

A Closer Walk With God



**Lessons Designed To Encourage A Closer Walk With God,
And Fruitful Service As Disciples Of Jesus Christ**

This material is from **ExecutableOutlines.com**, a web site containing sermon outlines and Bible studies by Mark A. Copeland. Visit the web site to browse or download additional material for church or personal use.

The outlines were developed in the course of my ministry as a preacher of the gospel. Feel free to use them as they are, or adapt them to suit your own personal style.

To God Be The Glory!

Executable Outlines, Copyright © Mark A. Copeland, 2006

A Closer Walk With God

Table Of Contents

Are You A Disciple Of Jesus?	3
Blessings And Responsibilities Of Being A Christian	7
Our Public Assemblies	10
Principles Of Prayer	14
The Practice Of Prayer	18
Studying The Bible	22
The Joy Of Singing	26
Growing In The Knowledge Of Jesus Christ	30
Overcoming Sin	34
Discerning Between Good And Evil	38
The Christian And Good Works	41
The Church And You	43
Increasing Opportunities To Share The Gospel	46
Continuing To Grow	51

A Closer Walk With God

Are You A Disciple Of Jesus?

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

INTRODUCTION

1. The above statement was made by Jesus to His apostles shortly before He ascended to heaven
- **Mt 28:18-20**
2. Commonly called “The Great Commission,” notice the main thought of Jesus’ command...
 - a. *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...”*
 - b. To *“make disciples,”* therefore, is the GOAL of evangelizing the world for Christ
3. Are you a disciple of Jesus?
 - a. More than likely you believe in Jesus...
 - b. You might even be one to attend church services regularly
-- But is that what it means to be His disciple?
4. The purpose in this study is to make clear what is involved in being a true disciple of Jesus Christ

[To begin, let’s define the word “disciple”...]

I. THE DEFINITION OF A DISCIPLE

A. THE WORD “DISCIPLE”...

1. The word “disciple” literally means **a learner**
2. According to Vine’s Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words, it denotes **“one who follows another’s teaching”**
3. But a disciple was not only a learner, he was also **an adherent**
4. For this reason disciples were spoken of as **imitators** of their teachers.

B. THE GOAL IN BEING A DISCIPLE...

1. Stated by Jesus himself: to be like the teacher - **Lk 6:40**
2. To be Christ’s disciple, then, is to strive to be like Him!
3. According to the apostle Paul, this coincides with God’s goal in the redemption of mankind, that they be conformed to the image of His Son - **Ro 8:29**

[Do you have a strong desire to follow Jesus and become like Him? Unless you do, it cannot be said that you are truly His disciple! There are also some **“identifying marks”** of discipleship given by Jesus which can help us to further identify a true disciple of Jesus...]

II. THE MARKS OF A DISCIPLE

A. A DISCIPLE IS “ONE WHO ABIDES IN JESUS’ WORDS” - Jn 8:31

1. This would imply being a diligent student of the teachings of Christ
2. It also requires one to be a “doer” of the Word - **Mt 7:21-27; Ja 1:21-25**
3. In view of this, a true disciple would not...
 - a. Fail to study the Bible diligently
 - b. Willingly refrain from opportunities to study with others (e.g., Bible classes, church services, gospel meetings)

B. A DISCIPLE IS ALSO “ONE WHO LOVES THE BRETHREN” - Jn 13:34-35

1. With a love patterned after the love of Jesus (“as I have loved you”)
2. With a love that is visible to the world (“by this all will know”)
3. Therefore, a true disciple would...
 - a. Make every effort to get to know his brethren
 - b. Take advantage of occasions to encourage and grow closer to them (e.g., attending services on Sunday and Wednesday nights)
4. Remember, a disciple is one who wants to become like his teacher
 - a. Was Jesus willing to sacrifice time and effort for His brethren?
 - b. Of course, and so will we... IF we are truly HIS disciples!

C. A DISCIPLE IS “ONE WHO BEARS MUCH FRUIT” - Jn 15:8

1. Notice the word “**much**” (also found in verse 5)
 - a. Jesus is not talking about an occasional good deed
 - b. But a lifestyle which prompts people to glorify God! - **Mt 5:16**
2. This is so important, that failure to bear much fruit will result in being severed from Christ - **Jn 15:1-2**
3. How can one be a disciple if he or she is cut off from Christ?

[The point should be clear: to be a disciple of Jesus Christ means more than just a casual church member. It requires **commitment**, especially in regards to:

- The teachings of Christ
- The love of brethren
- Bearing fruit to the glory of God

The kind of commitment involved is seen further when we consider the “**high cost**” of discipleship demanded by Jesus in **Lk 14:25-33...**]

III. THE COST OF BEING A DISCIPLE

A. JESUS MUST COME FIRST - Lk 14:26

1. Before anyone else, including members of our own family - **Mt 10:34-37**
2. Even before one’s own self - **Lk 9:23-25**

B. WE MUST BE WILLING TO SUFFER FOR CHRIST - Lk 14:27

1. Trying to live godly lives in an ungodly world, we may find that following Christ sometimes involves ridicule and persecution - **2 Ti 3:12**
2. Even if we are blessed to escape such things, we must still be willing to expend time and effort in promoting the cause of Christ in positive ways

C. PUT SIMPLY, WE MUST FORSAKE ALL TO FOLLOW CHRIST - Lk 14:33

1. In other words, Jesus must be **King** and **Lord** of our lives
2. Nothing can take precedent over Him and His Will for us

[This kind of “high cost” of discipleship demanded by Jesus caused many people to turn away from following Him. But Jesus wasn’t trying to attract large crowds, He wanted disciples! Is the **cost** worth it? I believe so, for consider some of the **rewards** of discipleship...]

IV. THE REWARDS OF BEING A DISCIPLE

A. THERE IS THE PROMISE OF “FUTURE BLESSINGS”...

1. We shall be saved from the wrath of God which is yet to come upon the world for its sins - **Ro 5:9**
2. We can look forward with joyful anticipation of eternity with God, free from sorrow, pain and death - **Re 21:1-8**

B. THERE ARE ALSO “PRESENT BLESSINGS”...

1. Jesus offers a **peace** the world cannot give to calm the troubled heart - **Jn 14:27**
2. His words inspire **joy** to lift our spirits out of any depression - **Jn 15:11**
3. He also offers to those who follow Him **the abiding love of God**, which can cast out fear - **Jn 15:9; 1 Jn 4:18**
4. And he makes it possible for us to be members of **the family of God**, which is able if need be to replace our physical family - **Mk 10:28-30**

[There are many other blessings we could mention that are enjoyed by disciples of Jesus; but these suffice to demonstrate that though discipleship is costly, the rewards far exceed the cost!

Now that we understand the nature of discipleship, its cost and rewards, I hope that we want to be true disciples of Jesus Christ. But how does one begin? For the answer we return to our beginning text - **Mt 28:19-20...**]

V. THE BEGINNING OF A DISCIPLE

A. IT INVOLVES BAPTISM - Mt 28:19

1. Why baptism?
 - a. Remember the goal of discipleship: to be like Jesus
 - b. He was holy and sinless, yet we are to be like Him
 - c. Fortunately, baptism is described as an act of faith which puts us in contact with the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ so we can be forgiven - **Ac 2:38; 22:16; Ro 6:3-4**
 - d. It is also the means by which one “puts on Christ” - **Ga 3:27**
 -- **So baptism is the logical starting place for true discipleship!**
2. But what is baptism?
 - a. It is an act of submission which must be preceded by faith in Jesus and repentance for our sins - **Ac 2:36-38; 8:36-37**
 - 1) This precludes infant baptism
 - 2) For infants are incapable of believing and repenting
 - b. It is also an act of submission which involves a burial in water, in which one then rises to walk in newness of life through the power of God - **Ac 8:38; Ro 6:3-4; Co 2:12**
 - 1) This precludes sprinkling or pouring as a mode of baptism

- 2) For neither of these involve a “burial” nor an immersion (which is the meaning of the Greek word “baptidzo”)
- c. When done according to the Word of God, baptism then becomes an act of faith on our part which results in a wonderful working of God in our lives!
 - 1) Our sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus - **Ac 22:16; Ep 5:25-27**
 - 2) We are “regenerated” and “renewed” by the Spirit of God so we can now live for God! - **Ti 3:5-6**
 - 3) It is truly a “rebirth” involving both water and the Spirit - **Jn 3:5**

B. TEACHING AND OBEDIENCE MUST FOLLOW - Mt 28:20

1. This brings us back to the very definition of discipleship
2. For Jesus clearly states:
 - a. We are to be **taught** (that is, to be **learners**)
 - b. We are to **observe** (that is, to be **adherents** or **doers**)
3. In this way we embark on a life devoted to learning and doing all that Jesus commanded

CONCLUSION

1. Only those **scripturally baptized** and demonstrating the “**marks**” of discipleship, despite the “**costs**,” can truly be called disciples of Jesus!
2. Only they can realistically look forward to the “**rewards**” of discipleship, and take consolation in the promise of Jesus:

“and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” - Mt 28:20

If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, then the prospects of “**A Closer Walk With God**” and more fruitful service as a disciple should be of great interest to you. I hope the lessons to follow will help fulfill that interest.

A Closer Walk With God

Blessings And Responsibilities Of Being A Christian

INTRODUCTION

1. Every person has some **big events** in life (for example: birth, graduation, marriage, death)
2. But the most important event for anyone is **becoming a Christian!**
 - a. Why? Because it affects both you and others for ETERNITY
 - b. Unfortunately, many people become Christians and do not really appreciate it until late in life, if ever
 - c. But our service for Christ would be more productive and infinitely more enjoyable if began to grasp the true significance of being Christians, and as such, the children of God
3. This lesson is the first in a series designed to encourage and instruct one to have “**A Closer Walk With God,**” and to be more fruitful in our service as disciples of Jesus Christ

[To **help motivate** us in fulfilling this goal, let’s summarize just a few of the blessings and responsibilities we have as Christians...]

I. GOD AS OUR HEAVENLY FATHER - 1 Jn 3:1

A. CONSIDER THE BLESSING OF HAVING GOD AS OUR FATHER...

1. He is the source of every good and perfect gift from above - **Ja 1:17; Mt 7:11**
2. He provides us comfort in all our afflictions - **2 Co 1:3-4**
3. When needed, in love He chastises us - **He 12:5-11**
4. He has promised never to forsake us - **He 13:5-6**

B. YET, THERE ARE RESPONSIBILITIES FOR HAVING GOD AS OUR FATHER...

1. We must **SUBMIT to God - Ja 4:7**
 - a. By submitting to His Word
 - b. By submitting to His providential workings in our lives - **1 Pe 5:6-11**
2. We must also **DRAW NEAR to God - Ja 4:8**
 - a. Just as an earthly father delights when his children want to draw near to him, so does God - cf. **Mt 23:37**
 - b. We draw nearer to God by “cleansing our hands” and “purifying our hearts” - **Ja 4:8**
 - 1) That is, by obtaining forgiveness and then strengthening our resolve to serve Him
 - 2) For the Christian, this involves repentance, confession of sins, and prayer - **Ac 8:22; 1 Jn 1:9**

II. JESUS CHRIST AS OUR LORD AND HIGH PRIEST - 1 Co 8:6; He 4:14

A. THINK FOR A MOMENT ABOUT THIS BLESSING...

1. He who is our “**Lord**” is also He who rules over the kings of the earth - **Re 1:5-6**
 - a. All authority in heaven and earth has been given Him - **Mt 28:18**
 - b. All have been made subject to Him - **1 Pe 3:22**
 - c. Yet, He calls us His “brethren” ! - **He 2:11-12**

2. As **“High Priest”**, He intercedes in our behalf - **Ro 8:34**
 - a. A High Priest who understands our every feeling - **He 2:17-18**
 - b. A High Priest who “ever lives” to make such intercession for us - **He 7:24-25**

B. WHAT ARE OUR RESPONSIBILITIES OF HAVING JESUS AS LORD AND HIGH PRIEST?

1. If He is truly our **LORD**, we must do what He says - **Lk 6:46**
 - a. We must be careful to observe what He taught - **Mt 28:18-20**
 - b. We must keep His commandments - **Jn 15:10,14**
2. We must also utilize His role as our **HIGH PRIEST** - **He 4:14-16**
 - a. In other words, be quick to obtain mercy and find grace to help us in time of need
 - b. Again, for the Christian this involves **prayer**

