Foundations

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Discipleship Binder | Vision

It is essential for us to build conviction for the vision of the Discipleship Binder. We ask that you please read and prayerfully digest the vision before delving in.

The Vision

*Believe in* the gospel and *live in response* to the gospel as a disciple.

What is the Gospel?

Usually when asked what the gospel is, people answer that it is the “good news of Jesus Christ” and that he “died and was raised for our sins.” While this is true, we want to offer a more robust explanation:

- God is the perfect, holy and just creator of the universe and He created us for His glory.
- It is the function and responsibility of every person to live for the glory of God.
- Yet, out of our stubborn and rebellious hearts, we have failed to glorify God as we ought.
- Because God is perfectly just, He must punish us for our failure to bring Him glory. Therefore, all of us are subject to eternal condemnation by God.
- But because God is also merciful, He sent His son, Jesus Christ, to rescue us sinners by dying in our place on the cross and resurrecting from the dead.
- It is not enough to merely assent that this happened; we must repent and trust in Christ.

*But it doesn’t end there...*

When Jesus preached the gospel, He did not merely preach the good news *is coming* but that the good news *had come*. The good news was not just something that was going to occur in the future (His death and resurrection), but the good news is that *Christ is here*.

When we look at history, we see that the Jews were waiting for their king to arrive and break them free from the bondage they were suffering. But when King Jesus arrived and set them free, He did not do so by military conquest, but by being murdered and rising from the dead.

The ends of His actions were even more unexpected and glorious than any imagined: First, the Jews are free now and forever to reign with their king. Second, Jesus is revealed not just as the king of the Jews but the king of all creation. Therefore, the good news is not for a specific ethnicity to delight in, but for all creation to celebrate. Now, all can experience the joy of seeing their Enthroned King bring the blessings of restoration and renewal.

Simply, the good news is not just what Jesus accomplished but *who He is*. Jesus is the good news. The King is here and we can re-enter His love and rule.
What Does it Mean to Live in Response to the Gospel?
Jesus came from heaven to earth and engaged culture with the desire to make the Father known. He came to tell the world that the King is here and that we can enjoy His sovereign rule. Those whom the Father allows to respond are born again as God’s children. The response to this reality is a total reorientation of one’s life according to the person of Jesus.

Being saved from your sins was exactly what Jesus meant, but He also meant so much more — a total surrender to His rule and His ways. Jesus taught that under His rule, our life indeed is no longer our own. This is what God assumes and requires to all those who profess to follow Jesus. This understanding and affirmation of the gospel is the backdrop of Christian obedience.

It is important that we understand obedience not as the world does but as Jesus does. It is not a life focused on duty and performance. There is nothing we can do to earn God’s love or achieve salvation. Nobody can boast about earning God’s favor, as it is an undeserved gift. Our works should only be motivated by the love and salvation God has already given us through Jesus. Jesus advocates good works, assuming they are done with the right motivation. When our actions are motivated by the love of God, then our works flow through the gift given to us by God—not as an attempt to earn it. The strength to do works comes from God, and the praise for these works goes to God. When we understand how much Christ loves us, we are enabled to fully partake in the ministry that God has for us.

With this desired motivation, Jesus sends us into this world with the purpose of telling the redemptive story about who God is and what He has done for his creation and how all people can experience relationship with their creator. By worshipping Jesus and making worshippers for Jesus, we fulfill our destinies as God’s creation.

Believing the gospel is, simply, believing that Jesus is King of all creation, and specifically, of your life. Living in response to the reality of the gospel, therefore, is continuously submitting every aspect of your life under the kingly rule of Christ. This reality is the groundwork for what we are hoping to accomplish in our binder.


SIN – Man rebelled against God.

JUSTICE – Our guilt (sinning against God) deserves punishment (Hell).

MERCY – God demonstrates His love by sending Jesus Christ.

JESUS – Lived a perfect life without sin (something we could not do).

ATONEMENT – Jesus died taking on our sins and absorbing God’s wrath in our place. Sin was wiped out and death was extinguished.

VICTORY – Jesus rose from the dead, victoriously conquering death, restoring righteousness to us and raising up our lives.

ALIVE – Christ is alive and reigning right now as King.

RESPONSE – We must repent from our sins and trust in Christ.

COMMISSION – Jesus has sent us as missionaries to proclaim the gospel.

SANCTIFICATION – Christ is continually changing our affections so that God becomes our source of ultimate joy.
The Meaning of Your Decision to Be a Christian

Romans 6:23
For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Introduction
“The gift of God is eternal life in Christ.” This represents the ultimate promise, the ultimate gift from God. Though we were dead in sin, God rescued us and gave us life in His Son. He gave His Son to die for our sins so that we might enjoy Him forever. Your decision to follow Christ, to believe in Him and in His saving power in your life, represents the acceptance of your own death in sin and God’s saving hand. You have been given the gift of life, and now have the freedom to walk with God. You have been saved!

What Must I Do To Be Saved?
In the middle of the first century, two criminals were convicted and sentenced for casting a spirit out of a slave girl. Their names were Paul and Silas. They were sent to the magistrates and charged with “disturbing the city.” They were beaten and placed in the hands of a jailer. The jailer was ordered to keep a tight watch.

Shackled behind bars, Paul and Silas began to yell out in raucous songs of praise to their God. While they were singing, the walls began to shake, the floors began to crack and suddenly an earthquake rumbled throughout the prison. Their chains were broken and the doors opened.

When the jailer awoke, he assumed that the prisoners had escaped. Fearing he would have to pay the cost for a prison break occurring on his watch, the jailer drew his sword to take his own life. But Paul and Silas were still there. Paul told the jailer not to take his life. In fear and reverence of their God, the jailer fell before their feet and asked them one question: “What must I do to be saved?”

If you are now a Christian, you should know the answer to this question. This document will help you process what it means to be saved and follow Jesus.

Practically, Your Decision to Be a Christian Means:
1. You Recognized Your Sin. The prerequisite to a new relationship with Christ is a person realizing they are helplessly lost in sin. It is impossible to become a child of God if you do not realize your sinfulness and your need for Christ’s cleansing. It is important to recognize that it is not just that we have sinned, but that we are sinful by nature.
   * Romans 3:10-18
   * Romans 3:23

2. You Recognized the Consequences of Your Sin. Because God is just, He must punish those who break the law. We have all broken the law; we have all sinned. Our punishment is eternal death. This is a perfectly just consequence for our actions against a holy god. When you received Christ’s death on the cross as a payment for your sins, you were rescued from eternal condemnation.
   * Romans 6:23
3. **You Received God’s Grace.** Grace is unmerited favor, an undeserved gift. In reconciling our relationship with God, grace did it all. There is nothing we can do to earn God’s grace. It is a free gift that you receive when you repent and trust in Christ.
   - Ephesians 2:8-9
4. **You Were Rescued.** You have been freed from the penalty and the power of sin. This rescuing we receive allows us to have relationship with God today and also allows us to spend eternity enjoying His company.
   - Romans 6:17-18
5. **You Were Justified.** You have received justification by faith in Christ. Faith is believing or trusting God and His Word. When you received Christ, you put your trust in Christ and His death for your sin instead of believing in your own ability to earn God’s favor. You recognize that it is not by your own power that you have been saved, but by the power of God.
   - Romans 5:1, 9-10
6. **You Begin to See Signs of Your Salvation.** As you walk with Christ and your relationship with Him grows, you will begin to see the effects in your life. You will increasingly find joy in God. Likewise, you will increasingly be fighting and hating sin. Just as a tree that is well watered bears good fruit, so a person bears good spiritual fruit when they are truly in Christ.
   - Galatians 5:22-24

**Faith Obeys and Endures**
As 15th century theologian Martin Luther said, “We are saved by faith alone, but not by faith that is alone.” Faith is not a one-time decision or teary-eyed prayer. It is not an apathetic agreement that Christ died for your sins. It is a perpetual response to Jesus’ saving work. Faith is lived theology. Faith obeys and faith endures.

- John 3:36
- Matthew 7:17-20
- Hebrews 3:14, 11:1, 12:1

**Spiritually Your Decision Means:**
There are so many things that happen in the spiritual realm when someone becomes a Christian that it would take pages upon pages to list them all. Here are just a few:

1. You have been forgiven of your sins
2. You have been made a child of God
3. You have been made a new creature and given new life
4. You have been given eternal life
5. You have been given the Holy Spirit

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1 Colossians 1:13-14
2 John 1:12
3 2 Corinthians 5:17
4 1 John 5:11-13
5 Ephesians 1:13-14
Conclusion
Your decision does not mean you have to be holy in order to maintain being justified; it means that those who have been justified are holy in God’s sight through faith in the person and finished work of Jesus Christ.

