however, in order to work, to be a part of and announce the Kingdom of God

## **Acts 8:4; 13:31**

- The role of the early church was to act as witnesses of the Gospel, the resurrection of Christ, and to preach that wherever they went
- We, in a similar way, are called to be witnesses of what the Gospel is and what it has done in our lives
- We, too, should do this wherever we go
- This probably sounds a little scary which is normal, but if it sounds like a burden that we don't want to participate in, then we have to ask if we really understand what we have in the life of Christ

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about announcing the kingdom of God that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# The Practicals of Kingdom Announcing – Study 21

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There is classic scene in the movie Amistad where John Quincy Adams chides another character for the folly of being such a persuasive speaker without a balancing amount of grace. The same can be said of us sharing the kingdom of God with others. Evangelism needs a mixture of boldness and grace. We need to pay careful attention so as to avoid to going to one extreme or the other. We need to be both bold and kind and full of grace and tact.

## **Kingdom Announcing** **2 Corinthians 5:10-21**

- What compels us to share the kingdom with others?
- We have been given the ministry of reconciliation
  - That means we seek to demonstrate reconciliation in every area of our lives
  - This ministry of reconciliation is not a choice, it has been given to us; it is our life
- What is the role of an ambassador?
- What does it mean that we are ambassadors in God's kingdom?

## **Acts 8:1, 4**

- Who was sharing their faith here?
  - It wasn't just the leaders who were sharing their faith
- What is most challenging for you about sharing your faith with others?

## **Being Bold** **Romans 1:16-17**

- We are not ashamed of the gospel (Romans 1:1-4), but why not?
- What power does the gospel have?
- Why is it important to remember that?

## **Luke 9:23-26**

- What stern warning is given for those that are ashamed of Jesus and his words?
- What are ways that we can act ashamed of Jesus and his words?

## **Acts 4:29-31**

- If we pray for boldness and act in faith, God will answer those prayers
- Why is boldness important in announcing the kingdom to others?

## **Matthew 10:16**

- We need to be both wise and shrewd in our evangelism efforts
- What do you think this means on a practical level?

## **Pitfalls**

### **Proverbs 12:18**

- We have to be careful with our words when announcing the kingdom to others
- We want to be honest and direct but not unnecessarily hurtful or foolish

## **Proverbs 25:17**

- We want to be persistent in reaching out to others, understanding that they likely do not understand the urgency of submitting to the gospel that we do
- But we also want to be wise and not overdo it and annoy people or creep them out

## **Proverbs 27:14**

- Announcing the kingdom to others involves a combination of being bold and confident, even wisely assertive on one hand but not coming on too strong on the other
- It is all about finding a balance

## **Seasoned with Grace**

### **1 Corinthians 9:20-23**

- Paul wasn't saying that he was being fake or insincere
- He found common ground with those that he was sharing his faith with
- He put their interests first and tried to connect with them so that they could hear the gospel that he was preaching in a way that they could understand and not be unnecessarily offended

### **Colossians 4:5**

- We need to be careful in what we say and how we present the kingdom of God to outsiders
- What does it mean to you to make the most of every opportunity?

### **1 Thessalonians 4:10-12**

- We want to be visible in our kingdom lives but full of respect and grace
- We don't want to be unnecessarily offensive

### **1 Peter 3:15-16**

- Why are gentleness and respect important in announcing the kingdom?
- What are some scenarios in which you could imagine maintaining gentleness and respect while sharing your faith could be challenging?
  - What should you do in those difficult situations?

### **2 Timothy 2:23-26**

- What does this warn us to avoid?

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about kingdom announcing that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Being Single, Dating, Marrying – Study 22

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One of the largest pressures that single Christians ever face comes in the questions of whether they should date or not, seek to get married or not, and who they should date or get married to. This study begins to look at these questions through biblical eyes. This is not just a study for single people, however. Singles and marrieds alike are all members of God's family together and it is important that we have and understand the same convictions on such important and core beliefs and practices.

## Single or Married

### 1 Corinthians 7:8-8; 17-24

- Paul's words here might seem rather ordinary to us but they were quite revolutionary in his time
  - Marriage was expected, so to say that it was unnecessary and perhaps being single was something to even be considered as preferable in the kingdom of God was shocking and new
- Christians might prefer to get married but are not required
- Getting married is preferred to giving into sin
- We are, however, called to put God's kingdom first and seek that with all of our energy, if God brings us a spouse then we should accept that with gratitude
- We should be content in whatever situation God has called us to
  - A single person might desire to be married, which is not necessarily wrong, but becomes a problem if they begin to see only value in being married, turn their desires to being married, and begin to seek that even above God's kingdom

### 1 Corinthians 7:32-35

- Paul wasn't against marriage, in fact he had a high view of it (Ephesians 5:21-32) but he did see advantages in remaining unmarried
  - It is quite probable (although we can never know for sure) that Paul was a widower and so knew what it meant to be married and to be single

## What About Dating?

### 1 Corinthians 7:39-40

- There are no biblical directives for dating because it was not a practice in the first century
- Dating, however, should be done in a godly manner, keeping with the principles of the kingdom of God
- What principle is given here about a Christian marrying that can rightly be applied to a Christian dating?

### Matthew 7:21-23

- It is important to remember that Jesus said that many would claim to be followers of his but would not be
  - It is important to remember that when we are considering dating someone and not get sentimental or driven by our emotions
  - If we are considering dating someone, is it reasonable to think that they should be a true disciple of Jesus Christ and not merely religious or someone who says that they are a Christian?