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO DWELLS IN US - 1 Co 3:16

A. WONDERFUL BLESSINGS ARE ATTRIBUTED TO THE HOLY SPIRIT’S INDWELLING...

1. He gives us strength to put to death the fleshly deeds of the body - **Ro 8:11-13; Ep 3:16, 20**
2. He also helps in our weakness when it comes to praying as we ought, by acting as an intercessor for us - **Ro 8:26-27**

B. WHAT RESPONSIBILITIES DO WE HAVE IN VIEW OF THE SPIRIT’S INDWELLING?

1. To keep the temple of God, the church, **holy** - **1 Co 3:16-17**
2. We are to **glorify God** even with our bodies - **1 Co 6:18-20**
3. We are to **Walk in the Spirit**, being so led by the Spirit as to produce the fruit of the Spirit - **Ga 5:16-18, 22-25**
 - a. This we do by setting our minds on the things of the Spirit - **Ro 8:5-6**
 - b. Which involves the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit - **Ep 6:17**

IV. THE CHURCH AS OUR FAMILY - 1 Ti 3:15

A. THE BLESSING OF HAVING THE CHURCH AS OUR FAMILY...

1. The members become like fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters - **1 Ti 5:1-2**
2. They can even replace physical relations we may lose when we become Christians - **Mk 10:28-30; Mt 12:46-50**

B. RESPONSIBILITIES OF HAVING THE CHURCH AS OUR FAMILY...

1. We are to **“edify one another”** - **He 10:24-25**
 - a. This necessitates assembling together frequently
 - b. This requires each one doing their share - **Ep 4:15-16**
2. We are to **“bear one another’s burdens”** - **Ga 6:1-2**
 - a. For such is the “law” of Christ
 - b. This requires that we know each other well, and can be depended upon to provide support

CONCLUSION

1. There are certainly many more blessings and responsibilities that we have as Christians
2. But I hope that these suffice to impress upon us...
 - a. How blessed we are as Christians
 - b. How important it is that we fulfill our responsibilities-- **Or we may lose the blessings we have! - He 3:12-15**

A Closer Walk With God

Our Public Assemblies

INTRODUCTION

1. In our last study, we noted that being a Christian involves both **blessings** and **responsibilities**
2. One of the blessings as well as an important responsibility for the Christian is the practice of **assembling** regularly with other Christians
 - a. We have **an example** of Christians assembling in **Ac 20:7**
 - b. We have **an explicit command** not to forsake our assembling together - **He 10:25**
3. The purpose of our assembling is threefold...
 - a. To **express praise and devotion to God and Christ**
 - b. To **exhort and encourage our brethren** to greater service - **He 10:24-25**
 - c. To **receive such encouragement** ourselves
4. In this study, we shall:
 - a. Briefly remark concerning the activities that we engage in during our assemblies
 - b. See how every activity is designed to accomplish the threefold purpose described above
 - c. Suggest how we can get the most out of our public assemblies

I. THE ACTIVITIES OF OUR ASSEMBLIES

A. PRAYER...

1. We have several examples of group prayer in the early church - **Ac 4:23-24; 12:5,12**
2. The value of such prayer is implied in **Ja 5:16** (if such is true concerning the prayer of **one** righteous man, how much more the prayers of **many** righteous?)
3. The value of all prayer is seen further in **Ph 4:6-7**
 - a. Thus prayer not only blesses (praises) God
 - b. But also blesses (benefits) those who pray!
4. **HINT:** To get the most out of public prayers, make them your own!
 - a. In your heart, tell the Lord you agree with what is being said by the one leading the prayer
 - b. Don't hesitate to offer a hearty "Amen!" if you agree

B. SINGING...

1. Commands to sing can be found in **Ep 5:19; Co 3:16; He 13:15**
2. Notice where the emphasis lies:
 - a. On praising God
 - b. On teaching one another
 - c. On making melody "in your hearts"
3. So the emphasis is not on how we sound, but on what we say and how we feel
 - a. Therefore, pay more attention to the words rather than the melody
 - b. Concentrate on engaging the mind and heart, and not just the mouth
4. **HINT:** To get more out singing in public, sing often in private! - **Ja 5:13**

C. THE WORD OF GOD...

1. Teaching or preaching of the Word of God was part of public worship in the early church - **Ac 20:7**
2. For it is by the Word of God that we can grow spiritually - **1 Pe 2:2**
3. How we listen to the proclamation of God's Word is an indication of our devotion to God
 - a. We should be quick to hear what God's Word has to say - **Ja 1:18-19**
 - b. It is important to receive God's Word with a proper attitude of meekness and willingness to receive it - **Ja 1:21; Mk 4:23-25**
4. **HINT:** As with singing, the more we study the Word in private, the more we get out of it in the public assemblies!

D. THE LORD'S SUPPER...

1. This is also called:
 - a. The "breaking of bread" - **Ac 2:42; 20:7**
 - b. "Communion" - **1 Co 10:16**
2. It is a memorial feast instituted by Jesus Himself - **1 Co 11:23-26**
 - a. In it we remember:
 - 1) The sinless body offered on the cross in our place
 - 2) The blood shed to provide forgiveness for our sins
 - b. Done faithfully, we proclaim our faith in the efficacy of the Lord's death
3. It should be done with all seriousness and appropriateness - **1 Co 11:27-29**
 - a. In a manner worthy of the One we are remembering
 - b. A time also to reflect upon our relationship with Him who died for us
4. Done properly...
 - a. It honors Jesus ("This do, in remembrance of Me")
 - b. It renews us to greater faithfulness - **1 Co 11:28-32**
 - c. It strengthens our oneness in the body of Christ - **1 Co 10:17**
 - d. We continually share in the "body and blood of the Lord" - **1 Co 10:16**
 - 1) Not literally
 - 2) Perhaps referring to a continual communion with the benefits of that sacrifice (e.g., forgiveness)
5. **HINT:** Reading passages like Isaiah 53, Psalms 22, and the Gospel records of Christ's suffering and death while partaking of the Supper can help keep our minds focused on what we are doing

E. THE COLLECTION...

1. The early church is noteworthy for its love for one another - **Ac 2:44,45; 4:32-35**
2. Such love went beyond those in the local congregation - **Ac 11:27-30**
3. In time, a systematic manner for providing for needy Christians was instituted - **1 Co 16:1-2**
4. The primary purpose of the collection, then, was to provide for needy Christians
 - a. Locally and abroad
 - b. Including those who devote their lives to preaching the gospel - **2 Co 11:8,9; Ph 4:10-18**
5. How much should one give? The New Testament does not set a percentage (like the "tithes", or a tenth, found in the Old Testament), but rather instructs us to give according to following principles:
 - a. "As he may prosper" - **1 Co 16:2**
 - b. Whatever is given with "a willing mind" - **2 Co 8:12**
 - c. "According to what one has" - **2 Co 8:12-13**

- d. “As he purposes (plans) in his heart” - **2 Co 9:7**
- e. Whatever one can give “cheerfully”, not “grudgingly” or “of necessity” - **2 Co 9:7**
- f. Keeping in mind the principle of “sowing and reaping” - **2 Co 9:6,8**
- 6. Even this activity fulfills the threefold purpose mentioned at the beginning of our lesson:
 - a. We are blessed in giving - **Ac 20:35; 2 Co 9:11**
 - b. Brethren’s needs are met - **2 Co 9:12a**
 - c. God is glorified - **2 Co 9:12-15**
- 7. **HINT:** to help motivate us in giving, remember the examples of the churches in Macedonia and of the Lord Himself - **2 Co 8:1-9**

II. HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF OUR ASSEMBLIES

A. KEEP IN MIND WHO IS PRESENT...

- 1. **Our brethren in Christ**
 - a. People like you, who appreciate the presence and encouragement of other Christians
 - b. So take the time to visit with them before and after the assembly
 - 1) Don’t get into the habit of always coming in at the last minute
 - 2) Don’t be in such a rush to leave after the service is ended
- 2. **Frequently visitors**
 - a. Who naturally draw conclusions about the congregation during their visit
 - 1) Will they conclude we are really disciples of Jesus? - cf. **Jn 13:35**
 - 2) Will they say in their hearts “God is truly among you”? - cf. **1 Co 14:25**
 - b. So take the time to welcome them and visit with them - **He 13:2**
- 3. **Especially our Lord**
 - a. As He promised in **Mt 18:20**
 - b. Do we act as we would if He were bodily present?

B. “YOU GET OUT OF IT WHAT YOU PUT INTO IT...”

- 1. Preparation beforehand makes a big difference
 - a. Such as praying and meditating upon what you are going to do
 - b. Planning what you can do to make the assembly more edifying (such as welcoming and visiting)
 - c. In other words, come to serve, not to be served (although you will be blessed in return by doing it this way)
- 2. The more you come, the more interest you show, the more (and faster) you will grow!
 - a. This is true in any endeavor (e.g., physical exercise, hobbies)
 - b. “How often do I have to come?” is an indication of grave spiritual immaturity!
 - 1) It displays a lack of true love for Christ and His brethren
 - 2) It shows one is selfishly concerned with how little they can do to save themselves
 - 3) How does the love of God abide in such a person? - cf. **1 Jn 3:16-19**

CONCLUSION

- 1. Rather, our attitude ought to be like that expressed by David in **Psa 122:1**
- 2. Neglecting the assemblies is detrimental to our spiritual growth as disciples of Christ
- 3. Do we express our love for God, our brethren, even our own selves as we should?

4. One of the greatest spiritual blessings we enjoy in Christ in this life is the fellowship we share in our public assemblies...Let's all do our part to fully utilize that blessing!

SOME QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE YOUR THINKING...

1. Does one attend the assemblies to be entertained, or to serve?
2. Do you attend every assembly of the congregation where you are?
3. If not, are you praying to God to help you make it possible for you to do so?
4. What can you do before the assemblies to get more out of them?

A Closer Walk With God

Principles Of Prayer

INTRODUCTION

1. One of the greatest blessings enjoyed by Christians in this life is the privilege of **prayer**, by which we can approach God...
 - a. Through prayer, the Christian can find **forgiveness** for sins - **1 Jn 1:9**
 - b. Through prayer, the Christian can find **peace** to replace anxiety - **Ph 4:6-7**
 - c. Through prayer, the Christian can receive **strength** from God through His Spirit - **Ep 3:14-16**
2. For such reasons, Paul frequently exhorted Christians to be diligent in their prayers...
 - a. “praying always with all prayer and supplication...” - **Ep 6:18**
 - b. “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving” - **Co 4:2**
 - c. “Pray without ceasing” - **1 Th 5:17**
3. Yet Jesus knew that people would tend to become slack in their prayers - **Lk 18:1**
 - a. It is out of a similar concern that prompts two lessons devoted specifically to prayer
 - b. It is hoped that you will be encouraged to be more diligent in prayer as we examine:
 - 1) Basic **principles** of prayer taught in God’s Word
 - 2) Suggestions concerning the **practice** of prayer in our daily lives

[In this lesson, then, “**Principles Of Prayer**”, beginning with...]