Application Questions
1. What does it mean that “all have sinned”?
2. What are the consequences of sin?
3. What do we have to do to be saved from our sin?
4. What does it mean to have faith?

Memory Verses
Romans 6:23
John 3:16

* How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?
What Defines a Christian Disciple?

John 8:31
Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.’

Introduction
While Webster’s Dictionary describes a disciple as “a pupil or follower of any teacher or school of religion, learning, art, etc,” a Christian disciple follows Jesus. A Christian disciple is one who loves God with everything one has. A Christian disciple, by God’s grace, becomes more and more like Christ through a life of faith and obedience.

Life Example
Have you ever met someone who claimed to be something, but acted another way? Have you ever encountered someone who contradicted what they said they believed? Think of a person who claims to be a huge fan of a certain sports team, but then turns on the team when they lose several games in a row. Think of a more serious example. We often hear stories of women who are abused by men who claim to love them. If one’s actions contradict one’s words, which is true? In Christ’s eyes, it is our actions that speak to what we believe. So, in following Him, we must hold to His teachings in our daily lives.

When we look at the New Testament Gospels, we see that those who followed Jesus truly were His disciples. Because of their love for Christ, many left their jobs, homes, and security to walk with Him as he ministered to people throughout Palestine. They had the benefit of walking with Christ in the flesh. So, what does it look like now – with Christ risen and the Holy Spirit dwelling within us – to be Jesus’ disciple?

Characteristics of a Christian disciple:
1. A true disciple of the Jesus worships God. If you are a new creation in Christ, you are someone who brings glory to God and recognizes His honor.
2. A disciple must be confident in the efficacy of Christ’s death and resurrection for his salvation. He must know that he is a child of God and Christ dwells within him.
3. A disciple walks in the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is responsible for everything that happens in the life of a believer—his new birth, daily walk, understanding of Scripture, prayer, etc. He produces the fruit of the Spirit in us, which enables us to live holy lives and witness for Christ.
4. A disciple demonstrates love for God, neighbor, fellow disciples, and enemies. Jesus commands us to love God with every fiber of our being and to love our neighbors as ourselves.
5. A disciple is one who knows how to read, study, memorize, and meditate upon the Word of God, to store its truths in his heart. It is impossible to walk in the fullness of God’s Holy Spirit without understanding God’s Word. The reverse is also true: you cannot understand God’s Word without the Holy Spirit.

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1 John 5:13
2 Galatians 5:22-25
3 Mark 12:30-31; Matthew 5:43-48
4 Psalm 119
6. **A true disciple of Jesus is a man or woman of prayer.** Jesus models throughout Scripture that communicating with God is one of the most important things in a Christian’s life. He models that those who are children of God seek the Father.

7. **A disciple is one who obeys the commands of God in a lifestyle that honors Christ.**

8. **A disciple is one who trusts God and lives a life of faith.** Scripture reminds us that, “without faith it is impossible to please God.”

9. **A disciple understands God’s grace.** God loves us unconditionally, whether we obey Him or not. This is the opposite of legalism – a heretic way of thinking that urges us to try to obey God’s laws in our own wisdom, strength, and power.

10. **A disciple is one who witnesses for Christ as a way of life.** If you love Jesus, you are spurred on to tell people about Him, testifying to what He has done in your life.

**Application Questions**

1. What are some characteristics of a true Christian disciple you are noticing in your own life?
2. What are some characteristics of a true Christian disciple that you struggle with? Have you given that over to the Lord?

**Memory Verses**

Luke 14:27
John 8:31
John 13:35

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?*

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5 1 Thessalonians 5:17
6 James 1:22-25
7 Hebrews 11:6
8 Romans 5:1
9 Matthew 5:16
Biblical Basis for Discipleship

Matthew 28:18-20
18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus’ Command
After Jesus’ resurrection, “all authority was entrusted to me” came to fruition. He is not waiting passively in heaven for His glorious arrival as king but already He is exercising His lordship. The literal translation is a command: “You disciple.” The word disciple translates as “to become a learner or pupil.” Grammatically, Matthew uses the aorist active imperative tense. This simply means an action that is absolutely required and occurring without end. It is surrounded by three participles (Go, Baptize, and Teach). The first participle ‘going/traveling’ is one of attendant circumstance. It is used to communicate an action that is equally as important as the finite verb ‘Disciple.’ In this respect, the verb is not dependent, and is best translated “Go and Make.” Therefore in Matthew’s mind, Go is understood as not only a nonnegotiable but an assumed action that is always linked to the command ‘Disciple.’

(Baptizing) and (Teaching) are participles of means. Jesus is communicating how the action of the finite verb is accomplished. By using ‘Baptizing’ Jesus is describing the symbolic gesture of being initiated into His fold. The gospel is the catalyst for that initiation and thus the most relevant message that a person can receive in this life. The focus is witnessing, so the task of baptizing in this text is mainly evangelistic in nature.

‘Teaching’ refers to catechesis, which means the process of educating through a method of active questioning and response. By teaching what Jesus taught, the church becomes an extension of His ministry. In all, the command to disciple finds its fulfillment in evangelism and education. The discipleship characteristics as commanded by Jesus appear not only in this commission, but throughout the Gospels.

Jesus’ Model
Discipleship was Jesus’ method of winning the world to Himself. In fact, Jesus converted very few people in His earth ministry in a clear-cut way. He literally staked His whole ministry on twelve men. As popular as He was during His earthly ministry, Jesus did not focus on the momentary applause of men but quietly poured His life in those who would multiply. Jesus was not trying to impress the crowd, but usher in a kingdom. Christ expects His followers to be fruitful, but often we are not without external motivation and accountability.

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3 Anthony, 53.
5 Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21
6 John 15:16
7 Anthony, 55.
Jesus knew that He would have to equip the saints to be able to lead the multitudes. This is what we need in our churches. It is safe to say that discipleship was foundational to Jesus’ ministry.

**Early Church Model**
Although not in a methodical plan as what we are accustomed to today, the apostles of the early church believed the command of Jesus was indeed serious. One clear example is the life that Paul modeled as shown most beautifully in the exhortation given in 2 Tim. 2:2. Paul understood it was important that Jesus sent him to do all that He had commanded. In the same way, he was sending Timothy. While being sent, Timothy is to continue the legacy by sending out faithful men out who would send others. This is what Jesus commanded Paul and this was his command to Timothy. The command is also extended to us today.

We have seen that Jesus calls His followers to reproduce the example of training disciples to continue the mission of actively teaching and sharing the gospel. There are practical examples of what this looks like through Jesus’ ministry and Paul’s relationship with Timothy to name a few. This will require long term investment but can create a deeply affecting ministry. So it appears that the call to discipleship is extended to the entire body of Christ and is no less relevant today than when it was first given.

Discipleship is an essential element of our Lord’s ministry and command to believers. It should be a significant component in the body of Christ both theoretically and practically.

**What Is Discipleship?**
Discipleship is a popular word, often used vaguely and ambiguously. It’s actually quite simple. Discipleship is the relationship between a teacher (discipler) and student (disciple). Many churches and Christian groups around the world do elements of discipleship, but rarely engage in holistic discipleship as modeled by Christ.

Discipleship is not fulfilled by any of the following items on their own:
- Fellowship
- Accountability
- Evangelizing and making converts
- Bible study
- Training seminars
- Listening to sermons
- Hanging out with an older believer

Remember, these are elements of discipleship, not equivalents of discipleship. They are good and godly, but they lack the individual attention, growth and accountability that Jesus modeled.

By looking at Jesus’ ministry and the early church, we see that to holistic discipleship involves someone training their disciple in **Word, Relationship, and Ministry.**

**Word**
Teaching disciples to obey all that Christ commanded and modeled throughout the Scriptures.

- Luke 11:28
Jesus clearly showed His disciples the importance and use of the Scriptures, both in His own personal devotion and in winning others to Himself. Learning and obeying Scripture is essential for one’s growth as a disciple of Christ. Mack Avenue Community Church expects its leaders to love God’s Word and to impart this love to their disciples.

**Relationship**
Building relationships that feature love, commitment, authenticity, vulnerability, accountability, and intentionality.

- Matthew 9:9
- John 1:43, 11:54
- 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Having called His men, Jesus made a practice of spending time with them. This was the essence of His training program—letting His disciples follow Him. Knowledge of Christ was gained by association before it was understood by explanation. He ate with His disciples, slept near them, and talked with them for most of His active ministry. Although there is no command to commit to such a level, it seems convincing that Jesus shows how important relationship development is to growing a disciple. If this does not happen, the disciple may feel like a project and not a person. The person should know he is loved, not only by Christ, but also by their discipler.