## The Old Testament Principles

### Deuteronomy 7:3-4

- God took a dim view of his people marrying outside of their own (Malachi 2:11; Ezra 9:1-2; etc.)
- For Israel, God wanted them to remain within the people of Israel for marriage
- For the people of God today, we are in Christ; that is our people
  - Is it reasonable to think that we should only date or marry people that are also in Christ?

## **1 Kings 11:3-4**

- What turned Solomon's heart away from God?
- It wasn't just the number of wives that was the problem, it was that they were not devoted to God
- Solomon didn't influence them; they influenced him

## **Matthew 10:16**

- We need to be both wise and shrewd in our evangelism efforts
- What do you think this means on a practical level?

## **New Testament Principles**

### **2 Corinthians 6:14**

- The direct context here is urging Christians not to tie themselves together with those who maintain false beliefs and doctrines
- This principle can also be applied to relationships like dating and marriage
- Is it reasonable to insist that if we should not be tied together with false teachers and false doctrines that we should not engage in intimate relationships with non-believers?

### **1 Corinthians 15:33**

- The principle here is clear: Bad company is much more likely to influence the Christian than the other way around
- Do you agree with this biblical principle?

## **What About Those Already Married?**

### **1 Corinthians 7:12-13**

- Christians should not bind themselves willingly into dating relationships and marriages with non-Christians, but this is not an excuse for those that are already married and become a Christian (or their spouse refuses to remain in Christ) to leave their spouse
- They are to stay and glorify God in their marriage as best they possibly can

## **3 Important Principles**

### **1 Corinthians 10:23-24, 31**

- Paul was responding to a group of Christians who were confusing their freedom in Christ
- They argued that they had the right, in Christ, to do anything that they wanted
- In response, Paul gave them three universal principles to apply to any situation
- These principles can be applied to virtually every situation that we find ourselves in, including the question of Christians dating and marrying
- We will put them in the form of three questions
  1. Is this beneficial?
    - Is what I want to do beneficial to my life in Christ and will it draw me closer to God?
  2. Is this constructive?
    - Will my actions benefit the body of Christ?
    - Does it seek the good of the whole body rather than just myself (v. 24)
  3. Does this glorify God?
    - How does what I'm considering bring glory to God and demonstrate his kingdom and the principles of his kingdom to the world?

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about dating and marrying in God's kingdom that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Kingdom Marriage – Study 23

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Marriage was God's idea from the first place and so it should not surprise that his word gives us a great deal of guidance and support in building a marriage that will last if we build our marriage around his word and keep God as the foundation of our home. It is virtually impossible to be doing well spiritually if our marriage is not going well because the two are so inter-related. This is not to say that marriages within the kingdom of God will be perfect, but they should be much stronger and look much different from the average marriage in the world.

## **God's Plan for Marriage**

### **Genesis 2:24**

- Marriage was given to us by God to meet the needs of one another
- But only God can meet our deepest needs
- Each spouse should put no other human (including their kids) ahead of their affection for their spouse, but if they don't each love God the most, the marriage will suffer

### **Matthew 19:4-6**

- Jesus defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman; he did so quoting the Old Testament passage in Genesis 2:24 so both the Old and New Testaments confirm this truth

### **Proverbs 18:22**

- In the book of Proverbs the height of wisdom for a man (and a woman) is to find a good and godly spouse (this culminates in Proverbs 31 where finding the godly wife is depicted as the pinnacle of a book about finding wisdom)

### **Matthew 19:8-9**

- In contrast to a word that increasingly takes marriage lightly and as an arrangement of convenience, God expects marriage to be for life
- If we have divorced, God can forgive us as he does for any other ungodly behavior before entering into Christ but as Christians we are not to take marriage lightly

### **Ephesians 5:28-33**

- The ultimate purpose for marriage lies even beyond the marriage and companionship between a man and a woman
- This tells us that the reason a man and woman become one flesh is to teach us about the ultimate marriage and relationship between Christ and his people, the church
- Our marriage teaches us about and points to the relationship between God and his people

## **The Difference in Christian Marriage**

### **Proverbs 15:22; Matthew 28:19**

- Seeking and taking advice and receiving ongoing discipling and teaching is an important part of a godly marriage that will continue to grow up into the life of Christ

### **Ephesians 5:21-28**

- A Christian marriage should be marked by mutual respect, love, and submission
- This works out practically in important things such as:
  - Husbands and wives should respect one another and submit to one another but the husband is the spiritual head of the family

- The husband should set the pace in having quiet times together
- Praying together
- Having regular family devotionals
- Being an active part of the church family
- Mutually edifying communication (Ephesians 4:29)
- Spending quality time together
- Getting rid of bitterness and pent-up feelings in a godly way (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:31)
- Working together as a team by coordinating your schedules and checking with each other often
- Laying down your lives, feelings, and emotions for the benefit of one another (Philippians 2:1-5)

## **Loving Husbands**

### **Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7**

- Husbands are to lead the family spiritually but should be loving and considerate of their wives
- Husbands should do their share of the load and be willing to help around the house and raising the kids
- A husband should, in most normal situations, be equally comfortable caring for the children if the wife is out of town, for instance, as the wife is

## **Submissive Wives**

### **Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:5-6; Proverbs 21:19; 25:24; 27:15**

- Submission doesn't mean to be trampled on
- It means to be respectful and willing to choose to respect the authority and role of the other person
- Wives should encourage their husbands to lead but not be nagging in their efforts

## **2 Corinthians 5:18**

- Nothing points to our ministry of reconciliation more than a harmonious marriage
- There are three important aspects of this that we will look at:

## **A Welcoming Home**

### **1 Peter 4:9**

- Having a home that is open to others consistently is important
- We don't want to create private little havens but an open door where the ministry of reconciliation is constantly on display
  - Have both Christians and non-Christians over for dinner, dessert, or almost any other reason often

## **A Spiritual Home**

### **1 Corinthians 10:31**

- Your household should seek to bring God glory in everything you do
- Don't save spiritual things for church gatherings
- Have spiritual conversations together, encourage one another spiritually, and seek to help each other grow
- Don't try to protect one another if there is ungodly behavior present (Acts 5:1-11)
- Help one another stay righteous before God (Hebrews 3:12)
- Every marriage needs counseling, mentoring, and input; seek it
  - Agree with one another on the importance of discipling and input within your marriage and give each other "permission" to bring in your discipling partners to help if there are unresolved issues

## **A Loving Home**

### **1 Corinthians 7:5**

- Do not deprive one another, but act out of the interest of one another (this is a two-way street)
- Just because you're married doesn't mean romantic things like cards, flowers, presents, creativity, gifts, surprises, etc., cannot be constant parts of your relationship

### **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about marriage in God's kingdom that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Kingdom Parenting – Study 24

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The center of God's plan to restore the world is family, both his family in Christ and individual family units made up of husband, wife, and usually children. A quick glance around our world, sadly, will show us what trouble the basic building block of the family is in. Marriages regularly struggle and fall apart and many people feel quite lost when it comes to parenting. The Christ-centered family will serve as a very different example of what a family can be and be quite attractive and offer great hope to those around you. The more our families learn to be centered on Christ, the more they will stand out from the typical families around them. This should not put pressure on anyone as though the Christian family must be perfect, because none of them are. We are not perfect but we do have a sharp focus and a goal of where we are going and what we can continue to transform into rather than just surviving to the next day the way that many families do.

## **The Goal – A Christ-Centered Home**

### **Proverbs 22:6**

- We are called to teach and train our children about the way that they should go
- This is a full-time job
- Children need to have the standard of the Bible applied to every area of their life and be taught to do so themselves as well; this should be done in an encouraging and not heavy or oppressive way
- The primary way that we teach children the way of Christ is through constant, little conversations with them where we help to direct their worldview
- We have to teach them that everything has a worldview that it is trying to teach them
  - They have to be very careful about the influences that they are allowing into their minds (1 Corinthians 15:33); this includes
    - Music
    - Friends
    - Movies
    - TV
    - Books
    - Etc.,
- The general truth that if we train our children in the way that they should go that they will not part from it is generally true but not an absolute promise because children do have their own free will

### **Psalms 11:3**

- If the foundations are not strong, there is no hope for a child or a family
- For the Christian family, Jesus Christ is the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11)
  - We must build everything in our families on that foundation
- Teach children how to make Christ the source of everything we think and do

### **Colossians 3:17**

- It is a slow but rewarding process to teach children to do everything in a manner consistent with Jesus Christ
  - We need to make sure that this is not crushing but an encouraging goal that the whole family works towards

### **Hosea 4:6a**

- The simple truth is that we will be destroyed without biblical knowledge and its proper use

- Teaching children how to operate in a godly way in a complicated world is a large but rewarding task

## **Deuteronomy 6:1-9**

- Teaching our children God's word is vitally important
- This passage, using a lot of powerful symbolic imagery, teaches us the importance of constantly inundating our children with the word of God
- This should include:
  - Regular family devotionals or Bible learning time
  - Regular quiet times with children at a level that is realistic for them
  - Praying regularly with children
  - Have a regular and encouraging discipling time with each child

## **Encouraging Environment**

### **Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21**

- Training children in the way of the Lord needs to be deliberate, firm, and consistent but you must take care not to make it discouraging and leave them feeling as though they can't ever do anything right
- There is a spiritual chain-of-command: Christ—husband—wife—children
  - The father must be the spiritual director of the home
  - But the husband and wife need to work together
  - If you are a single parent, it will be more difficult but not impossible
    - Take advantage of the rest of the body of Christ to help you
- Your family atmosphere should be encouraging, fun, and inviting for all
  - Spend special time with your kids (together and separately)
  - Have special traditions and make memories
  - Give them lots of affection, encouragement and affirmation
    - Your affirmations should far outweigh your corrections

## **Discipline**

### **Proverbs 23:13-14; 22:15-22**

- Discipling is the act of lovingly training your children
- God commands that we discipline our children
- Any time of discipling should be God-focused, loving, firm, and never harsh
  - If you cannot be controlled and calm then do not discipline at that moment
  - Discipline of any kind should never be done in anger
  - Children should always be taught and explained to why they are receiving discipline or correction and what they could have done rather than the undesired behavior
  - Any discipline time should end with loving and reassurance
- It is vitally important, though, that we are ultimately shepherding the heart of our children (and their motivations and desires) rather than just focusing on right behavior
- Remember we are not trying to raise good little boys and girls that blindly obey; we are trying to craft godly young men and women who follow God from their heart

## **Salt and Light**

### **Mark 9:50; Matthew 5:14-16**

- We are to have salt among or in ourselves
  - This gives a visual image of a container that needs to be filled with salt
  - Our children are like salt shakers
    - If we don't fill them up with the salt of a godly mindset then the world will be more than happy to fill them up
    - Be constantly aware what their influences are and what is going into their mind
- The family of God seeks to be a light to the world, showing the world how to live as the people of God

- As families within that larger family we are also to be a light to those around us
- Work together as a family to be a light in your neighborhood, your schools, etc.
- Teach your kids to think evangelistically and work together as a family to bring friends, relations, and neighbors to the family of Christ as well
- Be hospitable regularly and teach your entire family how to take part in that

## **Setting the Bar**

### **Matthew 10:24**

- Your children will be very unlikely to be more spiritually and focused on God than you are
- Model consistency
- Model humility
  - You cannot do this on your own
  - Be humble and get lots of advice, input, and discipling
  - Be open with your struggles so that other Christian parents can encourage and help you

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about parenting in God's kingdom that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Examining God's Word – Study 25

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One of the most important disciplines that a Christian needs to become consistent in is examining and studying the word of God. This needs to become a top priority of any Christian whether you are a book learner naturally or not. Each Christian should be consistently engaged in examining and learning the word of God both independently and in community with other Christians.