I. CHARACTERISTICS OF ACCEPTABLE PRAYER

A. IT MUST BE OFFERED “IN FAITH”...

1. “And all things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” - **Mt 21:22**
2. We must have faith in God, and in His ability to answer - **He 11:6**
3. Otherwise, prayer will not be answered - cf. **Ja 1:5-8**
4. Is our faith weak? Then increase it with the help of God’s Word - **Ro 10:17**

B. IT MUST BE OFFERED “IN THE SPIRIT OF HUMILITY”...

1. Notice the example of the Pharisee and the publican - **Lk 18:9-14**
2. Remember, “The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit” - **Psa 34:18**
3. As quoted by James: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” - **Ja 4:6**

C. IT MUST BE OFFERED “IN HARMONY WITH GOD’S WILL”...

1. God answers prayer that is offered “according to His will” - **1 Jn 5:14**
2. Jesus provided the example for us in His prayers at Gethsemane - **Lk 22:42**
3. Too often, prayers are unanswered because they are more concerned with OUR will, rather than GOD’S will! - cf. **Ja 4:3**

D. IT MUST BE OFFERED “BY THOSE RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD”...

1. “For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil” - **1 Pe 3:12**

2. The prayers of the righteous person are effective - **Ja 5:16-18**
3. But those continuing in sin He will not hear! - **Pro 28:9; Isa 59:1-2**
4. To be righteous before God...
 - a. Requires that we submit to the “righteousness of God” offered in Christ - cf. **Ro 10:1-4**
 - b. I.e., respond to the gospel of Christ - **Ro 1:16-17**

E. IT MUST BE OFFERED “IN THE SPIRIT OF THANKSGIVING”...

1. “giving thanks always for all things to God” - **Ep 5:20**
 2. “in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving” - **Ph 4:6**
 3. “...prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving” - **Co 4:2**
 4. “pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks” - **1 Th 5:17-18**
- **Do we think God will help us with our “present burdens” if don’t take the time to thank Him for “past blessings”?**

F. IT MUST BE OFFERED “WITH PERSISTENCE”...

1. Jesus illustrated this aspect of prayer through two parables
 - a. The parable of the persistent friend - **Lk 11:5-10**
 - b. The parable of the persistent widow - **Lk 18:1-8**
2. The virtue of persistence is demonstrated in the prayers of:
 - a. Jesus at Gethsemane - **Mt 26:44**
 - b. Paul, pertaining to his “thorn in the flesh” - **2 Co 12:7-8**
 - c. The early church - **Ac 2:42**

G. IT MUST BE OFFERED “IN THE NAME OF JESUS”...

1. “Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” - **Ep 5:20**
2. This means much more than simply adding a little phrase “in Jesus’ name” at the end of our prayers!
 - a. We must realize that Jesus is the only way by which we can approach God - **Jn 14:6**
 - b. We must view Him as our “high priest” who intercedes for us - **He 7:24-25; Jn 14:13**
3. Appealing to God in the name of His Son can give us great confidence that God will give us what we need! - **He 4:14-16**

[Such are the conditions that make prayer acceptable to God. But it might be helpful to also notice a few...]

II. OBSTACLES TO PRAYER

A. UNCONFESSED SIN...

1. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear” - **Psa 66:18**
2. The basis for prayer rests upon our being in fellowship with Him; such fellowship is broken if we do not confess our sins to Him!

B. IMPROPER TREATMENT OF OTHERS...

1. How we treat others has a bearing upon whether God will hear our prayers!
 - a. E.g., how we treat the poor - **Psa 41:1-3**
 - b. E.g., how one treats his friend - **Mt 5:23-24**
 - c. E.g., how a husband treats his wife - **1 Pe 3:7**
2. We must correct our relationships with others (if possible) before we can expect God to

hear our prayers!

3. Especially if we desire to receive forgiveness for our sins! - **Mt 6:14-15; 18:21-23**

[Finally, it is important to bear in mind that God answers prayer in various ways...]

III. ANSWERS TO PRAYERS

A. “REQUEST GRANTED...”

1. God may answer “Yes”, and grant the petitions we ask of Him
2. Such will be the case the more we try to do His Will in our lives - **1 Jn 3:22**

B. “REQUEST GRANTED, BUT NOT YET...”

1. God may grant our request, but in time and according to His purpose for our lives
2. “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven” - **Ecc 3:1**
3. So we may think God is saying “No”, when He is really saying “Yes, but wait”

C. “REQUEST GRANTED, BUT NOT AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT...”

1. Sometimes God says “Yes”, but answers it in way differently that we anticipated
2. Remember, God’s thoughts and methods are often much different than ours - **Isa 55:8,9**
3. Like asking God for strength and perseverance...
 - a. He may give us trials to bear
 - b. Which in turn develops the virtues we prayed for!
4. We should be careful and not dictate to God **how** to answer our prayers...
 - a. Limit the “how” and we might be limiting the “result”
 - b. For example, the way some pray for the sick, they limit God as to how He might restore them

D. “REQUEST DENIED...”

1. Often God says “No”
2. But we must trust that God, who knows all and what is best, would do so only if granting our request might not be for our good - cf. **He 12:5-11**
3. We may not fully understand, but we can still fully trust Him! - cf. **Hab 3:17-19**
4. Especially in light of the promise in **1 Co 10:13**

CONCLUSION

1. The ability to pray to God and receive answers in our lives is truly one of the greatest blessings we can have as children of God!
2. Hopefully, understanding and applying the principles discussed in this lesson will ensure greater success in having our prayers answered
3. Our next lesson will deal with “**The Practice Of Prayer**”, offering suggestions on the when, with whom, how and what of prayer

SOME QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE YOUR THINKING...

1. Do you find it easy or difficult to pray?

2. Do you believe in the power of God to answer prayer?
3. Should you be disappointed when it appears that God has answered your prayer with a “No”?
4. Are you spending time every day devoted to prayer?

A Closer Walk With God

The Practice Of Prayer

INTRODUCTION

1. In our previous lesson, we discussed **Principles Of Prayer**, such as:
 - a. Characteristics of acceptable prayer
 - b. Obstacles to prayer
 - c. Answers to prayer
2. With a desire to encourage disciples of Jesus to more diligent praying, this lesson will offer suggestions as to **The Practice Of Prayer...**

I. WHEN SHOULD WE PRAY?

A. HAVING “SET TIMES” TO PRAY CAN HELP TO CREATE THE HABIT OF PRAYING...

1. For example, consider the practice of:
 - a. **David**, whom God described as “a man after My own heart” - **Psa 55:17**
 - b. **Daniel**, whom the angel of God described as “O man greatly beloved” - **Dan 6:10**
2. These great men of God made it a habit to pray at set times throughout the day; we would do well to imitate their example
3. At the very least...
 - a. Find some time each day to be alone with God in prayer
 - 1) Early morning may be best for some
 - 2) Others might find it easier to be alone late at night
 - b. Make it a **special time** to be alone with your Heavenly Father!

B. YET PRAYERS SHOULD NOT BE LIMITED TO “SET TIMES”...

1. Special needs call for special times of praying
2. Consider the examples of:
 - a. **Jesus**, praying on important occasions - **Lk 6:12-13**
 - b. **Paul**, praying in trying circumstances - **Ac 16:25**
 - c. **Nehemiah** - praying on the spur of the moment - **Neh 2:4-5**

C. THE GOAL IS TO “PRAY WITHOUT CEASING” - 1 Th 5:17

1. Having “set times” will help develop the experience in praying
2. Praying “spontaneously” as needs arise will develop the disposition to pray in every circumstance (i.e., “without ceasing”)

II. WITH WHOM SHOULD WE PRAY?

A. JESUS EXHORTED US TO PRAY “IN SECRET” - Mt 6:5-6

1. Private prayer should occupy the largest portion of our total life of prayer
2. Consider the value of “secret prayer”:
 - a. It forms a close union, communion and fellowship with God (it is just you and Him!)
 - b. It is a true test of your sincerity and devotion

- 1) You certainly are not doing it to please men (they can't see you)
 - 2) You can't be trying to falsely impress God (He will see right through you)
 - c. Your Father will reward you "openly" - **Mt 6:6**
- **Therefore, "private prayer" should be a priority!**

B. JESUS ALSO SPOKE OF PRAYING WITH "TWO OR THREE" - Mt 18:19-20

1. The early Christians prayed together often...
 - a. In times of trouble - **Ac 4:23-24; 12:5,12; 16:25**
 - b. In times of departure - **Ac 20:36; 21:5**
 2. A sweetness of fellowship and sense of strength comes when God's people pray together
- **Therefore, "praying with others" should be done as often as possible**

III. HOW SHOULD WE PRAY?

A. JESUS TAUGHT HOW TO PRAY - Lk 11:1-4

1. The "Lord's Prayer", as it is commonly called, is a model, a guide for learning how to pray
2. A careful examination of this prayer reveals that proper prayer includes:
 - a. To "whom" we should pray ("Our Father in heaven")
 - b. Praising God ("Hallowed be Your Name")
 - c. Supplication
 - 1) For God's purposes ("Your kingdom come. Your will be done...")
 - 2) For our physical needs ("Give us this day our daily bread")
 - 3) For our spiritual needs ("Forgive us our sins...")
 - 4) For spiritual needs of others ("For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us")
3. He also stressed the importance of simplicity in our prayers - **Mt 6:7-8**

B. A HELPFUL ACROSTIC IN LEARNING TO PRAY IS "A-C-T-S"

1. **A = ADORATION**
 - a. I.e., praising God
 - b. A good example of this is found in **1 Chr 29:10-13**
 - c. Spending time in sincere praise of God's greatness will help put us in the proper spirit of humility
2. **C = CONFESSION**
 - a. I.e., acknowledging our sins before God
 - b. When we understand how sin can break the fellowship we have with God, we naturally desire its quick remission
 - c. Fortunately, as Christians we can be cleansed by the blood of Jesus as we confess our sins - **1 Jn 1:9**
3. **T = THANKSGIVING**
 - a. An important part of prayer, even those in which we are making requests - **Ph 4:6**
 - b. The benefits of giving thanks are many:
 - 1) Causes us to acknowledge God's existence, love, and care
 - 2) Reminds us of His goodness
 - 3) Helps to shift our focus from what we don't have to what we do have
 - c. The kind of things to be thankful for:
 - 1) Things we can see in our lives...
 - a) Health
 - b) Family and friends
 - c) God's guidance, answers to previous prayers

- 2) Things we may not be able to see...
 - a) Our adoption as His children
 - b) The forgiveness of sins
 - c) The hope of eternal life
 - d) The assurance of His continued presence
- d. God's people have every reason to be thankful, and to be known for "abounding in thanksgiving" - **Co 1:12; 2:7; 3:15; 4:2**
- 4. **S = SUPPLICATION**
 - a. I.e., making requests of God - **Ph 4:6**
 - b. If we are faithful in including the first three (adoration, confession, thanksgiving), this last will prevent prayer from being simply a spiritual "shopping list"
 - c. When we broaden our requests to include others, we enter into one of the most noble realms of prayer: **intercession**
 - 1) Something which God wants us to do - **1 Ti 2:1**
 - 2) Examples of whom we can pray for are given in the next section...

IV. FOR WHAT SHOULD WE PRAY?

A. IN THE SCRIPTURES, GOD INDICATES THAT HE WISHES US TO PRAY FOR:

- 1. **Self**
 - a. For physical daily needs - **Mt 6:11**
 - b. For personal growth in Christlikeness and devotion to God - **Co 1:9-12**
- 2. **Family**
 - a. For spouse, children, parents, siblings, etc.
 - b. For their nurture and growth in the teaching of the Lord - **Ep 6:4**
- 3. **Community**
 - a. For peace to prevail
 - b. E.g., **Jer 29:7**
- 4. **Church**
 - a. For love and unity to prevail - **Jn 13:35; 17:20-21**
 - b. For the spiritual growth of each member - **Ph 1:9-11**
 - c. For the gospel to have free course - **2 Th 3:1**
- 5. **Nation**
 - a. For national repentance and consciousness of who God is - **Psa 33:12; Pro 14:34**
 - b. For leaders to rule wisely - **1 Ti 2:2**
- 6. **Nonbelievers**
 - a. For their salvation - **Ro 10:1**
 - b. For the effort of those involved in teaching them - **Ep 6:18-20**
- 7. **The sick**
 - a. For their restoration to health - **Ja 5:14-15**
 - b. For spiritual strength and peace of mind - **Ja 5:16**
- 8. **The poor and oppressed**
 - a. Such as the homeless, fatherless, unborn children - **Pro 29:7**
 - b. Those in other nations oppressed by their own rulers or outside influences

B. IT MIGHT HELP TO HAVE A "PRAYER STRATEGY"...

- 1. **On Monday - Family**
 - a. Pray for both immediate and extended family members
 - b. For both their physical and spiritual well-being

2. **On Tuesday - Church**
 - a. For members in the local congregation
 - b. For Christians and congregations throughout the world
3. **On Wednesday - Community**
 - a. For community leaders
 - b. For your neighbors
4. **On Thursday - Nation**
 - a. For elected officials
 - b. For efforts to bring peace and righteousness
5. **On Friday - World**
 - a. For world peace
 - b. For nations that are “closed” to the gospel
6. **On Saturday - Afflicted**
 - a. For the poor, homeless, jobless
 - b. For those in prison
 - c. For those who are sick
 - d. For widows, single mothers, fatherless children

CONCLUSION

1. These are simply suggestions, to help us see that there is much we can be praying for; other suggestions could include:
 - a. A **“daily prayer strategy”** (morning-family; noon-church; evening-community)
 - b. When praying for the nation and the world, pray about the events described in the newspaper
 - c. Keeping a “list” or “journal” of those for whom you are praying
2. The important thing is to PRAY, and to do so:
 - a. “always”
 - b. “in everything”
 - c. “earnestly”
 - d. “being vigilant”
 - e. “without ceasing”
3. I hope these last two lessons will encourage us to be more diligent in utilizing this wonderful privilege of prayer!