**Ministry**
Training disciples in service and evangelism. Service is any work done with the motivation to honor Jesus. This could be buying a cup of coffee for a coworker, or caring for those who have been marginalized by society and affected by injustice, making provisions for those who are hurting spiritually and physically. Evangelism is spreading the gospel by public preaching or personal witness.

- Matthew 24:14
- 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

Jesus never asked anyone to do or be anything which first He had not demonstrated in His own life. His desire was to get the disciples into a vital experience with God. It is important that we realize that these early disciples really did not do much other than watch Jesus work for at least a year. However, the vision was kept before them by His activity. The model has been set for us. The mission of equipping us as believers to communicate our faith to the world was a huge component of discipleship in Jesus’ approach.

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8 Luke 8:10
Word, Relationship and Ministry work together to holistically model discipleship principles taught by Jesus. The goal of discipleship is to develop healthy believers that walk by faith, communicate their faith, and multiply their faith.

How to Choose a Disciple

Christ modeled the principle that selection of disciples is key to discipleship. He demonstrated that the multitudes could be won if they were just given Spirit-filled leaders to follow. We have to be discerning so that, like Paul following Jesus’ model, we will choose disciples who will not waste our time and but will be faithful stewards to what has been entrusted to them.

licer 2 Timothy 2:2

We should look for three main qualities in a disciple:

1. **Faithful.** Confidence that what you are entrusting to the person will be in good hands.
2. **Available.** It is hard to train someone who is not around. Therefore, a potential disciple must show a willingness to be around you. He or she must model commitment.
3. **Teachable.** It is impossible to teach someone who thinks they know everything and are not receptive to instruction or rebuke. Just as Jesus modeled, we are not to waste the stewardship of our lives with know-it-alls.

When Choosing a Disciple:

1. Cast vision for the mandate of discipleship. This is done by teaching what it means to be discipled and helping them understand the expectations.
2. Make it clear that you are the leader of the group you are calling them to. You are their servant and leader.
3. Discuss with the person the requirements of being Faithful, Available, Teachable.
4. The person must be willing to eventually disciple others – to follow the vision.
5. The person must be willing adhere to your requirements i.e. One on One times, Bible Study time etc.

Application Questions

1. What are the primary components of discipleship?
2. Have you built conviction on the metrics of discipleship?
3. What could hinder a discipleship relationship from being God-honoring?
4. What traits are we supposed to look for in potential disciples?

Memory Verses

Matthew 28:18-20
2 Tim 2:2

* How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?

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9 Matthew 9:12; Proverbs 8:13
The Holy Spirit

John 16:7-15
7 But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because people do not believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. 12 “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

Introduction
On the eve of His betrayal, Jesus offers His disciples hope in the form of the Holy Spirit. God sends us a person that we can have a personal relationship with. The Holy Spirit is not a power source, He is the third member of the Trinity, which also includes God the Father and God the Son. When Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit became the primary manifestation of the Trinity on earth. That is to say, He is the one who is most prominently present with us now, and we can access the Trinity through Him.

Throughout Scripture we see that the Spirit is indeed God. In the various passages that reference Him, we find that He is a distinct person yet at the same time He is fully God. The Holy Spirit is often referred to as if God were being mentioned. He is also spoken of as being equal with God and shares God’s incommunicable attributes of omnipotence (all-powerful), omniscience (all-knowing), omnipresence (present everywhere), and self-existence.

Earlier in John, Jesus says, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” The Greek word used for helper or counselor in this passage means the “same kind of helper.” This means that the person Jesus is sending is one who not only has all the attributes and abilities of the one who is leaving, but is of the same essence. The Holy Spirit is God and Jesus sends Him to dwell within us.

Although the disciples are sad about Jesus departure, it is best that he goes because this is when the Holy Spirit will come and empower all believers at once. Hence, the distinction that

14 Luke 1:34-35 (The conception of Jesus through the Holy Spirit); Acts 5:3-4 (Lying to the Holy Spirit); 1 Corinthians 2:3-4 (The power of the Holy Spirit); 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (The indwelling of the Holy Spirit); 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (The Lordship of the Holy Spirit); 2 Peter 1:20-21 (The inspiration of the Holy Spirit); Psalm 139:7 (The presence of the Holy Spirit)
15 Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:1-2
16 Luke 1:34-35; Romans 15:18-19
17 John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11
18 Psalm 139:7-9
19 Genesis 1:1-2; Hebrews 9:14
20 John 14:16-17
Jesus makes in John 14:17 between himself and the Spirit. Unlike when Jesus was on earth, the Spirit not only abides with the believer but he will be in the believer!

Even in just the two passages in John we have seen thus far, it is obvious that the Spirit has many roles. In each role, however, the Holy Spirit acts only on behalf of the other members of the Trinity. He creates, \(^{21}\) helps, \(^{22}\) gives life, \(^{23}\) leads, \(^{24}\) assures, \(^{25}\) intercedes according to the will of God, \(^{26}\) initiates into the body of Christ, \(^{27}\) illuminates, \(^{28}\) transforms, \(^{29}\) guarantees the redemption of those who are God’s possession, \(^{30}\) regenerates and renews, \(^{31}\) inspires, \(^{32}\) and brings about our rebirth \(^{33}\) all to the glory of the Father and the Son.

Traditionally, the wide variety of roles that the Spirit fulfills has given way to a great deal of confusion within the church about what exactly our interactions with the Spirit look like. Particular phrases like being filled with or baptized by or living by the Spirit have come to be interpreted in diverse and often contradictory terms. As a result, the same Spirit who is meant to bring unity to the Body of Christ has often been used by Satan to drive us apart.

But as Christians, we cannot abide by such confusion. The Holy Spirit is our only hope for understanding and living out the gospel. To allow Satan to turn the beautiful promise of a helper against us, is to condemn ourselves to a fruitless and futile faith even before we get started. So, let us examine the common sticking points together and see if we cannot arrive at a coherent answer.

**Being Filled With the Holy Spirit**

The only command in the Bible to “be filled with the Spirit” is located in Ephesians 5:18 which reads, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” Below are two simple observations from the text.

1. **Drunkenness is compared with Spirit filling.** The man who fills himself with wine chooses to put himself under its influence rather than controlling himself. Similarly, the man who intentionally yields to the Spirit is filled by the Spirit and is allowing the Spirit to control him.

2. The verb used for filling is continuous in action, calling for the believer to be continually filled with the Spirit. While this could mean that the believer is to experience a special anointing each moment of every day, it seems far more likely that Paul is speaking of the pursuit of a godly lifestyle.

God can supernaturally control any person at anytime (and there are occasions where *God gives* a special anointing to a person throughout the Bible), but in this text it seems

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\(^{21}\) Genesis 1:1-2
\(^{22}\) John 14:26
\(^{23}\) Romans 8:11
\(^{24}\) Romans 8:14
\(^{25}\) Romans 8:16; 1 John 3:24
\(^{26}\) Romans 8:26-27
\(^{27}\) 1 Corinthians 12:13
\(^{28}\) 1 Corinthians 2:12
\(^{29}\) 2 Corinthians 3:17-18
\(^{30}\) Ephesians 1:13-14
\(^{31}\) Titus 3:5
\(^{32}\) 2 Peter 1:20-21
\(^{33}\) John 3:3-8
overwhelmingly probable that when discussing “being filled with the Spirit,” the Scriptures are referring to submission to God and His kingdom agenda.

The importance of yielding to the Lord cannot be overstated. Submitting ourselves to God’s control and influence through sincere and genuine confession, repentance, renewed commitment, and heightened faith is how we clean out the dark corners of our hearts and lives. As long as the yielding is sincere, there will certainly be growth in sanctification and deeper fellowship with God. We have concluded that yielding to the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit is the same thing.

Living or Walking by the Spirit

The answer to our sinful lifestyle is to “live by the Spirit.” The phrase, seen in Galatians 5:16, is literally translated “keep on walking.” As a believer walks through life he should depend on the indwelling Holy Spirit for guidance and power. This passage brings to light three nuances of our indwelling.

1. The Spirit is present in a believer’s life, but the Spirit does not operate automatically in a believer’s heart. He waits to be depended on.

2. When a Christian does yield to the Spirit’s control, the promise is that he will not gratify (meaning to “complete” or “fulfill” in outward action) the desires of the sinful nature.

3. While no believer will ever be entirely free in this life from the evil desires that stem from his fallen human nature, he need not give in to them, but may experience victory by the Spirit’s help. As the apostle Peter notes elsewhere “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”

Jumping ahead in Galatians, Paul gives us an idea of what happens to our sinful nature when we become Christians (and, thus, indwelt by the Holy Spirit). In short, he tells us we need not be responsive to our sinful nature because it has been crucified.