## **The Importance of God's Word**

### **Mark 4:1-20**

- We can have different initial responses to God's word, but the principles of this passage continue to apply to our lives throughout our walk in Christ
- We must have our hearts always open to God's word

### **Mark 4:24-25**

- What truth does this passage teach us about digging in to God's word?

### **Psalms 119:105**

- What does this verse tell us that the word of God is for us?
- What does it imply about our lives if we do not consistently have the word of God?

### **Luke 16:19-31**

- Jesus believed that the word of God (Moses and the prophets) was the most powerful tool available to convert people to obedience to God
- He believed that the word was more effective and powerful than someone coming back from the dead
- Faith comes from hearing the word of God and nothing else (Romans 10:17)

### **Hebrews 4:12-13**

- The word is active and pertinent to our everyday lives which means it is important to dig into it everyday

## **It Takes Work**

### **Acts 17:10-12**

- Why were this group of people commended?
- Digging into the word of God is vital
- It is never a good idea to get so comfortable with any teacher that we don't measure their words against the word of God
- In order to be aware of poor, shallow, or incorrect teaching, each disciple must have their own knowledge of the word of God and constantly seek to dig deeper

### **1 Thessalonians 2:13**

- They accepted the word of God as just that rather than a human word; What is the difference?
- What did Paul mean by saying that the word was at work in them?

### **2 Peter 3:15-16**

- We must be careful in how we handle the word of God so that we do not twist the Scriptures
- The Scriptures can be difficult to understand (even Peter had trouble with Paul at time, evidently) but that doesn't mean that we quit trying to understand

- There are many resources within the body of Christ to help you understand and go deeper – use them

## **2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17**

- Reading is something that we do to a magazine or a good mystery novel
- The word of God is to be studied, examined, learned, and embraced
- Become a student and a lifelong learner

## **Don't Just Hear It, Do It**

### **James 1:22-25**

- Simply reading the word of God and agreeing with it but not putting it into obedient action is as silly as looking at yourself in the mirror and forgetting what you look like
- Examine the word carefully with an eye towards obeying it and putting it into practice

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about examining God's word that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# Studying God's Word – Study 26

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It's one thing to know that we need to do something. It is another matter entirely to actually know how to do it. It is certainly important to have a conviction that you need to study, examine, and know God's word on an ever-increasing deeper level. But it is quite possible to have that conviction without knowing how to actually go about going deeper into God's word and beginning a system of study. There are certainly many different ways to do that and they simply cannot even begin to be covered in this study but we will look at some simple steps to help you get started.

## Step 1 – Choose a book to study

- It is never the most productive method to just wake up in the morning, crack open the Bible to whatever page it opens to and begin reading for awhile to see what guidance and wisdom that particular section happens to offer today
  - To do that is to read the Bible more like a horoscope than the word of God that deserves to be studied and examined deeply
- Choose a book of the Bible that you would like to study
  - It may be a book that interests you, one that someone else suggested, one that was preached from recently, or one that you think covers some specific material that might help you in the areas in which you currently need growth and direction

## Step 2 – Read Through the Book

- It is best if you read all the way through your book to start
- Do this in one sitting if possible (that will be much more difficult with some longer books so you may have to break it up over a couple of days)
- You may even want to read it through in its entirety in several different translations (HCSB, NIV, ESV, NASB, NRSV, NLT, just to name a few)

## Step 3 – Principles to Understand the Book at a deeper level

- It is important to remember that the Bible is God's word for his people
  - The Bible was written for us but not directly to us
  - Before we can understand what it is saying to God's people today we have to understand what it said to the original audience to whom it was written; what was it calling them to do or know
- To understand the Bible properly, there are a few simple guidelines that will help us if we follow:
  1. Their Side of the River
    - Consider what the text would have been telling the original audience (their side of the river)
    - It cannot mean for us something that it never meant for them (even if they didn't fully understand everything at the time that it was written)
  2. How Wide is the River
    - Remember that there are things that put a greater distance between us and the original audience:
      - Culture
      - Historical setting
      - Language (figures of speech, etc.)
      - Status as God's people (nation of Israel vs. the church)
      - Covenant (Old or New)
      - Etc.