SOME QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE YOUR THINKING...

1. Do you spend time each day in prayer to God?
2. Do you find prayer an easy or difficult activity?
3. Do you pray with other people at times other than before meals, in Bible classes, or in the assembly?
4. Do your prayers include the needs of others, or just your own concerns?

A Closer Walk With God

Studying The Bible

INTRODUCTION

1. An important element involved in our walk with God is **Bible study**
2. Some new Christians find difficulty getting started in this area
3. But this is an important duty, one which the Bible emphasizes - **Ac 2:42; 1 Pe 2:2**

I. WHY BIBLE STUDY IS IMPORTANT

A. THE WORD OF GOD POSSESSES THE POWER OF “SANCTIFICATION”

1. “Sanctification” means “to set apart”; as used in the Bible, to set apart for God’s purpose
 2. The Word of God is the means by which does this...
 - a. As praised by David in his psalm - **Psa 19:7-11**
 - b. As mentioned in the prayer of Jesus - **Jn 17:17**
- **If we are to be useful to God, then we need to study His Word!**

B. THE WORD OF GOD POSSESSES THE POWER OF “PRESERVATION”

1. A lack of knowledge has always destroyed the people of God - **Hos 4:6**
 2. But the YOUNG can keep their ways pure by the Word of God - **Psa 119:9**
 3. And the ELDERS were exhorted to keep the church by the Word - **Ac 20:28-32**
- **A first step towards backsliding is neglecting God’s Word!**

C. THE WORD OF GOD POSSESSES THE POWER OF “SALVATION” AND “CONDEMNATION”

1. Received properly, it can save our souls! - **Ja 1:21**
2. It will be the standard by which we will be judged - **Jn 12:48**

[Will the Word save us, or will it condemn us? Careful study and application of the Bible makes the difference!]

II. WHY BIBLE STUDY IS OFTEN NEGLECTED

A. SOME JUST “TAKE THE PREACHER’S WORD”

1. For this reason, they do not study for themselves
2. Most preachers are good men, but they can still be wrong - **Ac 18:24-26**
3. It is our responsibility to “test the spirits” and to be able to identify “false apostles” - **1 Jn 4:1-2; 2 Co 11:13-15**

B. SOME SAY “THEY CAN’T GET ANYTHING OUT OF THE BIBLE”

1. This may be because they read it so little, or because they do not know how to go about studying it
2. Often it is because they do not use a modern English translation
3. Most have simply made little effort to understand it

4. Yet Paul assumed that people could understand it if they read it - cf. **Ep 3:3-4**

C. SOME SAY “THEY DON’T HAVE THE TIME”

1. People who **do** study are busy too, but they leave off things that are less important
2. As Jesus commanded, we must put the things of the kingdom of God **first** - **Mt 6:33**

[There is really no excuse for neglecting the Word of God. In view of its importance, we would be foolish to do so. But how shall one study the Word of God? There are several approaches...]

III. METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

A. THE “PLANNED-LESSON” METHOD...

1. “A Closer Walk With God” is an example of this method
2. Someone prepares lessons on a subject, then it is studied in a class or at home
3. This is a good way to study, but one’s study should not be limited to this method

B. THE “SUBJECT” METHOD...

1. This involves selecting some subject (e.g., “baptism”), then collecting and studying each passage in the Bible on the subject
2. This method has its advantages, but it can be easy to take things out of context and draw the wrong conclusion

C. THE “BOOK” METHOD...

1. This consists of an intensive study of a single book of the Bible
 2. Since the Bible was written a book at a time, this is probably the best way to study the Bible
 3. **Daily Bible Reading** programs can easily utilize this approach to the Scriptures
 - a. E.g., following a program to read through the entire Bible each year
 - b. E.g., taking a chapter each week to read and study daily, you can cover the New Testament in depth over a five year period
- **Doing both of these will give a person an overall understanding of the Bible and an in-depth understanding of the New Testament**

[To get more out of the studying you do, here are some...]

IV. SUGGESTIONS FOR BIBLE STUDY

A. SET A REGULAR TIME...

1. Regularity is a key to success, so set aside some regular time for study
 - a. For “night owls”, the best time may be late at night, after the children are in bed
 - b. For “morning larks”, early morning before the children arise might be better
2. Family study is a good practice, but each person needs also to have a regular time in which he or she can come face to face with God’s message alone

B. PRAY AS YOU STUDY...

1. Begin your study with prayer - cf. **Psa 119:18**
2. As you study, ask God for the wisdom and strength to understand and obey His Word - cf. **Psa 119:5,6**
3. End your study with prayer - cf. **Psa 119:10-11**

C. UTILIZE VARIOUS HELPS...

1. Translations

- a. Using various translations can help make understanding the Bible easier
- b. The more reliable translations are:
 - 1) King James Version (a classic, but somewhat archaic)
 - 2) New King James Version (my personal choice)
 - 3) American Standard Version (most literal, but hard to read)
 - 4) New American Standard Version (a wordy update to the ASV)
- c. Some translations that are easy to read can be used as references (e.g., New International Version)
- d. One should not put much stock in versions translated...
 - 1) By one man (e.g., The Living Bible)
 - 2) By individuals from one denominational background (e.g., The New World Translation)

2. Dictionaries

- a. Not knowing the meaning of words is the most common cause for not understanding the Bible
- b. An ordinary English dictionary can be used, but there are special Bible dictionaries that are more useful and accurate
- c. A good one is “Vine’s Expository Dictionary”

3. Concordance

- a. This useful work contains words in alphabetical order along with a list of verses in the Bible where they are found
- b. It can be a great time saver in finding verses based on a given subject
- c. If possible, use a concordance based upon the translation you use

4. Encyclopedias

- a. This type of reference gives detailed articles on the people, places, and things mentioned in the Bible
- b. Two good sets are:
 - 1) Zondervan’s Pictorial Encyclopedia Of The Bible
 - 2) The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

5. Commentaries

- a. These are books written by scholars commenting on various books of the Bible
 - 1) One must be careful, as these scholars are not inspired and are subject to mistakes
 - 2) But their insights and the fruit of their own study can be helpful
 - b. It might be good to ask mature Christians what commentaries they can recommend
- **These and other reference helps are often found in church libraries and may be available for your use; in time, you should gradually develop your own library of Bible study aids**

CONCLUSION

1. Such aids can be a great help, but make sure that the conclusions you draw are based upon your own careful study of God’s Word!
2. What is most important is that we are engaged in some sort of consistent, systematic study of the Bible so that we are ever being blessed by the Word of God!

SOME QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE YOUR THINKING...

1. How long do you study the Bible daily?
2. Do you study the class lessons at home (when available) that you have in church?
3. If you are not doing so now, are you willing to spend 15-30 minutes daily in Bible study?
4. What's your biggest problem in studying?

A Closer Walk With God

The Joy Of Singing

INTRODUCTION

1. Another important element of our walk with God is the act of singing praises...
 - a. We spend nearly a third of our assemblies engaged in this activity
 - b. It also has a place in our private devotions to God
 - And rightly so, for it has the potential of reaping great spiritual benefits to those who engage in it properly
2. It is clear that those who walked with God in Old Testament times delighted in singing - cf. **Psa 146:1-2**
3. Christians were taught to respond to the goodness of God in a similar way - **Ja 5:13**
4. But there are indications in many churches which cause me to wonder if some have lost the joy of singing...
 - a. Many Christians sing with virtually no emotion
 - b. Some go one step further, and do not sing at all!
 - c. I have personally known Christians, who...
 - 1) Complained because time available for classes was taken up by the singing of a few hymns
 - 2) Will not attend a worship service if they know it will be devoted primarily to singing
 - d. In contrast, it was common in the past for people to travel some distance to attend a service devoted to praising God in song
5. **Why do such conditions exist?** I suspect it may be a failure to appreciate:
 - a. The true purpose of singing
 - b. How we can get more out of singing

[In an effort to ensure that we will experience the **joy** of singing, let's first examine...]

I. THE PURPOSE OF SINGING

A. TO PRAISE THE LORD - Ac 16:25

1. This is the most popular concept of the purpose of singing
 - a. Indeed, this is certainly the idea inherent in the word "hymn"
 - b. Which comes from the Greek word **humnos**, meaning "a song in praise of"
2. Praising God should be "a natural" for Christians !
 - a. If David in the OT reacted this way to the blessings God gave him - **Psa 28:6-7**
 - b. How much more should we!
3. In fact, singing is one of the "spiritual sacrifices" that we are to offer to God - **He 13:15**
 - a. As "spiritual priests" we offer up "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God" - **1 Pe 2:5**
 - b. If we are not careful, we might be guilty of offering "defiled" service to God as was the case in Malachi's day! - cf. **Mal 1:7-8, 12-13**

B. TO TEACH AND ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER - Co 3:16; Ep 5:19

1. Our singing is not just directed toward God...
 - a. Certainly, many songs are
 - b. But many songs are directed to each other
2. That's because many songs are designed to teach one another
 - a. Teaching and admonishing us to live properly, enjoying the blessings of the Christian life
 - b. It might even be said that "congregational singing" is often "congregational teaching"!
 - c. Thus singing is a way that we can encourage our brethren and ourselves as well!

[When done properly, singing can be a wonderful blessing; but how can we get the most out of singing?]

II. GETTING MORE OUT OF OUR SINGING

A. WE MUST ENGAGE THE "MIND" AS WE SING...

1. Remember, singing is "teaching and admonishing one another"
 - a. This assumes that we **understand** what we sing
 - b. We must be careful that our enjoyment of singing is not like how many people enjoy their popular music (liking the music without necessarily understanding the words)
2. Therefore, give careful attention to the **words** of the song

B. WE MUST ALSO ENGAGE THE "HEART" AS WE SING...

1. When we sing, we must do so...
 - a. "with grace in our hearts" - **Co 3:16**
 - b. "making melody in your heart" - **Ep 5:19**
2. This assumes that we involve our **emotions** as we sing!
3. To sing without emotion (without grace in our hearts)...
 - a. Will be evident in our countenances! - **Pro 15:13**
 - b. Is hypocritical, and condemned by Jesus! - **Mt 15:7-8**

[So as we sing, do so with **both** the emotions of the heart and the understanding of the mind. In a further effort to assure that we experience the "joy of singing", consider some...]

III. QUESTIONS TO EVALUATE YOUR SINGING

A. DO YOU LIMIT THE SPHERE OF YOUR SINGING...?

1. Is your singing limited just to the public assemblies?
2. Or do you utilize opportunities to sing at other times with others, or even alone?
3. Singing, like prayer, ought to be spontaneous, arising whenever the circumstances call for it
- cf. **Ac 16:25; Ps 34:1-3**

B. IS THERE LACK OF EMOTION IN YOUR SINGING...?

1. Remember, singing is to involve the **heart**
2. And not with just "some" heart, but as in all that we do for the Lord, with "all" our hearts!
- **Mt 22:37**
3. When it comes time to praise the Lord, it should not be done "halfheartedly"
 - a. Remember **Mt 15:7-9**
 - b. "It is a great sign of mediocrity to praise always moderately." - Vauvenargues
4. Not all may be talented in voice, but all can and should bless the Lord with their "whole being"! - **Psa 103:1**

C. DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE SINGING...?

1. Again, singing must also involve the **mind**
2. Some songs, though sounding beautiful, can be so complicated as to hinder understanding
 - a. The musical arrangement can be such that one spends more time concentrating on the notes rather than the words
 - b. The pace of the song can be so fast that we don't absorb the meaning of the words
 - c. The words used may be unusual and not understood by the average singer
3. Song leaders can perform a valuable service by being careful in the songs they select to lead
 - a. Carefully introducing songs that may be new to the congregation
 - b. Taking a moment to explain the meaning of the song or unusual words in it
4. But the ultimate responsibility falls on us who sing, so we should make every effort to understand what we are singing

D. DO YOU STRESS MUSICAL HARMONY TO THE DETRIMENT OF NEW TESTAMENT SINGING...?

1. Fortunately, God stresses making melody in our hearts over making harmony with our voices
2. In a natural desire to offer beautiful praise, do you discourage those who might not have trained voices but still love to praise God with their whole being?
3. I have occasionally seen some Christians give a criticizing look at others who sang "off key"
4. But the emphasis should be on praising God in heart and mind, and not how it may sound to the human ear!