- Galatians 5:24-25

We should not suppose Paul’s words to be a command to crucifixion of our physical bodies or self-mortification. Rather, he is referring to the fact that by means of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Christians are identified with Christ in His death and resurrection. Paul declared that this had been his experience and that of all believers. While co-crucifixion took place potentially at the cross, it becomes effective for believers when they are converted.

The crucifixion of our sinful nature is not an eradication of it or even an inactivation of it. Instead, to say that we are crucified with Christ is to say that our sinful nature has been judged. Christ has provided victory over the sinful nature’s passions and desires in His death. Believers should stand firm and rejoice in that fact. And we must continually lay hold of this truth or we will be tempted to secure victory by self-effort.

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34 2 Peter 1:3
35 Galatians 2:20
36 Romans 6:1-6; Colossians 2:11; 3:9
37 Romans 6:11-12
Being in the Spirit
To be in the Holy Spirit is really to be in an atmosphere of God’s manifested presence. Many activities can be done “in the Spirit.” For example, we can rejoice in the Spirit. We can also decide something in the Spirit. It is even possible to just be in the Spirit.

According to the Scriptures, it is unlikely that being in the Spirit refers to a particular anointing or supernatural possession by the Spirit. Instead, it is most plausible to view being “in the Spirit” as being in the ‘realm’ or ‘area’ of the Spirit. Practically speaking, this means the believer lives life in God’s realm and sees things in His reality – having and being about God’s perspective, not man’s. We see this idea born out in Revelation 1:10, where John is not possessed but simply shown reality from God’s perspective, which is true reality.

Disruption of the Spirit
In contrast to being filled or in or walking by the Spirit is the notion of disrupting Him. All throughout the Old Testament the Holy Spirit came upon certain people. But Him staying was dependent on how they carried out the work of the Lord (i.e. 1 Samuel). Similarly in the New Testament, we see that the Holy Spirit can be grieved and cease to bring about blessing in a situation. Our hardened disobedience can even hurt the Spirit to such a degree that we do not allow him to continue his work of sanctification in our life.

We must be very careful not to grieve or offend the Holy Spirit. He will not force Himself on us against our wills and, if we resist and quench and oppose Him, then His empowering will depart and He will remove much of the blessing of God from our lives.

Baptism of the Holy Spirit
When it comes to baptism of the Holy Spirit, there are two main views. One we will call the charismatic view and the other we call the traditional view.

In the charismatic view, the baptism of the Holy Spirit comes after one has become a Christian and the result is great blessing in the believer’s life. Charismatics claim that the “baptism of the Spirit” reveals itself in many congregations through the speaking of an “unknown tongue.” Such “baptisms” are said to result in prayer and Bible study becoming much more meaningful and effective. An increase in worship is also reported along with the manifestation of different gifts (especially tongues!). Support for the charismatic view comes from the following Scriptural truths:

1. Jesus disciples were born again believers long before the day of Pentecost.
2. Jesus promises his disciples a baptism by the Holy Spirit just prior to his ascension.
3. The disciples are shown clearly experience this baptism on Pentecost.
4. Believers are instructed to ask for this baptism.

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38 Acts 9:31
39 Luke 10:21
40 Acts 19:21
41 Revelation 1:10
42 Grammatically this is known a “dative of Sphere.”
43 Acts 7:51; Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19
44 Acts 5:3-9; Hebrews 10:27,29
45 1 Corinthians 14:32
46 Acts 1:4-8
47 Acts 2:1-4
48 Acts 8:12, 1-17
While the support for the charismatic view is drawn from Scripture there is more to the picture. In piecing together a complete biblical view, we see that there seven passages in New Testament that speak of the event of people being baptized of the Holy Spirit. Because each of these verses use almost exactly the same expression in Greek, we can be certain they are speaking about the same baptism.

Out of the seven passages, 1 Corinthians 12:13 helps us best understand this baptism. It reads, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body.” The Greek word “baptizo” actually means “identification” or more exhaustively, the initiation into God’s fold (or flock of sheep). Therefore, “baptism by the Spirit” is to be identified by the spirit as being put into the family of God. It is the proof that one has entered into the family of God. It seems, according to Paul, that baptism happens at conversion.

Now that we understand the context of baptism in the Spirit we can begin to make sense of what is happening in the first six verses. Remember, the day of Pentecost (that time period) was the point of transition between the Old Covenant identification (Jewish heritage) into the family of God and the New Covenant identification (all that believe—both Jew and Gentile) into the family of God. Each of these six verses speaks of this new identification into the family of God and they record a step-wise unfolding of that reality.

The first to experience this new identification are the faithful Jews who came on board with Jesus’ plan to be the new people of God. Jesus promised them that the Holy Spirit would not only be with them but in them. The supernatural occurrence of baptism or “identification” to served notice to the world and the disciples themselves that something new was going on. The true people of God, namely those who believed in Christ, were being revealed.

The result of the disciples’ baptism is that they began to speak in tongues. Tongues are described in the text as spoken languages on earth that people are given the supernatural ability to speak and others to understand and interpret.

- Acts 2:4-11

This Baptism was meant also for another reason in addition to the first (which again shows the world and the disciples who the true people of God are, namely those who believed in Christ). However, a brief survey of Acts is required to demonstrate this second reason.

We begin with the first occurrence of people receiving the Holy Spirit after the Jewish disciples. It is recorded that the Samaritans (The half breed Jews) who were not seen fit by the ethnic Jews to enter the kingdom of God were reported as to have accepted the word of God. Therefore the leaders of the early church sent Peter and John (Jews) to lay hands on them to receive the spirit. After they did, the people indeed received the spirit of God.

These Samaritans are said to have “accepted the word of God” and have been “baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.” It is clear they believed and it is equally clear that they did not have the Holy Spirit. Why not? Does this not contradict passages like Romans 8:9 which say that if you do not have the spirit of Christ then you are not a Christian?

There is something much more historically and theologically precise happening in these verses. God has made a new people around the person and finished work of Christ. However,
contrary to the Jews thinking, this “New Israel” would not be for the few Jews that said yes to the claim of Christ, but the “New Israel” would encompass “all those who believed” both Jew and Gentile alike.

How would the world and more importantly the faithful Jewish-Christian realize this “New Israel” to be true and not simply a theory? Only if the same empowerment that was promised to disciples at Pentecost (which authenticated them as the new people of God) also happened to the Gentiles. Jesus had taught his disciples that the Gentiles should be a part of the family of God. 53 But practically speaking, the believing Jew still found it hard to accept 54 that the Spirit would be poured out on “all flesh” including anyone any non-Jew who believed in Christ.

Therefore, the supernatural occurrence of the Holy Spirit in these texts are to confirm first, to the Gentiles that they belong to the family of God (those that believe), and also to confirm to the Jews that the Gentiles belonged to the family of God. It was crucial that the Gentile’s faith be validated in order that entrance would not be denied as had been done historically.

To further confirm this line of reasoning, we see a similar situation however not with Jewish half-breeds but with Gentile sinners. In Acts 10 Peter has been commanded to interact with Gentiles. The reasoning becomes clear to Peter in verses 44-48. They have received the Holy Spirit and the Jews were “astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.” Then Peter said, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” The main point is that “they received the spirit just as we have.”

The authenticating tool that God would use to show that “all others” were to be included into the family of God could not simply be his words (which he proclaimed many times to his disciples). He would have to give them an identical external experience in order to confirm that the only determining factor in being part of God’s family is belief in Christ. 55 As a result, we see Peter explaining his new theological understanding in Acts 15.

We encounter one final group in Acts 11, those of John’s baptism. They were faithful followers of John but for some reason never made the transition to the one whom he was pointing to. Nevertheless, when explained to them the meaning behind John’s prophetic words, they indeed believed and received the spirit. Therefore, the mission was complete which was to take all those who believed in Christ and to authenticate that all people can be a part in God’s family: Half-breeds, Gentiles, and even newcomers. It is exhaustively clear that baptism here was not meant to proclaim an extra portion of the spirit but to confirm full entrance into the kingdom of God for all who believe.

**Conclusion**

The Holy Spirit is the third member of the Trinity, which includes God the Father and God the Son. While He shares some roles with the other members of the Trinity, He also has His own distinct roles. When Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit became the primary manifestation of the Trinity on earth. The Holy Spirit is responsible for our spiritual rebirth in Jesus Christ and our ongoing renewal in His image. To “be filled” or “in” or “walk by the Spirit” is, first and foremost, to follow His prompting towards godliness.