- We have to at least be aware of those things as we consider what it will take to cross the river to bring the text from their time into ours
- 3. Cross the River in our Boat Named “Principle”
  - The Bible is a book of timeless principles written to specific people at specific times
  - Our job as readers is to not get bogged down in the cultural specifics of each situation but to understand those things a bit so that we can properly extract the principle from each situation
  - Determine the principle of a verse, passage, or paragraph
- 4. Arrive on Our Side of the River
  - How would we apply this principle to the people of God today?
  - What is your part and responsibility in that principle as it is applied to God’s family?
- Example:
  - Let’s go back through those four guidelines and apply them to a passage that would, on its surface, seem to have no application for us today – Exodus 21:28-29
    1. Their Side of the River
      - They were being told quite clearly that an animal that injured another human must be put to death and its meat not eaten so that no benefit might come from such a tragedy. This would have been an economic blow for the owner so it was not as though they were getting off free and clear. If, however, this was a repeated offense, then the owner was negligent and it should not be treated as an accident; the owner would pay the price for the crime with their own life
    2. How Wide is the River
      - Remember that there are things that put a greater distance between us and the original audience:
        - This was written to the people of Israel before they had a king and any kind of ruling government other than God’s word
        - The Law was the model by which they judged every aspect of life and it told them what kind of people they should be
        - They were an agrarian people that would come in contact with animals often
        - This took place under the Old Covenant and the Law
    3. Cross the River in our Boat Named “Principle”
      - The principle here is something like this: God does not want us to punish people unduly for accidents nor does he want us to become negligent. God’s people should show grace where appropriate but also be responsible for their actions (or lack thereof) and make restitution if they or something that is in their care (child, pet, etc) causes harm
    4. Arrive on Our Side of the River
      - This is a principle that can easily be applied to many appropriate situations
      - Reading the Bible this way makes all of God’s word living and active

## **Step 4 – Read and Observe**

- Once we have read a book all the way through we now want to go back carefully and be detectives
  - What does each sentence say?
  - What is the main point of each paragraph?
  - Are there any wordplays, repetitions of words or ideas, figures of speech, lists, commands, etc., of which we need to take note?
  - Are there any parts that you don’t understand
    - Get in the habit of taking notes while you study, including writing down questions that you cannot answer on your own
  - If you need to look up a specific word to see what it might have meant in the original language you can use a source like [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org) (type in a verse, several small icons will appear

to the left of that verse, choose the “c” icon, then click on the Strong’s number for the word you would like to look up)

- You may also find it helpful to get a concordance and a good Bible dictionary

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### **Step 5 – Work Your Way Through the Book**

- Go through a little bit of the book each day
- You’re not in a race so it doesn’t matter how long you take to go through a book

### **Step 6 – Come to Some Convictions**

- At the end of each daily study session you will want to write down the answers to some simple questions:
  - What did I learn about the nature of God today and/or how he relates to his people?
  - What principles did I encounter in God’s Word Today?
  - What do these principles mean for the people of God?
  - How do these principles teach, rebuke, correct, and train me in righteousness today?
  - What am I going to do in response to God’s word today?

### **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about studying God’s word that you didn’t previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# The Kingdom of God, Part 1 – Study 27

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The central aspect of Jesus' ministry on earth and teaching was the kingdom of God. In actuality, the kingdom of God is the skin of the entire word of God; it is the thing that keeps everything together and ties in all of the other themes, truths, and aspects of the Bible. Being that it is such an important element of God's will for his people and is the destiny of his entire creation, it is important that we begin to have a good understanding of what the kingdom of God is.

## The Kingdom of God on Earth

### Genesis 1:31; 2:8-9; 2:16-17

- God's creation was just as God wanted it; the Garden was, in effect, God's kingdom
- God created humans to live in concert with him, being his representatives and caring for his creation
- God's kingdom has to do with realizing the rule, reign, and kingship of God in the realm of earth
- Humans were made to be in God's kingdom by doing his will

## Losing the Kingdom

### Genesis 3:6-7; 17-19; 23-24

- Humans chose to do their own will rather than God's which kept us from representing God, from being part of his kingdom and rule, and separated us from God
- Ever since this moment, God has been at work to restore us to his kingdom

## Hints of the Kingdom

### Exodus 19:3-8

- God entered into covenant with the descendants of Abraham, the Israelites
- God rescued them, brought them out of Egypt
- God was their king, they were to be his people
  - He called them to be obedient
  - He called them to be priests (people who could enter into God's presence and help others to do so as well)
  - Israel agreed to be God's people
- This would not be the kingdom in its fullness but would show people what the kingdom would be like
- Sadly, the remainder of the Old Testament chronicles the fact that Israel broke covenant with God and refused to be the people that God wanted them to be

### Isaiah 2:2-4

- Israel, the covenant with them, and the Law were always temporary measures for God to bring about his kingdom through the Messiah
- The mountain of the Lord was another way of talking about the kingdom of God
- The Messiah would bring about a new wave of the kingdom and allow it to break into the present realm
- Notice that it prophesies that the kingdom would consist of people from all nations who would live in peace and harmony with one another within God's kingdom (this means that the fulfillment of the kingdom could not be Israel if the promise was to consist of all nations)

### Jeremiah 31:31-34

- God promised a New Covenant that would surpass the Old Covenant with Israel
- This New Covenant would not be by birth but by choice as each individual had the choice to enter into relationship with God and to be part of his kingdom

## **Daniel 2:44**

- God promised to establish his kingdom on earth during the times of the “great” kingdoms of the earth

## **Daniel 7:13-14**

- The Messiah, the son of man, would establish the everlasting kingdom that would never end

## **2 Chronicles 36:23**

- In the Hebrew Bible that Jesus used during his lifetime, this was the last verse of what we call the Old Testament (the texts were the same, they just used a somewhat different order for the books)
- This verse was a prophecy that pointed to the fact that the kingdoms of the earth were lacking
  - Someone needed to return to Jerusalem to build God a proper Temple
  - This would not be another physical Temple
- The term translated “go up” was a specific term in the Hebrew language
  - It referred to one going into holy war for the cause of God and his people
- The basic question that the Hebrew Old Testament left off with was who would go to battle for God’s people in Jerusalem and finally bring about the promised Kingdom and Temple that Israel had been waiting for?
  - In other words, who would establish God’s kingdom on earth?