E. DO YOU HINDER YOUR OWN SINGING BY WHERE YOU SIT...?

1. Sitting alone or spread out naturally discourages many from singing as they might otherwise
2. People become more involved, are more uplifted, edify others better, when they sit together and close to the song leader
3. One of the first steps to better singing is to sit with others who love to sing!

CONCLUSION

1. Have we lost the joy of singing?
2. I believe that if we could see ourselves as song leaders do, we might be constrained to say "yes"!
3. But I hope that by reminding ourselves of the purpose of singing and how to get more out of it, we might rekindle this act of worship which can do so much for our walk with God!
4. May David's attitude, a man after God's own heart, describe our own:

"I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being." - Psa 104:33

"Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful." - Ps 147:1

SOME QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE YOUR THINKING...

1. Which is more important when we sing, how we sound or how we feel?

2. Are we really teaching and admonishing one another in song if we just whisper or mouth the words?
3. Do we sing because we are happy, or are we happy because we sing?
4. Do you sing praises to God by yourself throughout the week?
5. Does your family ever sing spiritual songs together (e.g., while traveling in the car)?
6. Which is more unscriptural, singing with mechanical instruments, or singing without engaging the instrument of the heart?

A Closer Walk With God

Growing In The Knowledge Of Jesus Christ

INTRODUCTION

1. An important element in having a closer walk with God is fulfilling the command given by the apostle Peter in **2 Pe 3:18**
 - a. What does it mean to “grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”?
 - b. How can we be sure that we are growing in this “knowledge”?
2. Peter has defined what is meant to grow in the knowledge of Christ, and his definition is found in **2 Pe 1:2-11**
3. In this lesson, we shall:
 - a. Look more closely at what is involved in “growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ”
 - b. Consider reasons why we should desire to grow in this “knowledge”

I. WHAT IT MEANS TO GROW IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS

A. THE DEVELOPMENT OF EIGHT GRACES...

1. These “graces” are listed in **2 Pe 1:5-7**
2. Briefly defined...
 - a. **Faith** is “conviction, strong assurance”
 - b. **Virtue** is “moral excellence, goodness”
 - c. **Knowledge** is “correct insight”
 - d. **Self-control** is “self-discipline”
 - e. **Perseverance** is “bearing up under trials”
 - f. **Godliness** is “godly character out of devotion to God”
 - g. **Brotherly kindness** is “love toward brethren”
 - h. **Love** is “active goodwill toward others”
3. Now note carefully **2 Pe 1:8**
 - a. We must “**abound**” in these eight graces
 - b. Only then can it be said that we are “growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ”
4. It is more than simply increasing our “intellectual” knowledge of Jesus!
 - a. Such knowledge has a place, but it is just one of the graces necessary
 - b. Peter is talking about growing in a **fuller** and **personal** knowledge of Jesus Christ!
 - 1) Which comes by developing the “Christ-like” attributes listed in this passage
 - 2) The more we grow in these “graces”, the more we really “know” Jesus (for He is the perfect personification of these “graces”)
5. That it involves more than intellectual knowledge is also evident from the Greek word used for knowledge in **2 Pe 1:2-3,8**
 - a. The word is **epignosis** {ep-ig’-no-sis}, meaning “**to become thoroughly acquainted with, to know thoroughly, to know accurately, know well**” (Thayer)
 - b. Such knowledge comes only as we **demonstrate** these “Christ-like graces” in our lives

B. IN CONJUNCTION WITH EACH OTHER...

1. Notice the word “**add**” (or “supply”) in **2 Pe 1:5**

- a. Before each grace mentioned, the word is implied
 - b. The word in Greek is **epichoregeo** {ep-ee-khor-ayg-eh'-o}
 - 1) “Originally, to found and support a chorus, to lead a choir, to keep in tune”
 - 2) “Then, to supply or provide”
 - c. This word suggests the idea of “each grace working in harmony with the others to produce an overall effect”
2. Notice also the preposition **“to”** (or “in”) in **2 Pe 1:5-7**
 - a. This implies “each grace is to temper and make perfect the grace that goes before it”
 - b. To illustrate this point:
 - 1) **“to knowledge (add) self-control”** - the grace of self-control enables one to apply properly the knowledge one has
 - 2) **“to self-control (add) perseverance”** - self-control in turn needs the quality of perseverance to be consistent day after day
 3. Therefore each grace is necessary!
 - a. They must all be developed in conjunction with each other
 - b. We cannot be selective and just pick the ones we like and leave others behind

C. WITH ALL DILIGENCE...

1. Notice the repeated use of the word **“diligence”** - **2 Pe 1:5,10**
2. It means **“earnestness, zeal, sometimes with haste”**
3. To grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ requires much effort
4. We do not “accidentally” or “naturally” develop these graces!
5. If we are not careful, we may be like the teacher in the following illustration:
In his book Folk Psalms of Faith, Ray Stedman tells a story of a woman who had been a school teacher for 25 years. When she heard about a job that would mean a promotion, she applied for the position. However, someone who had been teaching for only one year was hired instead. She went to the principal and asked why. The principal responded, “I’m sorry, but you haven’t had 25 years of experience as you claim; you’ve had only one year’s experience 25 times.” During that whole time the teacher had not improved.
6. We may have been Christians for a number of years; but unless...
 - a. We “add” to our faith these Christ-like qualities with all “diligence”
 - b. We are simply repeating the first year over and over again!

[Is the effort worth it? In the context of this passage (**2 Pe 1:2-11**) Peter provides **five** reasons why we should “give all diligence” to grow in this knowledge of Jesus Christ...]

II. REASONS TO GROW IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS

A. GRACE AND PEACE ARE MULTIPLIED...

1. Grace and peace are common forms of greeting in the New Testament
 - a. **Grace** - a greeting which requests God’s unmerited favor upon the person addressed
 - b. **Peace** - a greeting requesting the natural result of God’s favor
 2. Note that these two blessings are “multiplied” in the knowledge of Jesus Christ - **2 Pe 1:2**
 - a. All men experience God’s favor and its result to some degree - cf. **Mt 5:45**
 - b. But only in Christ can one enjoy the “fulness” of God’s favor and peace - **Ep 1:3; Ph 4:6-7**
- **If you desire God’s grace and peace to be “multiplied” in your life, it is through the knowledge (epignosis) of Jesus Christ; i.e., as you become more like Him!**

B. ALL THINGS PERTAINING TO LIFE AND GODLINESS PROVIDED...

1. We note that God provides all things pertaining to life and godliness through the knowledge (epignosis) of Him who called us to glory and virtue - **2 Pe 1:3**
 - a. "Life" in this context refers to our spiritual life and well-being
 - b. "Godliness" refers to the pious conduct which comes out of devotion to God
 2. Only as we grow in this knowledge do we enjoy the true, full life available by God's divine power!
 - a. Which includes "exceedingly great and precious promises" - **2 Pe 1:4a**
 - b. Which enables us to be "partakers of the divine nature" - **2 Pe 1:4b**
 - c. Which can free us from the "corruption that is in the world through lust" - **2 Pe 1:4c**
- **If we desire to have all that God offers related to life and godliness, it comes as we develop the Christ-like character!**

C. SPIRITUAL "MYOPIA" AND "AMNESIA" AVOIDED...

1. Our religion is "shortsighted" if we are not growing in the knowledge of Jesus! - **2 Pe 1:9a**
 - a. For what is the ultimate objective of being a Christian?
 - b. Is it not to become like Christ? - cf. also **Ro 8:29; Co 3:9-11**
 - c. As we have seen, this is what it really means to grow in the knowledge of Christ
 2. Failure to so grow indicates we have forgotten why we were redeemed by the blood of Christ in the first place! - **2 Pe 1:9b**
 - a. To have our sins forgiven, yes...
 - b. But also to become what He wants us to be - like His Son!
- **Unless we want to be guilty of forgetfulness and shortsightedness, we need to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ!**

D. WE WILL NEVER STUMBLE...

1. Peter says "if you do these things you will never stumble" - **2 Pe 1:10**
 - a. If you are diligent to make your calling and election sure
 - b. If you add to your faith virtue, etc.
 - c. If abound in these eight graces
 2. This does not mean we will never sin - cf. **1 Jn 1:8,10**
 - a. The word "stumble" in Greek means "to fall into misery, become wretched; cf. the loss of salvation" (Thayer)
 - b. we will never stumble so as to fall short of our ultimate salvation!
- **But this assurance is true only if we are "giving all diligence" to grow in the knowledge of Christ and thereby "making our calling and election sure"**

E. AN ABUNDANT ENTRANCE INTO THE EVERLASTING KINGDOM...

1. This "everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" - **2 Pe 1:11**
 - a. Is the "heavenly kingdom" referred to by Paul in **2 Ti 4:18**
 - b. In other words, the ultimate destiny of the redeemed!
2. What is meant by the idea of an "abundant entrance"?
 - a. "You may be able to enter, not as having escaped from a shipwreck, or from fire, but as it were in triumph." (Bengel)
 - b. By possessing the eight graces, we will be able to live victoriously in this life and to joyously anticipate what lies ahead - cf. **2 Ti 4:6-8**

CONCLUSION

1. These five reasons should sufficiently motivate us to be diligent in growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ
2. Give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, and have a closer walk with God, by making every effort to add these “graces” to our lives!
3. Or have we forgotten that we were purged from our old sins?
 - a. We have, if we are apathetic in our desire to grow in these “graces”!
 - b. If so, we need to repent and pray for forgiveness!

SOME QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE YOUR THINKING...

1. Which of these “graces” do you think you have developed best?
2. In which are you most lacking?
3. Do you feel you are making progress in the “knowledge of Jesus Christ”?
4. If not, what can you do to begin making progress?

A Closer Walk With God

Overcoming Sin

INTRODUCTION

1. A wonderful blessing we receive when we become Christians is the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus Christ
 - a. At our baptism, the blood of Christ cleanses us from all past sins
 - b. Compare **Ac 22:16** with **Re 1:5**
2. This does not mean that our problem with sin is over...
 - a. We still sin at times - **1 Jn 1:8,10**
 - b. Satan does his best to cause us to sin - **1 Pe 5:8**
3. If we are to maintain a close walk with God, and ultimately receive the riches of glory He has prepared for us, we must overcome the problem of sin in two ways:
 - a. By sinning less and less - **1 Jn 2:1a**
 - b. By knowing what to do when we do sin - **1 Jn 2:1b-2**
4. This lesson is concerned with helping us see how sin develops, and how to overcome sin with its terrible consequences

[To overcome sin, we need to understand how it develops. The Bible outlines the development of sin in **Ja 1:12-15...**]

I. HOW SIN DEVELOPS

A. THE FIRST STAGE IS “TEMPTATION”...

1. In **Ja 1:14**, we see that “temptation” includes two things:
 - a. **Desire** (some translations say “lust”, suggesting a strong desire for something)
 - b. **Enticement** (an opportunity and encouragement to satisfy the desire)
2. Putting it in the form of a simple equation: **Temptation = Desire + Opportunity**
3. To illustrate:
 - a. A small boy is **tempted** to steal some cookies when he **wants** (desire) them and has an **occasion** (opportunity) to take them
 - b. The temptation becomes stronger if he wants them badly, and has a good chance of getting them without being seen
4. **Note:** At this stage in the development of sin, actual sin has not yet been committed
 - a. It is not a sin to be “tempted”
 - b. For Jesus Himself was “tempted as we are, yet without sin” - **He 4:15; 2:18**

B. THE SECOND STAGE IS “SIN” ITSELF...

1. “When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin” - **Ja 1:15**
2. It becomes sin when we **act** and **yield** to the temptation
3. Thus sin involves the added step of some sort of action on our part
4. Again, in the form of a simple equation: **Sin = Desire + Opportunity + Action**

C. THE THIRD STAGE INVOLVES THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNREPENTED AND UNFORGIVEN SIN: “DEATH”...

1. “And sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” - **Ja 1:15**
2. The “death” spoken here refers to spiritual separation from God
 - a. This separation occurs first in this life - cf. **Isa 59:2**
 - b. If we die physically in this state, then we will experience the “second death”, which involves eternal punishment! - **Re 21:8**
3. Putting all this into a final equation: **Desire + Opportunity + Action + No Forgiveness = Death**

D. OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF SIN...

1. Sin will have overcome us if we receive the “final punishment” of **Re 21:8**
2. But we will have overcome sin if we can avoid this punishment and experience the glories God has prepared for His children!
3. How can we be sure to overcome sin? **By stopping its development at any one of the four points leading to the final punishment!**

[Now let’s examine how this may be done...]