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53 Matthew 8:5-13  
54 Galatians 2:11-20  
55 Acts 11:17
Application Questions
1. Are you walking in step with the Spirit? Or are you continuing to gratify your sinful nature?
2. Are you asking to be filled by the Holy Spirit? Are you letting Him into every area of your life? Or are there sinful behaviors and thinking you still need to repent of and turn over to Him?

Memory Verses
John 7:37-39
John 16:12-13

* How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?
The Spirit-Filled Life

Colossians 3:1-3
1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Introduction
Before knowing Christ we believed in lies. Our reality is now set with Christ as our focus, and we are given clear vision through the help of the Holy Spirit. In Colossians 3, Paul speaks to the church of Colossae, reminding them – and us – that we are now to live with a new kind of mentality. We are to depend on Biblical wisdom to define our truth, and “set our hearts [and]...minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Paul is reminding us that even our hearts and minds need to be changed by the gospel. As we depend on the Lord, our lives will be transformed.

Living the Spirit-Filled Life
The Holy Spirit is one person of our triune God and is interchangeable with God. Jesus gave us the Spirit, “Helper,” when He ascended into heaven. Living a Spirit-filled life separates those individuals who are truly changed by Christ’s death on the cross, and those that are not. Galatians 5 says that if you belong to Christ you will put your old sinful self to death and live led by the Spirit. Living a life led by the Spirit should compel the believer to practice what we refer to as “spiritual breathing.” When one physically breathes, they both inhale and exhale. Spiritual breathing implies an “exhaling” of sin (through confession), and an “inhaling” of Christ (through inviting the Holy Spirit’s help). Here we will look at what it means to belong to Christ and to live a “Spirit-filled” life.

1. The Mystical Aspect. The Holy Spirit is mystical and mysterious, but is meant to be a helper to all who follow Christ. To not seek understanding about the Spirit is to remain ignorant about what God can do in you and through you.
   - The Holy Spirit – who is God – is in you! Paul often uses this aspect of the Spirit’s filling as motivation for living in holiness. We are to call on the Holy Spirit to help us flee from sin and pursue godliness.

2. The Practical Aspect. As we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will read, obey and meditate on biblical truths. We are also to seek this biblical truth through wise counsel from others who truly follow Christ.
   - Renew your mind
     - Preoccupy your thoughts with spiritual things.
     - Meditate on and memorize Scripture.
   - Encourage the Body
     - Speak Truth to one another.

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1 John 14:26
2 Colossians 3:1; 1 Corinthians 6:19
3 Colossians 3:1; Romans 12:1-2
4 Ephesians 5:18-19
How Are We Filled?

1. **Mystical Aspect.** We receive the Holy Spirit when we become a Christian. He dwells within all those who belong to Christ.
   - God sends His Spirit into our hearts when we receive Christ.\(^5\) We will never lose the Spirit’s presence; He cannot be taken from us.

2. **Practical Aspect.** We need to remind ourselves of the Truth.
   - Happens when we read God’s Word and pray.
     - God’s principles and nature are found in His Word. To the extent that you live a life based on God’s principles is the extent to which you are filled.
     - Filling occurs when we increasingly allow the Spirit to permeate each area of our lives.

3. **Spiritual Breathing**
   - Exhale (Confess sin and repent)
     - 1 John 1:9, 2:1
     - Example: You have been hurt by a fellow believer and have responded in anger without forgiveness. A proper “exhaling” response would be to confess your sin to the Lord, recognizing His forgiveness. You would then go to your brother or sister in Christ and confess your sin to them and ask for forgiveness.
   - Inhale (Be filled with the Spirit)
     - Appropriate grace and forgiveness
     - Consider your sin as having been forgiven through the blood of Christ
     - Example: You live in the knowledge that you, having recognized your sin and repenting of it, are free from its chains. This is simply because of Christ’s grace and forgiveness.

The Roles of the Holy Spirit

- **Helper**
  - John 14:16-21, 26
- **Parakletos**
  - Comforter, encourager, advocate, helper, one who steps forward on behalf of another or to represent another. In the classical Greek, it took the meaning of legal advisor.
  - This role of the Spirit seems to be tightly identified with the notion of Christian obedience.
- **Assurance of Salvation**
  - Romans 8:15-16 – bears witness, produces testimony.
- **Conviction of Sin**
  - John 16:8

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\(^5\) Romans 8:15-16
Conclusion
If we call ourselves Christians, our lives should be changed by the gospel. However, we cannot do good things on our own. We cannot even know the heart and will of God without His help. For all who have responded to the cross, we have been given the Holy Spirit to dwell in us and to assist us in our life-long pursuit of holiness. We must seek to know God through His Word and allow that to soak into every aspect of our lives. If we are in Christ, we never lose His Spirit. Yet if we are in Christ, we have an obligation to submit to his Spirit.

Application Questions
1. Is the Holy Spirit God?
2. When does the believer receive the Holy Spirit? Can an unbeliever receive Him?
3. What does the Holy Spirit enable us to do?
4. What are three areas of your life that you are struggling to give over to the Lord? Why are you refusing to surrender these? What does Scripture say about these?
5. If you recognize your sin and want to turn from it and start anew, take this opportunity to practice the Spiritual Breathing exercise of confessing and receiving forgiveness for these sins. This may be done alone or with another believer in Christ.

Memory Verses
Colossians 3:1-3
1 John 1:9

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?
Renewing Your Mind

Romans 12:1-2
1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Introduction
God does not desire us to present a dead animal sacrifice, but desires for us to be a living sacrifice. What does it meant to be a living sacrifice? It means to daily lay aside our own desires and follow after Him. It means to live by the power of the Holy Spirit in order for the fruit of the Spirit to manifest in our lives. This is our “spiritual act of worship” unto the Lord: we live by the Spirit by renewing our minds in God’s Truth.

Let us consider these verses from Scripture as we examine what it means to renew our mind. Most individuals operate out of the belief that when something (activating event) happens, they are to simply respond (reaction). Hence, the equation of A=C. For many people, this activating event will elicit a natural reaction.

Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activating Event (A)</th>
<th>Possible Reactions (C)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Someone steps/stands on your foot while waiting at the bus stop.</td>
<td>1)  Ask the person, “Would you please move your foot?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2)  Ask the person, “Why do you feel the need to step on my foot?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3)  Simply move your foot without saying anything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4)  Aggressively push the person off of your foot.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many of us think that when things happen to us, we are to respond naturally. This thinking is problematic. As the table shows, people will respond differently to the same event. Why? Because their reaction depends entirely on what they believe. Our belief systems determine our reactions. When we do something, the action is motivated by what we are believing. Instead of living under the equation \( A = C \), we actually live under the equation \( A + B = C \). Here is the same example, but with the belief systems that determine the reactions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activating Event (A)</th>
<th>Belief System (B)</th>
<th>Reactions (C)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Someone steps/stands on your foot while waiting at the bus stop. | 1) Being kind and straightforward is the most effective way to get the individual off of my foot.  
2) I need to understand this individual better, so talking things out is the best approach.  
3) Confrontation is never a good option! In order to avoid a confrontation, it’s best not to engage this individual at all.  
4) Physical touch and violation of my personal space is an insult! I’ve learned to deal with insults through violence. | 1) Ask the person, “Would you please move your foot?”  
2) Ask the person, “Why do you feel the need to step on my foot?”  
3) Simply move your foot without saying anything.  
4) Aggressively push the person off of your foot. |

It is clear from these examples that all things remain constant except for what the person has been taught to believe! Understanding this teaching illuminates many passages throughout Scripture that exhort the believer to shift their way of thinking from worldly to God-centered.

- Romans 8:6-8

**The Power of the Enemy is in the Lie**

As Christians, we know that there is only one belief system that is Truth and all other belief systems are lies. If Satan can convince us to believe lies about ourselves, lies about others and lies about God, we will be under his control, even while he is bound. This is why it is crucial for us to renew our minds.

- John 8:44  
- 1 Peter 5:8
How Do We Renew Our Minds?
First, we must realize that there are many lies we believe on a regular basis. These lies inadvertently and sometimes maliciously come from culture, friends, family, and even the church. God wants us to expose these lies and transform our minds with His Truth.

There Are Two Types of Lies
1. **Conscious Lies.** These lies are easily detected. Maybe before you knew Christ, you used to berate and cuss out others to bring them down. Or perhaps you used to steal. This behavior existed because of your belief system. Clearly, since they were sinful acts, these behaviors originated from lies in your belief system. Therefore, as a follower of Christ, you now must realize that these behaviors must cease because God commands not to conform to the world’s mold but to His. These “conscious” lies are dealt with based on the Christian’s desire to come broken before God and repent of their sin.