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about God’s kingdom that you didn’t previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# The Kingdom of God, Part 2 – Study 28

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The central aspect of Jesus' ministry on earth and teaching was the kingdom of God. In actuality, the kingdom of God is the skin of the entire word of God; it is the thing that keeps everything together and ties in all of the other themes, truths, and aspects of the Bible. Being that it is such an important element of God's will for his people and is the destiny of his entire creation, it is important that we begin to have a good understanding of what the kingdom of God is.

## The Kingdom Coming in Waves

### Matthew 6:10

- One of the key things that Jesus taught his disciples to pray for was that the kingdom would continue to come and that God's will would be done—that is the kingdom in essence, the place where God's will is done
- It would make little sense for Jesus to ask his disciples to pray for something that was largely irrelevant in their time
  - Jesus asked them to pray for the kingdom to come because it was breaking in all around them through Jesus' ministry and would come in a special, new way soon

### Matthew 4:17

- Jesus was preaching from the very onset of his ministry that the kingdom of God had come near
- The kingdom would be the central aspect of Jesus' teaching throughout his ministry

### Matthew 12:28

- Through Jesus' actions and ministry the kingdom of God was breaking into the world just as the prophets had foretold
- The Messiah was ushering in the kingdom of God

### Mark 9:1

- Jesus told his disciples that some would be alive and, by implication, some would be dead, at the coming of the kingdom
  - This would seem to indicate that the kingdom, although was breaking in through Jesus' ministry, would come in a very strong wave, in power, during the lifetimes of at least some of the disciples
  - As we will see, when the kingdom did come in power, Judas Iscariot (who was present here) would be dead while the others would be alive, thus Jesus' words were quite accurate

### Luke 24:44-49

- This takes place after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead
- He tells them:
  - All prophecies in the Old Testament must be fulfilled
  - Forgiveness of sin would be proclaimed to all nation beginning at Jerusalem
  - The Spirit would come upon them in power as a means to this

### Acts 1:3-5

- Jesus resurrected after 3 days, then spent 40 days teaching his disciples about the kingdom of God
- He then ascended to heaven and 7 days later Pentecost took place in Jerusalem

## **The Spirit Opens the Door to the Kingdom for the Jews**

### **Acts 2:1-12**

- The festival of Pentecost took place 50 days after Jesus' death (Passover)
- Jews from all nations were present in Jerusalem to celebrate
- The Holy Spirit came in power (v. 4)
- The miraculous sign that the family of God, the kingdom of all nations, had come was that each person heard the proclamation in their own language

### **Acts 2:22-24**

- Jesus was killed but God raised him from the dead showing him to be the true Messiah, the one who would be king of the kingdom

### **Acts 2:36-39**

- God demonstrated that Jesus was both Lord and Christ
  - He was the king of the kingdom and a large wave of the kingdom had come
- Those who recognized Jesus as their Lord and king were prepared to follow and wanted to know what to do
- They were told to enter into the life of Christ, the life of the kingdom, by being baptized and receiving the forgiveness of sin and the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit
- The door to the kingdom had been opened for the Jews

## **The Spirit Opens the Door to the Kingdom for the Gentiles**

### **Acts 10:44-49; 11:15-17**

- It seems like no large controversy to us that Gentiles would be welcomed into the kingdom of God but it was a topic of great concern in the first century
- Even the earliest Christians would have assumed that Gentiles would not just be allowed into God's New Covenant family; surely they must become Jews first and follow the Law of Moses
- The entirety of chapters 10-11 make clear that the Holy Spirit was making it clear that this was not the case
  - The work of Christ had changed their assumptions
  - God's family and kingdom really would include people of all nations through nothing more than entering into Christ
  - The Spirit came upon them just as he had come upon people in the Old Testament (this was different than the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit)
- The Spirit came upon them in power just as he had come upon the disciples to open the door of the kingdom at Pentecost
- Through the baptism of the Holy Spirit the door to the kingdom had been opened in these events that were once-for-all and need-not-be-repeated events

## **The People of the Kingdom**

### **1 Peter 2:9-10**

- The people of God are the people of the kingdom
- We are the kingdom of priests that God had always desired
- Some have mistakenly assumed that this means that the kingdom of God is the same thing as the church
- The church is to be the clearest example of the kingdom but the kingdom is the rule of God
  - The kingdom should be made manifest through the life and activities of the church

## **Still Waiting**

### **1 Peter 1:3-5; Colossians**

- We have access to the kingdom, but it has still not come in all its fullness

- It is waiting in heaven until it comes in fullness with Christ when he returns at the resurrection of all believers

### **Revelation 21:1-7**

- One day the kingdom will come in all of its fullness and God will restore the heavens and earth and he will dwell with his people forever

### **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about God's kingdom that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# The Resurrection – Study 29

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It is perhaps unfortunate that so many people, including Christians have little understanding about what happens after we die. Very few Christians have a solid understanding of the Resurrection which is particularly curious considering the fact that the writer of Hebrews lists the Resurrection of the dead among the elementary teachings of the faith that everyone should know before even moving on to spiritual maturity (Hebrews 6:2). With that in mind, we undertake to at least study out some of the basics of the resurrection. Much of this might seem difficult to understand or new but it is not at all. These concepts of the resurrection were the bread and butter of the early church. Resurrection, as understood below, was the great hope of the early church. It was what continued to motivate them in the face of death and was the promise that kept them from fearing persecution and even death. It makes sense that it should be as important to us as it was to the early Christians.