II. HOW TO OVERCOME SIN

A. CHANGE OUR “DESIRES”...

1. Since this is where the process of sin begins, it is the best place for us to begin
2. Bear in mind that it is a part of Christian growth to change our desires - **Ro 12:1-2; Ga 5:24**
3. How do we change our desires?
 - a. Notice that the **Word of God** has always been instrumental in helping people overcome sin - **Psa 119:11; Mt 4:3-10**
 - b. To see how the Word of God can change our desires...
 - 1) As we read of God’s love, longsuffering and mercy, we desire to serve Him - **Psa 116:12-14**
 - 2) As we read of sin and its damnable consequences, we come to hate it! - **Psa 119:104**
4. So the more we study God’s Word, the less likely we will have the **desire** to sin, thereby beginning to overcome sin by “nipping it in the bud”!

[But changing our desires takes time; while engaged in the process of changing our desires, what else can we do?]

B. LIMIT OUR “OPPORTUNITIES”...

1. Remember, we are tempted only when there is both **desire** and **opportunity**
2. So while we work on changing our desires, we should limit the opportunities to fulfill wrongful desires
3. This can be done by **asking for God’s providential help**, as Jesus taught - **Mt 6:13; 26:41**
4. We can cooperate with God by:
 - a. Purposely avoiding situations that might excite wrongful desires
 - 1) Following the example of David - **Psa 101:3-4**
 - 2) And the example of Job - **Job 31:1**

- b. Avoiding those whose evil behavior encourages us to sin with them
 - 1) Again, David sets a good example - **Psa 101:6-7**
 - 2) Paul also adds his warning - **1 Co 15:33**

[But we will unlikely remove **every** desire and opportunity to sin in this life, what then?]

C. EXERCISE “SELF-CONTROL”...

1. Remember, it becomes sin when we yield to **action** in fulfilling our sinful desires
2. If we can control ourselves so as to not yield, then we can overcome sin!
3. How does the Christian exercise self-control?
 - a. Self-control is but one aspect of the “fruit of the Spirit” - **Ga 5:22-23**
 - b. When we become Christians, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives - **Ac 2:38; 5:32**
 - c. The Spirit is God’s instrumental agent by which He imparts strength to us - **Ep 3:16**
 - d. Strengthened by the Spirit, we are able to “put to death the deeds of the body” - **Ro 8:12-13**
 - e. As Paul said: “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” - **Ph 4:13**
4. It is through faith in God’s Word that the Christian believes that he has this divine help - **Ep 3:20**
 - a. It is certainly proper to pray for it, as Paul did in behalf of the Ephesians - **Ep 3:16**
 - b. But equally important, to act upon it, trusting that you are not alone as you try to do God’s will - **Ph 2:12-13**
 - c. As an exercise commercial once said: **Just do it!**
5. The Christian, then, has no excuse for yielding to a temptation - **1 Co 10:13**

[But there may be times when we don’t take advantage of the strength God provides through His Spirit, and we sin; what then?]

D. OBTAIN “FORGIVENESS”...

1. Remember that sin is victorious when it results in punishment
2. But if we obtain forgiveness through the blood of Christ, we can avoid that punishment and thereby still overcome sin! - **1 Jn 2:1-2**
3. Yes, Christ is truly the “propitiation” for our sins!
 - a. By His blood, we were forgiven of past sins when united with Him in **baptism** - **Ac 2:38; 22:16; Re 1:5**
 - b. By His blood, we can be forgiven of present sins when we **repent, pray, and confess our sins** to God - **Ac 8:22; 1 Jn 1:9**
4. At any time the Christian can overcome sins that were committed, by repenting and confessing them to God!

E. SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT OVERCOMING SIN...

1. If you noticed carefully, you should have seen that at each of the four points in the development of sin, God is able and willing to help us overcome sin!
 - a. God helps us to “control our desires” by providing **His Word** to renew our minds
 - b. God helps us to “limit the opportunities” through **His Providence** as we pray for such
 - c. God helps us to “exercise self-control” over our actions through **His Spirit** strengthening the inner man
 - d. God helps us to “obtain forgiveness” through **His Son’s blood** as we repent and pray
- Isn’t the grace of God wonderful? - cf. **2 Th 3:3; 1 Co 10:13**

2. In this discussion we have concentrated on “sins of commission”
 - a. That is, sins we commit by overt action on our part
 - b. There are also “sins of omission”
 - 1) Sins which come from failing to do what is right - **Ja 4:17**
 - 2) Overcoming these sins is similar...
 - a) Change our desires so we want to do what is right
 - b) Exercise self-control so we act as we should when we have the opportunity
 - c) When guilty of sins of omission, obtain forgiveness in the same way
3. In learning the four points at which we may overcome sin, don't think that we can simply wait until we reach the fourth point to act...
 - a. That is, to just go ahead and sin, then ask God for forgiveness
 - b. There are several reasons why we should not do this:
 - 1) In baptism, we were freed from the power of sin, and should now present ourselves to God as servants of righteousness - **Ro 6:1-23**
 - 2) Though we can receive forgiveness for sin, we might still suffer the “temporal” consequences of sins - **Ga 6:7-9**
 - 3) If we allow sin to deceive us so as to become “hardened”, we may get to the point of sinning “willfully” and lose our salvation! - **He 3:12-14; 10:26-31**
 - c. So don't take the grace of God lightly and attempt to abuse it!

CONCLUSION

1. How much better it would be to praise God for His grace, and use it to overcome sin in our lives!
2. May the promise found in **Ja 1:12** help motivate us to do so:

“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

SOME QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE YOUR THINKING...

1. Are you engaged in a daily Bible study program which will help you develop the proper kind of desires?
2. Do you “watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation”?
3. Do you avoid circumstances and companions that you know would entice you to sin?
4. Do you pray that God will strengthen you “by His Spirit in the inner man”?
5. Do you ask God daily to forgive your sins, and to help you overcome sin in your life?

A Closer Walk With God

Discerning Between Good And Evil

INTRODUCTION

1. In the previous lesson we talked about overcoming sin by:
 - a. Understanding the development of sin
 - b. Utilizing the help of God to...
 - 1) Change our desires
 - 2) Limit our opportunities to sin
 - 3) Exercise self-control
 - 4) Seek forgiveness
2. Assumed in all of this, is that we know or can discern the difference between what is good and evil
 - a. Knowing the difference does not come automatically upon conversion
 - b. It is an ability that comes with time and “exercise” - cf. **He 5:12-14**
3. This lesson is designed to help us develop this ability to discern, so that we might truly have “a closer walk with God”

[Deciding what is right and what is wrong is really very simple. It involves asking a few questions about the matter at hand...]

I. IS IT CLEARLY CONDEMNED IN THE BIBLE?

A. MANY THINGS ARE SPECIFICALLY MENTIONED AS BEING WRONG...

1. One list of such things is found in **Ga 5:19-21**
2. A similar list is found in **Ep 5:3-7**

B. FOR SUCH THINGS, THAT SETTLES THE MATTER...

1. At least as far as Christians are concerned
2. There is no room for debate when the Scriptures clearly condemn some practice

[But not all sins are mentioned by name, for the Bible would be endless if that were true! So another question needs to be asked...]

II. IS IT SIMILAR TO THOSE THINGS CONDEMNED IN THE BIBLE?

A. IN GALATIANS 5:19-21, NOTE THE PHRASE “AND THE LIKE”...

1. When we are uncertain about some matter, we should ask whether it is **like** sins specifically mentioned
2. For example, what about smoking marijuana? Is it not like “drunkenness”?

B. YOU MIGHT COMPARE IT WITH THE GOOD THINGS MENTIONED...

1. Notice those things in **Ga 5:22-23**
2. Is the matter in question more like the “fruit of the Spirit” (that which is good) or the “works of the flesh” (that which is evil)?

[Another question to consider...]

III. DOES IT HURT YOUR CONSCIENCE?

A. THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE...

1. In light of the following Scriptures - **1 Ti 1:5, 18-19; 3:9**
2. Violating our conscience to the degree it no longer bothers us is a sure sign of apostasy!
- **1 Ti 4:1-2**

B. THIS MAY HELP US TO BETTER APPRECIATE ROMANS 14:23...

1. Doing something when you doubt its rightfulness is to violate your conscience
2. That, declares Paul, is sin!
3. So an act may be good in of itself, but...
 - a. If you think it is wrong (because of incorrect knowledge)
 - b. Or have doubts about its rightfulness
...then don't do it!

[Another help...]

IV. WHAT DO MATURE CHRISTIANS SAY ABOUT IT?

A. OF COURSE, THIS IS NOT THE ULTIMATE DETERMINING FACTOR...

1. For mature Christians can be wrong
2. As they would be the first to admit

B. BUT HEBREWS 5:14 DOES SAY THAT THOSE WHO BY “REASON OF USE” ARE IN A POSITION TO DISCERN...

1. This is why the advice of mature Christians can be helpful - cf. **Ph 3:17**
2. The example of Rehoboam's failure to listen to the advice of older, mature men should teach us something - **1 Kin 12:6-20**
3. Paul instructed Titus that the younger should look to those older - **Ti 2:3-5**

[Then a question that is often overlooked...]

V. DOES IT HINDER YOUR INFLUENCE?

A. BY BOTH EXAMPLE AND WORD, PAUL STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CONCERNED ABOUT OUR INFLUENCE ON OTHERS...

1. Notice his concern for how his influence affected the salvation of others - **1 Co 9:19-23**
2. He then commands to do likewise, in which we are simply imitating the example of Christ!
- **1 Co 10:31-11:1**

B. PETER TAUGHT THE VALUE OF A GOOD EXAMPLE...

1. In helping a wife win her husband to the Lord - **1 Pe 3:1-2**
2. What is said of a wife's example would also be true of a Christian's example

[So we should be concerned as to whether a practice under question **helps** or **hinders** our influence for the Lord!]

VI. IS IT POOR STEWARDSHIP?

A. THAT WE ARE “STEWARDS” OF OUR TIME, MONEY, AND BODIES, IS EVIDENT...

1. From the Lord’s Parable of the Talents - **Mt 25:14-30**
2. From Paul’s instruction concerning our bodies - **1 Co 6:19-20**
3. From his directions for those rich in this world - **1 Ti 6:17-19**

B. SOME ACTIVITIES MAY BE HARMLESS IN THEMSELVES, BUT REQUIRE SO MUCH TIME AND ENERGY...

1. There is none left for the Lord!
2. This can be true of vocations, hobbies, etc.
3. We should bear in mind that time is limited and therefore priorities must be set and kept
- **Ep 5:16; Mt 6:33**

[Finally, we can ask...]

VII. WOULD JESUS DO IT?

A. REMEMBER THE GOAL OF DISCIPLESHIP...

1. As found in **Lk 6:40**
2. To be like Jesus!

B. “WOULD JESUS DO IT?” IS THEREFORE AN APPROPRIATE QUESTION...

1. If you think He would not, it is probably wrong!

C. THIS MAKES THE STUDY OF JESUS OF PRIME IMPORTANCE...

1. Studying His life, His examples, His Word
2. So that we can have the “mind of Christ” - **Ph 2:5**

CONCLUSION

1. I hope that these seven questions can help in identifying what is good and what is evil
2. The importance of properly discerning between good and evil is seen in such passages like **2 Co 6:16-7:1**
 - a. Where we are reminded of how blessed we are to be the people of God
 - b. And the responsibility to act accordingly, if we wish to have a closer walk with God!

SOME QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE YOUR THINKING...

1. Do you have some older Christian to whom you feel free to go to for advice?
2. Do you feel that you usually give enough thought to the effect of your actions on other people?
3. Are you trying to keep a good conscience in all that you do?
4. Will you ask, when in doubt, “What would Jesus do?”

A Closer Walk With God

The Christian And Good Works

INTRODUCTION

1. In a previous lesson we discussed the matter of devotion or worship to God, especially in our public assemblies
2. One objective of such activities is to stir us up to “good works” - **He 10:24-25**
3. In this short but important lesson, we shall examine the matter of “good works” which Christians are to do...