2. **Subconscious Lies.** These lies are not as easy to detect. They can be subtler and usually result from patterns of thinking. These lies can be ingrained in you and eventually become part of your personality.

Turning Lies into Spiritual Truth
After we recognize the lies in our belief system, we must choose to believe the Truth! The only way for someone to stop believing lies and begin to believe truth is not through positive thinking. We cannot believe the Truth unless we know the Truth.

The Truth is Found in God’s Word
We must begin by asking what God’s word says about a particular situation. For example, if we are believing lies about ourselves in regards to issues of self-worth and self-image, we can turn to Genesis 1:27, Psalm 139:13-14, Isaiah 43:4-5, and Romans 8:37-59 to understand that our worth is a result of who we are in Christ.

Conclusion
We must remember that all behavior we exhibit is a function of what we believe at that moment. If we are believing a lie, then our behavior or reactions to circumstances in our lives will reflect this lie. By understanding the command to replace the lies in our belief system with spiritual truth, we are on the road to recovery and healthy living in Christ. We will begin to see victory in our walks with God once we begin to break free from these lies.

Application Questions
1. Do you really believe that everything you do or say is controlled by your belief system? If not, why?
2. Are there any sin patterns in your life that you are struggling with? If so, what is the lie that forms the basis for this sin pattern? What does God’s Word say is true?
3. What are some lies that Satan has told you about yourself and your relationship with God? What does God’s Word say is true?
4. On a practical, day-to-day, level, what do you think it means to believe the truth?

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?
Position and Condition

Romans 5:1
1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

POSITION

Life Without Christ
Prior to submitting your life to Christ, you are guilty in your position before God and therefore subject to His wrath.

- Ephesians 2:1-3
- John 3:36, 8:34-35
- Romans 1:18-32, 2:5-10, 6:23

Saved by Christ
When you accept Jesus Christ as lord and savior, something miraculous occurs in the spiritual realm: you go from being spiritually dead (separated from God and subject to His wrath) to spiritually alive (free from condemnation, reconciled to God and welcomed into His family). Your position before God changes from guilty to innocent. Your standing before Him is forever perfect. The trajectory of your life has been altered for eternity and you are deemed a new creation in Christ.

- Romans 6:22
- 2 Corinthians 5:16-19
- Ephesians 2:4-22
CONDITION

Life With Christ
We have seen that after submitting our lives to Christ, our position before God changes. He gives us the Holy Spirit and the process of sanctification begins. We already have salvation; now we must work out our salvation, being regenerated by the Holy Spirit and having our hearts and minds continually transformed as we live for God. Think of it this way: our position is secure but our condition is progressive.

- Ephesians 1-2, 5:1-20
- 1 Timothy 6:12
- 2 Timothy 4:6-8
- James 1
- 1 Peter 2

Called to Live in Holiness
God calls us to a life of holiness because He is holy and He desires us to reflect His image well so that others might see His goodness and submit to Him (this is essentially the story of God. He called Israel to be His people so that they would be a light to the nations).

Remember, this is a process. We have spent years living for ourselves and worshipping idols. We must now renew our minds continually submit to the Lord, and operate in a way that is pleasing to God.

- Leviticus 19:2
- Ephesians 5:3
- Romans 6:11-14
- 2 Corinthians 5:20-21
- 1 Peter 1:16

Spiritual Breathing
While we are always in good relationship with the Lord, our fellowship with Him can be hindered (as demonstrated by the small spikes on the chart, which represents sin) if we do not practice “spiritual breathing.” Its process is twofold:

Exhale – confess sin (early and often) and repent
- 1 John 1:9

Inhale – yield to the Spirit, trust in Christ, experience His grace and forgiveness
- Ephesians 5:18
- Galatians 5:16

1 Rom. 12:1-2
2 Refer to the Spirit-Filled Life document
Application Questions
1. When you sin, does it change or affect your position before God? Do you live in light of this reality?
2. How much of your life is a result of who you are in Christ compared to what you do for Christ?
3. What does dealing with sin in a healthy manner look like in light of this study?
   Do you regularly find yourself going through the process of sin, confession, repentance, and forgiveness? Do you tend to wallow in your sin, or is true repentance instantaneous when you are made aware of your sin?
4. How does this study help you believe the gospel and live in response to the reality of the gospel?
5. Are you living in the reality that you are righteous before the Lord because of His grace, or are you constantly trying to “earn” salvation and often feel defeated when you sin and fall short?

* How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?
The Forsaken Life

Luke 14:33
In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

Introduction
The Forsaken Life – or living in utmost devotion to Christ – is the only legitimate response to the gospel. Unfortunately, modern Western Christianity has almost completely abandoned this concept, as lukewarm commitment to Jesus is the normal mode of operation. It is telling that what is really just biblical Christianity is now called “radical living.”

But for the early church, believing the claims of Christ could not be separated from living the Forsaken Life. The Bible clearly teaches that if a person claims to be a Christian then the assumption is that they have abandoned their life and become a slave to God.¹


The Cost of Being a Christian
Looking at the story in Luke 14:25-35, we see Jesus engage in a severe sifting process. There were large crowds in attendance to hear Jesus teach, and He tells them what it means for people to follow Him: count the cost, love me more than your family, carry your cross, give up everything. The imagery of “carrying your cross” alone indicates to the crowd that following Jesus means you are to be a dead man walking.

Jesus’ mandate of utmost self-denial goes against the mantra of the world where a person’s own life is to be their primary focus. To enter into Christ’s allegiance, you must die to your current way of life. Because of the significance of these qualifications, Jesus does not want the decision to be hasty. He wants all professing Christians to count the cost. The importance of counting the cost is so important that Jesus uses twin parables in Luke 14:28-32 to drive home His point. Jesus wants all of you. He wants to claim all your possessions and desires. In the passage, Jesus is clear about the price. Three times between vv. 26-33 Jesus gives the refrain, “…cannot be my disciple.”

The Forsaken Life is the demand. Jesus is asking, “Are you willing to give me your life?” The cost is clear. The requirement is clear. These words condemn half-heartedness; lukewarm devotion has no place in Christianity.

Jesus concludes this passage with an analogy to salt. Salt is valuable when it has the quality of saltiness. In the same way followers of Christ possess particular character natural to true disciple (absolute unselfishness, and self-sacrificing loyalty to Him). If a professing Christian is not willing to display these qualities, they are as useless as salt that has gone stale.

The Savior has spoken tremendous words and He ends with, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” We must earnestly believe what Jesus said, for the eternal destiny of our souls is at stake.

- Matthew 16:24-25
- John 12:25

¹ 1 Corinthians 7:22-24; Ephesians 6:6
Assurance Of Salvation

Many might ask, “What about eternal security or assurance of salvation?” People believe that eternal security implies that if a person becomes a Christian then they always remain a Christian. This is true, as long as we understand the correct definition of a Christian.

Many in modern Western Christianity believe that a person is saved if they say a heartfelt prayer. Then, with this newfound salvation, they person believes they can live their life as they see fit and still achieve their goal of dodging hell and getting into heaven.

When we say, “I am a Christian because I believe,” we are saying that assenting to facts is equivalent to the Christian life. This could not be further from the mindset of a first-century Jew. The Forsaken Life was not a concept written about in first-century Jewish culture because it was embedded in Jewish culture. They understood that God was asking for the allegiance of their whole life. This is why the masses deserted Jesus in John 6. This is also why when people followed Jesus it was not carelessly. People gave up their jobs and left their families. In Acts, we see Christians selling their homes for the cause of Christ. They understood faith to be the surrendering of their lives to the Lord.

Matthew 7:13-27

The sermon concludes with four short sections, each calling for genuineness in the disciple’s response to the demands of Jesus. Each presents a contrast between the genuine and the fake, and this genuineness is found not in what he professes, but in his performance. A professed adherence may be impressive, deceive men, and even himself, but will not deceive God. As Oliver Wendell Holmes once noted, “Most people are willing to take the Sermon on the Mount as a flag to sail under, but few will use it as a rudder by which to steer.”

Jesus says we will know true believers by their fruits. The fruits are not specified, but the idea is clearly that profession must be tested by practice. A man’s heart will inevitably show itself by the way he lives. Jesus makes clear in vv. 19-20 that profession of discipleship alone is not protection against the coming judgment. The Gospel of Matthew frequently emphasizes the danger of a purely nominal discipleship and warns that there will be professed disciples who will be rejected at the end.

To be clear, the Scriptures never assert that a true believer can lose their salvation. The Scriptures are clear, however, that there are a lot of professing Christians who go through the motions and their true heart will one day be exposed. People who “fall away” from Jesus do not lose their salvation; they never came to Christ in the first place.