## The Message of the Gospel

### 2 Timothy 2:8-11

- What does Paul say, in shorthand, is his gospel message
- The gospel is the declaration that Jesus was the Davidic Messiah that had defeated death and made that victory available to those who would have faith in his life

### 1 Corinthians 15:1-21

- Again Paul says that his gospel is the declaration of Jesus' victory over death
- He also says that Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee (or the firstfruits) of the rest of the "crop" which is our resurrection
- What does Paul say, in verses 12-19, is the negative ramifications if there is no resurrection from the dead
- For a sample of other passages that speak of the importance of the resurrection of the dead in the preaching of the apostolic church see: Acts 1:21-22; Acts 2:25-36; Acts 4:1-3; Acts 4:32-33; Acts 17:16-18; 31-33; Acts 23:6-8; Acts 24:10-21; Romans 1:1-6; Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 6:1-2

## What is the Resurrection?

### 1 Corinthians 15:42-49

- For Paul the problem was not with the body itself but with sin and death which had taken up residence producing corruption, dishonor and weakness
- Being human is good, being an embodied human in good, being a rebellious human, a decaying human, a human dishonored through bodily sin and bodily death is bad
- What needs replacing is not the body but the animating force that controls the will
- The words translated "natural" and "spiritual" have to do with what animates the body not the substance of which it is made
- Paul is saying that at the resurrection of those in Christ, our natures that are currently animated by our own human souls will be transformed by the Spirit to be animated by God's own Spirit – Our tendency to sin will be gone and dealt with
- Paul says in Romans 8:9-11 that the process of choosing to walk according to the Spirit rather than our own fleshly desires in the present age trains us for and anticipates that time when we will be transformed fully

### 2 Corinthians 5:1-8

- Paul describes a three stage process which includes:
- Our present unredeemed bodies (He refers to this as our earthly tents)

- The intermediate stage when we will have passed through physical death and into the presence of the Lord awaiting resurrection (He calls this “being naked”)
- The resurrection body (He calls this our heavenly dwelling because saying something was heavenly meant it was aligned with the will of God and because the Scriptures promise that the resurrection bodies and the new creation are being kept in heaven until God comes and restores all things including our bodies. See Matthew 19:28; Acts 3:19-21; Romans 8:20-24; Colossians 3:1-5; 1 Peter 1:3-5)

## **2 Peter 3:3-15**

- Peter is answering those who were already mocking the belief in the resurrection of those in Christ and the onset of the new creation
- Many people think that Peter is saying that the whole world will be burned up and destroyed but that cannot be the case based on both an understanding of the language he uses and two important pieces of internal logic:
  - First, Peter says that what he is describing is similar to the destruction that came upon the world during Noah’s flood. The word he used throughout this passage that is translated “destroy” means to “dissolve,” “unloose,” or “overthrow.” Peter says that what he is talking about will be of a similar nature of cleansing destruction as the flood. The flood was certainly not an annihilation of the physical universe and neither is what Peter is describing.
  - Second, Peter says in verses 14-15, that he is writing of the same things that Paul writes of, but nowhere do we see Paul describing the annihilation of the world. Paul speaks of resurrection and restoration of the universe (see Romans 8:18-25 for example)
- When Peter refers to the elements being destroyed, he uses a word which can mean elements as we might think of as atoms, etc., but more frequently the word was used as a figure of speech referring to the a, b, c’s of the world (especially in a negative sense). Peter is then saying that in the resurrection, the basic principles of the world opposed to God will be unloosed and judged for what they are
- Peter’s use of “laid bare” was a figure of speech that referred to being revealed in judgment
- When he speaks of fire, he is using a common Jewish reference to God’s presence as the consuming fire (Ex. 24:17; Deut. 4:24; 2 Sam. 22:9; Ps. 18:8; Isa. 30:27, 30; Heb. 12:29)
- The new heavens and new earth refers to God’s restored universe after the resurrection (Rev. 21:1-5)

## **When Will This Take Place?**

### **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

- The early Christians were so confident that Jesus’ physical resurrection guaranteed theirs as the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20) that they were prepared for it to happen at any time. They simply didn’t know when it would take place so they spoke of its coming as being near and imminent, which it always is. Simply because it has yet to take place does not mean that it won’t or that we have to come up with crazy theories to explain that resurrection has already happened as a spiritual event or something that happens when we die (2 Timothy 2:15-18)
- Because of this eager expectation, there was much talk of those who were alive at the resurrection being transformed. This led some to wonder what happened to those who had already died. Did they miss out?
- Paul says, first that no one know when the resurrection will come but when it does it will not be a secret coming or something that could be missed.
- It will include the dead in Christ that he will raise and will also include the transformation of those still alive
- Paul says that they will be caught up together in the clouds to meet in the air
  - This is clear allusion to Moses entering into the glory cloud of the presence of God (Ex. 24:15-18)
  - The word translated “meet” was actually a very specific word that denoted meeting and escorting someone important back into town (Matt. 25:1, 6; Acts 28:15)

## **What the Resurrection Means in the Present**

## **Romans 6:1-14**

- Our baptism into Christ is not only the entrance into the death, life, and resurrection of Christ, it is also a present participation in that life
- The life and resurrection of Christ is not just a future hope
- We don't just enter into a future resurrection but that we begin to live the reality of that future in the present

## **1 Corinthians 15:58**

- Paul writes this verse in summary of his long exposition on resurrection
- Dying to self, undergoing the persecution and trials of the Christian faith, and the work that we do in the Lord are not in vain because they will matter in the resurrection, in the age to come
- What we do now is an anticipation of the age to come, it is learning to live by the values of that time and is not simply doing things for the sake of being blindly obedient

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about the resurrection that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# In the Image of the King – Study 30

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There are so many religions and philosophies in our world today other than true Christianity that offer alternate ways and theories of saving people. Sometimes that can be confusing and they can begin to sound rather attractive. But we must always remember what the real problems are. The real problem for humans is not that our lives are miserable or that we just need to go to paradise or heaven or become one with the universe. Our problem is that because of sin we have corrupted the image of God for which we were intended. This is an important topic because Jesus Christ is the only solution to that problem.