I. CHRISTIANS ARE TO DO “GOOD WORKS”

A. DO NOT MISUNDERSTAND THE “PURPOSE” OF GOOD WORKS...

1. They are not done to “buy” or “earn” our way into heaven
2. God saves us by His **grace**, not by our works - **Ep 2:8-9; Ti 3:4-7**
3. Yet, as God’s People, we have been created in Christ Jesus to do good works! - **Ep 2:10; Ti 2:11-14; 3:1,8,14**

B. WHY, THEN, ARE WE TO DO GOOD WORKS...?

1. They bring glory to God! - **Mt 5:16; 1 Pe 2:11-12**
2. They can prepare unbelievers to be more receptive to the gospel - **1 Pe 2:12; 3:1-2**
3. They demonstrate the living nature of our faith - **Ja 2:14-17**
4. They are necessary if we are to be like Jesus - cf. **Lk 6:46** with **Ac 10:38**

II. WHAT “GOOD WORKS” CAN WE DO?

A. SOME GOOD WORKS ARE “SPIRITUAL” IN NATURE...

1. Telling others of God’s grace - **1 Pe 2:9-10**
 - a. We may not all be “teachers” in a formal sense - **1 Co 12:27-31; Ja 3:1-2**
 - b. But all of us can share with others the wonderful grace of God available in Christ Jesus!
2. Encouraging other Christians - **He 3:12-13**
 - a. We can be a “Philemon” or a “Stephanus” - **Phile 7; 1 Co 16:15-18**
 - b. For example...through cards, calls, visits, Bible studies, etc.
3. Restoring weak brethren - **Ga 6:1-2**
 - a. We can be a “Barnabas” (who helped John Mark)
 - b. The importance of this work is seen in light of **Ja 5:19-20**

B. OTHER GOOD WORKS ARE MORE “PHYSICAL” IN NATURE...

1. Jesus did not limit His good works to things spiritual - **Lk 7:22**
2. Nor did He expect His disciples to so limit their good works...
 - a. Cf. the “Limited Commission” - **Mt 10:7-8**
 - b. Cf. the “judgment scene” - **Mt 25:34-40**
3. Just as some may be gifted in talent and opportunities to “teach”, so others are gifted to “serve” in areas of physical service - **Ro 12:3-8**

- a. Such as “giving”
- b. Such as “showing mercy”
4. Women can be especially fruitful in this area...
 - a. For they often have a more flexible use of their time
 - b. Why not be a “Dorcas”? - **Ac 9:36-39**

CONCLUSION

1. No matter how we may serve the Lord, “good works” are a **mark of pure religion** - cf. **Ja 1:27**
2. It is also a **key to spiritual blessedness** (happiness) - **Ja 1:25; Ac 20:35**
3. So let’s be sure to keep in mind the admonition of Paul to Titus...

“Those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.”
- Ti 3:8

SOME QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE YOUR THINKING

1. What kind of “spiritual” good works are you doing, or are preparing yourself to do?
2. What kind of “physical” good works are you doing, or hope one day to do?
3. Who should get the glory when you are praised for good works?

A Closer Walk With God

The Church And You

INTRODUCTION

1. As we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, as we continue in our service and walk with God, we do not do so alone
2. A wonderful blessing we have in Christ is being members of His body, the church
3. When we properly understand...
 - a. What the church is, both in its universal and local sense
 - b. What our responsibilities are toward the church-- Then we can better utilize this blessing to help us remain faithful in our lives as disciples of Christ

I. WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

A. THE WORD “CHURCH” REFERS TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN SAVED...

1. As we are saved, the Lord in heaven Himself “adds” us to His church - **Ac 2:47**
2. As His “church” (a word meaning “assembly” or “congregation”), we are members of God’s “household” or “family” - **1 Ti 3:15**

B. THE WORD “CHURCH” IS USED PRIMARILY IN TWO SENSES...

1. **The universal sense: all the saved throughout the world**
 - a. It is used in this way in passages like **Mt 16:18; Ep 5:23; Co 1:18**
 - b. In the “universal” sense:
 - 1) There is only ONE church - **Ep 4:4**; compare with **Ep 1:22-23**
 - 2) Christ is the head; individual Christians are members of His body - **1 Co 12:27**
 - 3) There is NO EARTHLY ORGANIZATION; what organization there may be is spiritual in nature - **Ep 2:19-20**
 - 4) The universal church never meets as such; it has no “officers” except Jesus
2. **The local sense: the saved in one particular locality**
 - a. It is used in this way in passages like **1 Co 1:2; Re 1:11; Ro 16:16**
 - b. In the “local” sense:
 - 1) There are MANY churches - cf. **Ga 1:2**
 - 2) There is to be EARTHLY ORGANIZATION within each local church
 - a) Ideally, each church has elders (also know as bishops, pastors) and deacons - **Ph 1:1** (described more fully later in this lesson)
 - b) But churches may exist temporarily until such men can be appointed - cf. **Ac 14:21-23**
 - 3) Local churches meet regularly; and Christians have responsibilities in connection with their brethren in the local church

II. RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

A. WE SHOULD “JOIN OURSELVES” TO A LOCAL CHURCH...

1. Only Christ “adds” one to the church **universal**; but one can and should “join” themselves to a **local** church - **Ac 9:26-28**
2. This enables you to benefit by the association of other Christians, and provides you an opportunity to be of service to them - cf. **He 3:12-14; 10:24-25**
3. There are some responsibilities Christ has given you that you cannot fulfill on your own; for example, the Lord’s Supper - **Ac 20:7**
4. So you need to find and join a local faithful congregation of the Lord (a careful study of the New Testament can help you to identify such today; perhaps a subject for future study?)

B. WE SHOULD COOPERATE WITH THE “LEADERS”...

1. In a fully developed local church, there will be **elders** to oversee the people of God
 - a. The terms “elder, pastor, bishop, shepherd, overseer” are often used interchangeably, referring to the same position - **Ac 20:17,28; Ti 1:5-7; 1 Pe 5:1-2**
 - b. Their qualifications are found in **1 Ti 3:1-7; Ti 1:5-9**
 - c. Our responsibilities to them are as follows:
 - 1) To recognize and respect them - **1 Th 5:12-13; 1 Ti 5:17-20**
 - 2) To obey and be submissive when they lead scripturally - **He 13:17; 1 Pe 5:2-3**
 - d. Think of them as your “spiritual advisors”, as “shepherds”; they are mature, experienced Christian men who are charged by God to “watch out for your souls”!
2. In a fully developed local church, there will also be **deacons** to serve the people of God
 - a. These are “servants” who assist the elders in the work of the church
 - b. Their qualifications are found in **1 Ti 3:8-13**
 - c. The work they do is a very noble one - **1 Ti 3:13**
3. There may also be those who serve as **evangelists** and **teachers** - **Ep 4:11**
 - a. The “evangelists” concentrate their attention on teaching the gospel to the lost
 - b. “Teachers” concentrate attention upon edifying the members
 - c. Those commonly referred to as “preachers” or “ministers” may do both the work of evangelist and teacher
 - d. But whether they serve as evangelist, teacher, preacher, or minister, within the local church they likewise submit to the leadership of the elders

C. WE SHOULD CONTRIBUTE REGULARLY TO THE WORK OF THE CHURCH...

1. The work of the church can be divided into three areas:
 - a. Evangelism - **Mt 28:19-20; 1 Ti 3:15; 1 Pe 2:9-10**
 - b. Edification - **Ep 4:11-16**
 - c. Benevolence - **1 Ti 5:16**
2. How the local church can raise funds to do its work is illustrated in **1 Co 16:1-2**
3. Principles governing such collections were discussed in Lesson #2, “Our Public Assemblies”
4. The financial support provided the local church enables it to do much of the work God designed it to do

D. WE SHOULD DO OUR PART IN THE WORK OF THE CHURCH...

1. We cannot “pay” to have our part of the church’s work done for us
2. A strong, successful congregation is one where every member does their part - **Ep 4:15-16**
3. There are different kinds of functions we might perform - cf. **Ro 12:3-8**
4. What is essential is that we each do what we can with the same zeal and enthusiasm - cf. **1 Pe 4:10-11**

E. WE SHOULD HELP KEEP THE CHURCH UNITED...

1. Unity among believers is very important to Jesus - **Jn 17:20-21**; cf. **Ep 2:14-16**
2. Division is condemned in the Scriptures - **1 Co 1:10-13; 3:3-4**
3. To maintain our unity in Christ requires certain attitudes and diligent effort - **Ep 4:1-3**
4. Here are some things we can do:
 - a. Be peacemakers when brethren have disagreements - **Mt 5:9**
 - b. Avoid gossip - **1 Ti 5:13,19**
 - c. Avoid discussion of speculative questions - **1 Ti 6:3-5; 2 Ti 2:23**
 - d. Avoid partiality - **1 Ti 5:21**

F. WE SHOULD LIVE A LIFE THAT SPEAKS WELL OF THE CHURCH...

1. Be an example to others - **1 Ti 4:12; Ti 2:7-8**
 - a. Some people delight in finding Christians who are not living right and use them as an example to attack the church
 - b. We are to avoid giving them opportunities to do so - **Ti 2:8; 1 Ti 5:14; 1 Pe 2:12**
2. Christians are not perfect, but should strive to be an example of what we ought to be!

CONCLUSION

1. More could be said on this subject, but this should suffice to make the point that with the blessings of fellowship within the body of Christ come various responsibilities
2. God did not intend for us to be “islands unto ourselves”, but joined together in Christ where we can encourage one another in an atmosphere of righteousness, joy, and peace - **Ro 14:17-19**

SOME QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE YOUR THINKING...

1. Have you let a local church know that you wish to be identified as an accepted, working member of their group?
2. Do you know the elders, deacons and other members of the church where you attend?
3. Do you have a sense of what function you provide in the body of Christ, and are you fulfilling it?
4. If every member of the church were as faithful and active as you in your service to the Lord, what kind of church would it be?

A Closer Walk With God

Increasing Opportunities To Share The Gospel

INTRODUCTION

1. The importance of sharing the gospel of Christ with the lost cannot be overemphasized...
 - a. Jesus wants everyone to hear the good news of salvation - **Mk 16:15-16**
 - b. The gospel is God's power to salvation to all who believe it - **Ro 1:16-17**
 - **But what is the most effective way to reach people today?**

2. The Institute For American Church Growth asked over 10,000 people this question: **“What was responsible for your coming to Christ and this church?”** Their replies were . . .
 - a. I had a special need - 3%
 - b. I just walked in - 3%
 - c. I liked the minister - 6%
 - d. I visited there - 1%
 - e. I liked the Bible classes - 5%
 - f. I attended a gospel meeting - 0.5%
 - g. I liked the programs - 3%
 - h. **A friend or relative invited me - 79%**

3. What do we learn from a survey like this?
 - a. **If churches are to grow, it will be through the efforts of individual members**
 - 1) Preachers, programs, classes may help, but in most cases they will only maintain the size of the congregation
 - 2) Such congregational efforts are worthwhile, for they can reach people with whom we might otherwise never come in contact
 - b. **The greatest potential lies with those who have some contact with members of the local congregation**
 - 1) Each of us have daily contact with tens of people who need the gospel of Christ
 - 2) In addition to efforts designed to reach people “en masse” (via television, radio, mail), we need to utilize the contacts made through the members (i.e., provide a **“two-pronged” approach to evangelism**)

4. Two things are needed to utilize the contacts made through individual members
 - a. **Concern** for the lost by those members - cf. **Mt 9:36-38; Ro 9:1-3; 10:1**
 - b. **Knowledge of how** we can increase our opportunities to share the gospel with those with whom we frequently come into contact

[Assuming that the concern is there, in this lesson I wish to share suggestions on **how** anyone who is a Christian can increase their opportunities to share the gospel...]

I. DO THINGS WHICH MAKE FOR A CARING CONGREGATION

A. OUR LOVE WILL HELP PROVE THAT WE ARE WHO WE CLAIM...

1. I.e., that we are truly the disciples of Christ - **Jn 13:35**
2. Correct doctrine, organization, worship, etc., is important . . .

3. But it will be our love for one another that will convince the world that we are truly the disciples of Christ!

B. OUR LOVE MAKES US USEFUL TO THE LORD...

1. The Lord knows the true condition of His churches! - **Re 3:7-8**
2. If we are a congregation that can be used by Him . . .
 - a. To reach others with the gospel
 - b. To assimilate them into the Family of God
 - c. To nurture them in their spiritual growth-- Then He will “open doors” for us!
3. But suppose that we are not a place where new Christians can grow spiritually in an atmosphere of love...?