Is This Works-Based Theology?

Not at all! We are saved by faith in Christ alone. In the Bible, works are never an enemy of faith but the proof of faith. Faith and actions work in tandem to bring glory to God. We do good works not to earn salvation but out of gratitude that God already gave us salvation in Christ.

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2 Matthew 4:19-20
3 Acts 4:34-37
5 Romans 3:28, 5:1; Ephesians 2:8-9
6 James 2:18-24
Why Should We Willingly Lose Our Lives?
Jesus calls for us to die to ourselves before we follow Him. At first glance, this does not seem like an attractive offer. However, there is a guaranteed return on the investment. It is more than worth it.

We have two choices: follow Satan (worship ourselves, money, sex, status, etc.) or follow Jesus (commit to His kingdom and agenda). Devotion to Satan might lead to a successful life in the eyes of the world. However, we will be enemies of God and will be eternally punished. Devotion to Jesus will guarantee us entrance into the kingdom of God and we will never taste death. Further, we get access to the ultimate source of joy – God Himself.

- Luke 17:7-10
- Romans 6:1-10
- 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 7:21-24

Application Questions
1. What does it cost to be a disciple of Jesus?
2. What is the difference between works-based theology and living the Forsaken Life?
3. Is losing your life to follow Jesus worth it? Why?

Memory Verses
Luke 14:33
Matthew 16:24-25

* How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?

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7 Matthew 10:28; Mark 9:43; Revelation 20:14
8 John 8:51, 11:26, 10:28; Mark 9:1
Forgiveness

Exodus 34:6-7
6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”

Understanding Forgiveness
In order to understand forgiveness we must understand the ultimate expression of forgiveness found in the relationship between God and humanity. Forgiveness is only possible because God is a God of grace.1 Forgiveness is rooted in His nature.

To forgive is to release a person from the penalty of an offense, to clear them of any charge and not hold it against them. But notice, God’s forgiveness is not indiscriminate; it cannot be abused. He does not leave the guilty unpunished. If someone is to be forgiven by God, there must be repentance – remorse over sin, turning from sin, turning toward God for forgiveness. Repentant sinners are forgiven.2 Those who do not repent will not be forgiven.3

- Isaiah 43:25
- Ezekiel 38:30-32
- Acts 26:20

Sin merits punishment because it offends the very nature of God. Therefore, to pardon or to excuse a sin, whether intentional or unintentional, is the result of God extending His astounding grace towards humanity. When someone is forgiven, it should be received with gratitude and regarded with awe and wonder.4 In Jeremiah 31:34 the Lord says, “I will remember their sin no more,” and Micah speaks of Him as casting sins “into the depths of the sea.”5 Such vivid language emphasizes the completeness of God’s forgiveness. When He forgives, our sins are dealt with thoroughly. God sees our sins no more.

It is made clear in Scripture that the forgiven sinner must forgive others.6 A readiness to forgive others is an indicator that we have truly repented and received forgiveness ourselves. Moreover, forgiveness of others is to be whole-hearted. It springs from Christ’s forgiveness of us, and it is to be like Christ’s forgiveness.7

Forgiveness rests on the atoning work of Christ. That is to say, it is an act of sheer grace. “He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins.”8 On man’s side, repentance is insisted upon again and again. John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins9, a theme which is taken up by Peter with reference to Christian baptism.10

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1 Nehemiah 9:17; Daniel 9:9
2 Psalm 51; Isaiah 38:17, 43:25
3 Ezekiel 18:30-32; Mark 6:12; Luke 5:31-33, 15:7; Acts 26:20; 2 Corinthians 7:10
4 Psalm 130:4
5 Micah 7:19
6 Luke 6:37; Matthew 6:12, 14
7 Colossians 3:13
8 1 John 1:9
9 Mark 1:4
Christ Himself directed that “repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name.” Forgiveness is similarly linked with faith. Faith and repentance are not to be thought of as merits whereby we deserve forgiveness. Rather, they are the means whereby we appropriate the grace of God.

**Sin**

In order to appreciate (and understand) forgiveness, we need at least a cursory look at sin. The most characteristic feature of sin in all its aspects is that it is directed against God. Any definition of sin should foremost articulate that it is a direct affront to God, a rebellion and a contradiction to His nature. Sin is a violation against our ultimate function as humans – to bring glory to God. It is the failure to conform to His moral law in act, attitude, or nature.

**The Origin of Sin**

Sin has not always been in existence. Though, it was not God who sinned or messed up; rather, His sovereign hand ordained sin to come into the world. While evil existed in Satan even before humans were created, the Bible is more concerned with sin’s origin in regards to humanity. The origin of sin in humanity, as described in Genesis 3, began as an internal God-denying aspiration that manifested itself in external disobedience. As to the problem of how Adam and Eve could have been subject to temptation had they not previously known sin, Scripture does not enter into extended discussion. A reason for Scripture’s relative silence is that a rational explanation of the origin of sin would have the inevitable result of directing attention away from the Scripture’s primary concern, the confession of our personal guilt.

**The Consequence of Sin**

Sin is directly opposite to all that is good in the character of God. Just as He delights in Himself and all that He is, so God necessarily and eternally hates sin. It contradicts His holiness, and He must hate it.

The fundamental effect of sin is alienation between God and the person or society that sins. The Bible invariably regards sin as both universal and pervasive. No individual human being is free from sin (except Christ) and no human behavior or action is free from the effects of sin.

When you choose not to forgive, you choose to remain in sin because you are knowingly disobeying God who calls you to forgive. Obedience to God allows us to experience life to the fullest, but rebellion or choosing to harden your heart is foolish and only

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10 Acts 2:38  
11 Luke 24:47  
12 Acts 10:43; James 5:15  
13 Psalm 51:4; Romans 8:7  
14 1 John 3:4; Romans 2  
15 Job 34:10; James 1:3  
16 Ephesians 1:11; Daniel 4:35  
17 Isaiah 4:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-18  
18 1 Timothy 2:14; James 1:13  
20 Deuteronomy 32:4  
21 Isaiah 59:2  
22 Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22
leads to trouble.\textsuperscript{23} You are no longer a slave to sin and to the desires of your heart, you are now a slave to righteousness.\textsuperscript{24}

**What Happens When a Christian Sins?**

1. When a Christian sins, his or her legal standing before God is unchanged. You cannot cease to be a child of God, nor will He refuse to forgive a truly repentant heart.
   - Romans 8:1
   - Romans 6:23

2. Our fellowship with God is disrupted and our Christian life is damaged.\textsuperscript{25} Each member of the trinity is grieved when Christians sin. As we sin, we diminish the degree in which we abide in Christ. This is damaging to our relationship with God and others, and maligns a fruitful ministry in the Lord. Although our relationship is intact, sin truly hinders our fellowship with God. The way we reconcile our hindered relationship with God is by repenting and receiving God’s forgiveness. Jesus reminds us that we should pray each day, confessing sins early and often, and repenting.\textsuperscript{26}

**Conclusion**

God is holy, pure and just. Therefore, He hates and punishes sin. Due to the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, we are born with a sinful nature. Thankfully, God is gracious enough to forgive us for our past and future sins. No act of forgiveness will be ever be greater than God’s forgiveness of your sin. Because we have experienced God’s forgiveness, we are called to forgive others. Forgiveness allows for us to be reconciled to God and to our fellow man.

**Application Questions**

1. What does it mean to forgive someone?
2. What is the ultimate expression of forgiveness?
3. How does sin affect our relationship with God? Our position with God?
4. Do you find it difficult to forgive others? Do you find it difficult to accept and believe that God has forgiven you?

**Memory Verses**

Colossians 3:13
2 Corinthians 7:10

* How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?

\textsuperscript{23} Psalm 28:14
\textsuperscript{24} Romans 6:11-18
\textsuperscript{25} Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 12:6, 9-10; Revelation 3:19; Isaiah 59:1-2
\textsuperscript{26} Matthew 6:12
Prayer

Psalm 17:6
I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer.

Introduction
Prayer is worship that includes all the attitudes of the human spirit in its approach to God. The Christian worships God when he adores, confesses, praises and supplicates (humbly presents requests) in prayer. Prayer in the Bible is not a “natural response.” Consequently, the Lord does not hear every prayer. The biblical doctrine of prayer emphasizes the character of God and the necessity of a man being in covenant relation with Him, entering fully into all the privileges and obligations of that relationship. Prayer is the highest activity of which the human spirit is capable.