## **The Purpose of Man**

### **Genesis 1:26-27**

- For what stated purpose did God make humans?
- God made humans in his image, a word that referred to representing God
  - Humans, made in God's image, had the ability to perfectly represent God and do his will as they cared for his creation

### **Psalm 8:4-9**

- This is a picture of man in his perfect created state, representing God's image
- But does this sound like the average human being today?
  - Do human beings rule over creation and flawlessly represent God?
- Clearly we do not so what happened?

## **Image Corrupted**

### **Genesis 5:2-3**

- Humans were made in God's image, to represent him but something has changed since the Fall of humans due to sin (Genesis 3)
- Rather than being God's image bearers, humans have corrupted the image of God
  - Adam's son is born in his own image
- Humans who sin by doing their own will can no longer fully bear God's image

## **The Perfect Image-Bearer**

### **Colossians 1:15; 2 Corinthians 4:4**

- Jesus came to do God's will (John 6:38) which made him God's image-bearer
- Jesus represented God perfectly, did his will, and was the very image of God

## **Restored to God's Image**

### **Colossians 3:9-10; Ephesians 4:21-24; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Corinthians 15:49; Romans 8:29**

- In Christ we are being restored to the image of God
- This process comes through knowing the life of Christ and doing it more and more
- We are not immediately restored in God's image the moment we are baptized into Christ
  - When we enter into Christ it begins a process of being able to do God's will through the power of the Spirit
  - We grow into the image of God
- Romans 8:29 tells us that this was God's plan from the very beginning
  - God's plan from before the foundations of the earth were laid was that we would be restored to his image by entering into the life of his son

- His plan was always to have a Messiah-shaped family
- In Christ is the only way that we can be restored to the image of God
  - No other religion, spiritual leader, prophet, or guru can restore humans to God's image
  - That is why Jesus said that he was *the way, the truth, and the life*
  - Restoration to God's image is found in Christ alone—Never forget that

## **Give to God's Matthew 22:15-22**

- The Pharisees thought that they could trap Jesus by asking him whether Jews should pay taxes to the much-hated Roman Empire
  - If he answered "yes" then he would be quickly rejected as a traitor by his Jewish listeners
  - If answered "no" then he would be quickly arrested by Rome for inciting people to rebel against paying taxes
- Jesus' answer was shockingly amazing to those that were listening to him
- He asked for a coin with Caesar's image on it
  - The Jews shouldn't have had one on them because with Caesar's image it would have been a violation of the ten commandments
- When they did produce it Jesus asked whose image was on it
  - The clear answer was "Caesar"
- His response was incredible
  - "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's"
  - His point was that the coin had Caesar's image on it and if he wanted it back, then fine, give it to him
  - But humans had been made with God's image, and God wanted what was his
  - They should all be giving themselves entirely to God, because they had his image imprinted on them

## **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about God's image that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

# The Will of the King – Study 31

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One of the most important themes of the Bible and the kingdom of God is the issue of doing God's will. Sin, simply put, is doing our own will rather than God's. Thus being restored to doing God's will is of vital importance for our walk in the family of God as kingdom people.

## **Made for God's Will, but . . .**

### **Genesis 3:1-6**

- Adam and Eve decided to do their own will and what seemed best rather than following God's will
- Man's heart, or the seat of their will, had become totally focused on doing their own will rather than God's
- As beings made in God's image to do his will, not doing his will makes us less than fully human

## **A New Plan**

### **Ezekiel 36:26-27**

- God had a plan to renew the hearts of humans so that we could become fully human, doing his will once again
- This plan would come through Jesus

## **God's Will on Earth**

### **Matthew 6:10**

- Being part of God's kingdom means to do God's will here on earth as it is done perfectly in heaven

## **John 4:34**

- In the Jewish culture, food was symbolic for the substance that sustained your life
- Can you say that doing God's will is the most important thing in your life?

## **John 6:38**

- For what purpose did Jesus say he came?

## **Matthew 7:21-23**

- Not everyone who thinks of themselves as religious or as knowing Jesus will be known by Jesus
- Jesus says that only those who do God's will are those that he will know
- When considering your own judgment before Christ, are you confident that you have given your life to doing God's will?

## **Romans 12:1-2**

- A sacrifice was something that was offered up and given completely to God
- On a personal and practical level, what does it mean to offer you as a sacrifice to God?
- What does it take to begin to do God's will rather than your own?

## **Matthew 26:36-46**

- Jesus serves as the ultimate model of doing the Father's will rather than submitting to the will of his human flesh
- Jesus turned to the Father in prayer to align himself with the Father's will
- Humans first disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden by refusing to do his will and doing their own will instead

- Jesus reversed that by going into another garden and doing the Father's will rather than his own will
- Jesus was completely surrendered to God's will—are you?

### **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about God's will that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?