C. HERE ARE SOME “ACTION STEPS” TO TAKE...

1. Make it a point to get to know **all** the members by name
 - a. Get a church directory and begin to place names with faces
 - b. Try to learn someone new at each service until you know them all
2. Practice “hospitality” towards the members - **1 Pe 4:8-9**
 - a. Invite them into your home, or out to eat (set a goal of one new family or member per month)
 - b. Visit other Christians frequently (esp. the sick, shut-ins, new members, absent members)

II. MAKE A LIST OF SOULS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE SAVED

A. THIS MAY NOT SEEM IMPORTANT, BUT IT IS...!

1. It utilizes a very helpful technique used by people successful in all walks of life (i.e., having a “things to do” list)
2. For us, it helps to focus our attention upon those we hope to reach for the Lord, and not neglect them

B. IN MAKING UP THIS LIST...

1. Start with those who are close to you and work outwardly
 - a. Family
 - b. Friends
 - c. Coworkers
 - d. Neighbors
 - e. Relatives of fellow church members
 - f. Regular visitors to the services of the church
 - g. Casual acquaintances (mailman, store clerk, etc.)
2. Limit this list to five or eight souls (a list with too many and you will not be able to focus your efforts effectively)
3. Give priority to those who are the “unchurched”
 - a. I.e., who are not active members of any denomination or particular religion
 - b. Active members of a denomination or religion are often very satisfied with their human traditions and are not as receptive to the pure and simple gospel of Christ
4. Husbands and wives might best just have one list (as the suggestions to follow will require their joint cooperation)

C. KEEP THIS LIST WHERE YOU WILL SEE IT DAILY...

1. So you will be constantly reminded of these people
2. So you will be more likely to do the things mentioned next . . .

III. PRAY FOR THESE SOULS ON YOUR LIST DAILY

A. THAT GOD WILL WORK TOGETHER WITH YOU...

1. To give you “opportunities” to do good for them - **Co 4:3; 2 Th 3:1**
2. To give you the “wisdom” to make the most of those opportunities - **Ep 6:19-20**

B. THAT THOSE ON YOUR LIST WILL...

1. Have the opportunity to hear the truth
2. Have honest hearts to be open and receptive to the truth

C. REMEMBER, IT IS GOD WHO GIVES THE INCREASE...

1. We are but servants whom God can use in His providential workings - **1 Co 3:5-7**
2. So though we may work as though it all depends upon us, let us pray as though it all depends upon God!

IV. DO THINGS WHICH DEMONSTRATE YOUR LOVE FOR THEM

A. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS SUGGESTION...

1. “People don’t care how much we know until they know how much we care!”
2. A demonstration of love will make a person more likely to be receptive to the gospel of love when it is shared! - cf. **1 Pe 2:12**

B. SOME “ACTION STEPS” TO TAKE...

1. Invite them into your home for a dinner or snack
2. Visit them, especially in times of trial or sickness
3. Do things with them on a social level

V. INVITE THOSE ON YOUR LIST TO ATTEND SERVICES

A. REASONS TO WANT THEM ATTENDING SERVICES...

1. They will (or should) have an opportunity to see a caring congregation in action
 - a. Combined with your own demonstration of love as an individual...
 - b. ...the demonstration of love by others should make a lasting impression
2. They will more likely have an opportunity to be presented with the gospel of Christ (more on this, shortly)

B. AS YOU PREPARE TO INVITE THESE SOULS, BE SURE TO PRAY...

1. Asking for “wisdom” to invite them in the best manner
2. Asking for “boldness” to offer the invitation to attend

VI. DEMONSTRATE LOVE TOWARDS THOSE VISITORS WHO DO ATTEND

A. WHETHER INVITED BY YOU, SOMEONE ELSE, OR ARE “WALK-INS”...

1. Greet them, let them know they are welcome
2. Invite them home or out for a dinner or snack
3. Call or visit them, after they have attended - cf. **He 13:2; Ro 12:13b**

B. IN DOING THIS, YOU ARE PREPARING THEIR HEARTS FOR THE GOSPEL...

1. For by demonstrating love as a congregation of Christians...
2. ...they will be more likely to believe in the love of God demonstrated in the life of Christ!
- 1 Pe 2:11-12

VII. SEE THAT THEY HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR THE GOSPEL

A. IDEALLY, THIS WILL COME AFTER WITNESSING A DEMONSTRATION OF THE GOSPEL "IN OUR LIVES"...

1. By our love, hospitality, etc.
2. Both as individuals and as a congregation

B. IF YOU FEEL CONFIDENT IN TEACHING OTHERS, THEN APPROACH THEM YOURSELF AND SUGGEST...

1. A home Bible study with them (using aids like video tapes, charts, or simply an open Bible)
2. Or that they study on their own with the aid of a Bible correspondence course

C. IF YOU DO NOT FEEL YOU ARE YET CAPABLE TO APPROACH THEM CONCERNING A STUDY, OR IN CONDUCTING THE STUDY YOURSELF...

1. Bring it to the attention of members who are able and willing to teach
2. Provide opportunities for the teacher and the prospect to become better acquainted, and the teacher can take it from there

CONCLUSION

1. These suggestions are offered...
 - a. With a **firm conviction** that if they will be carried out, opportunities to share the gospel and save souls will be greatly increased!
 - b. With **the hope** that you will accept the challenge to implement these suggestions
2. This approach is not only the **most successful** in saving and keeping souls, it is also one of the **most natural** and easiest ways to reach the lost for Christ!
 - a. Remember the survey by The Institute For American Church Growth?
 - b. One does not even have to be able to teach to be effective in leading others to Christ!
 - c. One simply has to **be a friend** to Christians and to the lost!
3. And even if we do not convert a single soul . . .
 - a. We will have fulfilled our obligation to share Christ with others
 - b. We will have done it in such a way as to become better **Christians**, a better **congregation**, better **friends**, better **neighbors**, better **coworkers**, etc.!

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION BY A CONGREGATION OR A FEW INTERESTED INDIVIDUALS...

1. Have those interested in being involved meet together on a weekly basis
2. Encourage one another to **set goals** for the coming week
 - a. Share ideas for goals; for example...
 - 1) Having over or visiting one person or family from the congregation
 - 2) Making a list of souls for which to begin praying

- 3) What you plan to do to demonstrate your love and concern for those on your list
 - 4) Who you will invite to services
 - 5) What visitors you will call, visit, etc.
 - 6) Who you will offer to have a study, or put in contact with someone who will follow-up with a study
- b. Write the goals for the coming week down
 - c. Pray about them, together and on your own throughout the week
3. At each weekly meeting...
- a. Share and discuss how the goals are being met
 - b. Set new goals for the coming week
 - c. Write them, pray about them

This simple program should easily increase opportunities to share the gospel and bring many souls to Christ!

A Closer Walk With God

Continuing To Grow

INTRODUCTION

1. Growth is necessary in all areas of life: business, science, industry, etc.
2. This is especially true in our lives as Christians - cf. **Ep 4:14-15; 1 Pe 2:2; 2 Pe 3:18; 2 Th 1:3**
3. But spiritual growth must be well-rounded, balanced growth...
 - a. The Christian must grow in knowledge, in zeal, in faith, in Christ-like character, in good works
 - b. The Christian must not be full of knowledge while his disposition remains un-Christlike
4. This final lesson is intended to help us continue growing ever closer to God and more productive in our service to Jesus Christ

[It is beneficial to be aware of those things which act as...]

I. HINDRANCES TO GROWTH

A. LACK OF EFFORT...

1. Growing in Christ is not automatic
2. One may still be a “babe” after many years - cf. **He 5:13; 1 Co 3:1,2**
3. Growth requires effort, but those who are spiritually lazy will simply follow the course of least resistance; such will forever remain “babes” , if they do not fall away altogether

B. DISCOURAGEMENT...

1. Some people make a good beginning, but get discouraged and quit
2. Reasons may vary: church troubles, personal problems, lack of encouragement from others, etc.
3. But consider the example of the apostle Paul:
 - a. Few of us would ever have the problems he had - **2 Co 11:24-29**
 - b. Yet he did not “lose heart” (become discouraged) - **2 Co 4:8-9**
 - c. Why? Because he knew his labor was not in vain - **2 Co 4:16-5:1**
4. And so he encourages us not to grow weary in doing good - **Ga 6:9; 1 Co 15:58**

C. THE LAW OF DISUSE...

1. A knife stays bright when used, but unused it becomes rusty
2. So it is with Christians, we lose what knowledge, ability, and opportunity we have when we do not use them!
3. To use another metaphor, unless we are earnest in our endeavor, we will simply “drift away” from the Lord - **He 2:1**

D. THE LAW OF INTERFERENCE...

1. Crops, trees and flowers do not grow well when crowded
2. So our spiritual growth will be hindered if we allow others to crowd out our spiritual life
 - a. Businessmen may become too busy to attend to God’s business

- b. A woman may get so occupied with housekeeping that she has little time for God
 - c. Young people may be so busy with school activities that prayer, worship, good works and Bible study are crowded out
 - d. Preachers might get so tied down with meetings, administrative duties, etc., that they too do not have time to spend alone with God
3. Jesus warned about the danger of interference - **Mk 4:18-19**

[In an effort to prevent succumbing to these hindrances, here are some . . .]

II. SUGGESTIONS FOR CONTINUING YOUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

A. BECOME ACTIVE IN THE WORK OF THE CONGREGATION...

1. Begin immediately!
 - a. It is important not to delay (remember the “hindrances”)
 - b. There is work for everyone, and it is best to start with something you are able to handle
 - c. Even the most humble service can be a source of joy for those who are doing it to please God - cf. **Psa 84:10; Jn 13:12-17**
2. Offer your services to the elders!
 - a. These men will be glad to find work for you to do in keeping with your ability
 - b. Sometimes they hesitate to call on people for work if they are not sure the people are willing
 - c. But let them know that you have the attitude of Isaiah: “Here am I! Send me.” - **Isa 6:8**
3. Look for work needing to be done!
 - a. The best servant is one who can see things to be done and does them without having to be told every step to take
 - b. Most of us are good critics; here is how we can put that ability to good use:
 - 1) Whenever we see something we want to criticize, take that as an opportunity to show (not tell) how it should be done
 - 2) Someone else’s failure is often our opportunity to be of service
 - 3) In other words, “Don’t criticize, energize!”

B. START A PROGRAM OF REGULAR PRIVATE DEVOTIONS...

1. Spend time each day alone with God, engaged in prayer, Bible study, singing praises
2. Such time consistently spent will supply the spiritual nourishment necessary for spiritual growth
3. Many Christians do not grow because they try to exist on a “spiritual starvation diet”!

C. PARTICIPATE IN AN INFORMAL BIBLE STUDY GROUP...

1. Meet weekly with other Christians in an informal setting to study the Bible together
2. This provides opportunity for mutual sharing and encouragement which leads to even more knowledge and spiritual growth

D. BECOME INVOLVED IN LEADING PEOPLE TO CHRIST...

1. Begin implementing the suggestions in the lesson on increasing opportunities to share the gospel
2. Even if you don’t do the actual teaching, you can do what Andrew and Philip did: lead a friend to Christ! - **Jn 1:40-46**
3. Those involved in leading others to Christ rarely ever stop growing in Christ themselves!

E. PRACTICE CONSTANT SELF-EXAMINATION...

1. The Scriptures call us to examine ourselves in our relation to Christ - **2 Co 13:5**
2. Here are some questions we should often ask ourselves:
 - a. Do I have a better Bible knowledge than one year ago?
 - b. Am I as interested in Jesus Christ today as when I was baptized?
 - c. Have I helped someone else to become a Christian?
 - d. Am I enjoying life as a child of God?
 - e. Am I improving my life, my disposition, and becoming more like Christ?
 - f. Do I set a good example for other Christians?
 - g. Am I growing in such activities as Bible study, prayer, worship?
3. Self-examination is not an easy process, but true spiritual growth is impossible without it!

CONCLUSION

1. Though we have come to the end of this series of studies, if we implement the suggestions in this lesson and those preceding, we will successfully embark on a spiritual journey with Christ that will last through eternity!
2. It is sad that many Christians are often just religious enough to be miserable; but their life is intended to be one filled with love, joy, peace, and so much more! - **Ga 5:22-23**
3. It is my prayer that these lessons may be useful in helping you to truly experience the **abundant life** that Jesus provides! - cf. **Jn 10:10**

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.” (1 Th 5:23-24)