Why Pray?
1. Prayer is designed to allow the believer to have profound intimacy with God. It is an aspect of worship where the believer recognizes who God is and agrees with His will.
2. We are commanded to pray. Specifically, we are commanded to pray continually, to pray for all believers, to not be anxious and instead present our requests to God with thanksgiving, etc. Jesus assumes that we pray, as He instructed us on how to pray.
3. We have seen followers of God modeling prayer since the beginning of creation, where the patriarchs call upon the name of the Lord.
4. Prayer accomplishes God’s will on earth.
5. Prayer enables us to live a life dependant on the God. Through prayer we model our dependence on God, presenting our requests to Him and allowing us to not be anxious.
6. Prayer allows us to seek God’s will and assistance in our lives and the lives of others.

What Happens When We Pray?
Paul writes to the Romans what takes place when we pray.

 Romans 8:26-27

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1 John 4:24
2 Isaiah 1:15, 29:13
3 1 Thessalonians 5:17
4 Ephesians 6:18
5 Philippians 4:6
6 Matthew 6:5
7 Genesis 4:26, 12:8, 21:33
8 Romans 8:26-28; 1 John 5:14-15
9 Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 5:7
10 Ephesians 3:16-17, 6:18-20; Philippians 1:4; Colossians 1:3, 4:3-4; 1 John 5:16
As fallen humans, we are so weak that we do not even know what we should pray for. We know that we have this surge of feelings, thoughts, anxieties and other emotions swirling around, yet we cannot perfectly put into words what we ought to be asking. But the Holy Spirit can articulate the groans of our hearts! Though we are ignorant of what to pray for and how to voice those requests, the Spirit graciously voices our requests to the Father for us.\footnote{Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). The Bible knowledge commentary: An exposition of the scriptures (Ro 8:26–27). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.} In this request, the Holy Spirit brings to the Father a prayer that is strong and in accordance with God’s will (they know the mind of each other, as there is one God and they are both fully God). Therefore whenever you pray, your prayers will be fixed to be according to God’s will.\footnote{Romans 8:28} Additionally, the Holy Spirit came to glorify Christ, so whenever He does anything, He has to make sure that the glorification of Christ is the essence of it. The Father will always grant a request from the Spirit (because it is in accordance with His will), though He does not always answer all our requests in the affirmative (because not all of our requests are in accordance with His will).

How Do We Pray?

1. **With Confidence.** Prayer is possible because of our great High Priest who is both human and divine, because He is now in the heavenly place and because of what He is now doing.\footnote{Hebrews 4:14-16, 7:25}

2. **Trusting God.** As we pray, we remember that God is God, and is free to execute His will in whatever way He chooses (1 John 5:14-15).

3. **With the Spirit’s Help.** Just as the Spirit enables us to do anything in life, the Spirit enables us as we pray. To not pursue a dynamic prayer life is to not give the Holy Spirit anything to help. By not allowing the Holy Spirit to help, one will never live beyond his or her own ability and weakness, which will result in a failed Christian life, Communication with God is the most important issue in life.

4. **By Following Jesus’ Model.** He urges us to pray knowing that God gives good gifts;\footnote{Matthew 7:7-12} to pray with a forgiving and humble spirit;\footnote{Matthew 6:12-15} to pray with persistence;\footnote{Luke 11} to pray with simplicity;\footnote{Matthew 23:14; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:47} to pray with urgency and intensity;\footnote{Mark 13:33, 14:38; Matthew 26:41} and to pray in humility, not showing off in front of others.\footnote{Matthew 6:5-15} As to method in prayer, the Lord had two important things to teach. First, prayer is now to be offered to the Father, as Jesus modeled by praying to the Father during his time on earth.\footnote{Matthew 8:2, 9:18} As the Father insisted on faith,\footnote{Mark 9:23} tested sincerity,\footnote{Matthew 9:27-31} uncovered ignorance\footnote{Matthew 20:20-22} and sinful presumption\footnote{Matthew 14:27-31} in those who petitioned to Him, so He does today in the experience of those who pray
to Him. Secondly, prayer is now be offered in the name of Christ, through whom we have access to the Father. To pray in the name of Christ is to pray as Christ Himself prayed.

5. **From the Heart.** People may utter many poetic words in prayer, but according to the Bible, the Lord never hears your oration. He does not hear your words, but your heart. The believer should never think that their words might not be “good enough.”

6. **In All Circumstances.** As to the Lord’s practice of prayer, it is well known that He prayed in secret, in times of spiritual conflict and on the cross. In His prayers, Jesus offered thanksgiving, sought guidance, interceded and communed with the Father.

The Lord’s Prayer | Luke 11:1-4

1. **Hallowed Be Your Name.** “Hallowed” communicates: let your name be regarded as holy. It is not so much a petition as an act of worship. The speaker, in his own words, magnifies and praises the holiness of God. This is of first importance (sequentially and spiritually). We are first and foremost to give God glory (this is the purpose of our existence), and we do that in prayer by recognizing and acknowledging His holiness and majesty. It’s not “buttering Him up” to get what we want, but rather an admission of reality and a subjection to His grandeur. It also signifies an attitude of reverence. We come to Him not flippancy or haphazardly, but with regard to His holiness.

2. **Your Kingdom Come.** Ask that God’s values, plans, and ideals come to pass, and that they be honored and applied on earth. It is a genuine concern for God’s agenda and gives him preeminence as the king of the universe.

3. **Give Us Each Day Our Daily Bread.** We recognize and acknowledge our dependence on God for daily physical and spiritual provision.

4. **Forgive Us Our Sins, For We Also Forgive Everyone Who Sins Against Us.** Here there is confession, keeping the lines of communication open between God and you. Forgiving others is not a prerequisite for salvation, however, it is clear in Scripture that a person who claims to have received God’s forgiveness must have this desire to forgive others spring forth from their lives. If not, we must question has that person really received God’s forgiveness. We can experience forgiveness daily if we engage in frequent and specific confession and repentance.

5. **Lead Us Not Into Temptation.** We ask protection from tempting situations.

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25 John 14:13, 15:16, 16:23
26 Romans 8:26-28
27 Luke 5:15, 6:12
30 Luke 10:21; John 6:11; Matthew 26:27
31 Luke 6:12-16
32 John 17:6-19, 20-26; Luke 22:31-34; Mark 10:16
34 Matthew 6:14-15
Sample Prayer Structure
There are four major areas we should address when we pray to the Lord:

1. **Preeminence.** God, you are majestic and powerful. I yield my life to you.
2. **Provision.** Lord, give me your guidance in decision-making.
3. **Pardon.** Forgive me for my sins (be specific).
4. **Protection.** Keep me from giving in to the temptations of the world.

Here is another example:

1. Adoration
2. Confession
3. Thanksgiving
4. Supplication

Conclusion
The heart of prayer is expressed by B. F. Westcott: “True prayer—the prayer that must be answered—is the personal recognition and acceptance of the divine will (Jn. 14:7; cf. Mk. 11:24). It follows that the hearing of prayer which teaches obedience is not so much the granting of a specific petition, which is assumed by the petitioner to be the way to the end desired, but the assurance that what is granted does most effectively lead to the end. Thus we are taught that Christ learned that every detail of His life and passion contributed to the accomplishment of the work, which He came to fulfill, and so He was most perfectly ‘heard’. In this sense He was ‘heard for his godly fear’.”

Application Questions
1. Do you believe that prayer is essential to your walk with the Lord?
2. How often do you pray?
3. How do you pray?

Memory Verses
Philippians 4:6-7
1 John 5:14-15

* How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?

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Quiet Times

Matthew 14:22-23
22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone,

Introduction
Genesis 15:1 says, “After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.’” The promise the Lord makes to Abram when He makes a covenant with him is that He will be Abram’s “Great Reward.” God promises that He is the great reward, the ultimate payoff. Not a means to an end, but an end in Himself. Our relationship with God is what it is all about. The point of following Christ is not simply to “get to heaven” but to spend eternity in relationship with God. He promises us that the time we invest in building a relationship with Him will be worth it. “Quiet Time” is what we call the time we intentionally spend in communion with God – in prayer and the reading of Scripture. Explained below are reasons we should spend quiet time with God:

1. Allows Us to Know God and His Ways
The Bible is God’s Word given to us. It is His revelation of Himself. As we study God’s Word, we learn His ways, His nature and character.

- Psalm 119:15
- Psalm 119:33
- Psalm 119:37

2. Keeps Our Way Pure
As we focus our attention on God and meditate on His Word, we gradually look less like the world and more like Christ.

- Psalm 119:9-11
- Psalm 119:105
- James 4:8

3. Renews Our Mind
As we spend time with God and understand the Scriptures, the lies of the world, the flesh and the devil are exposed and the Truth of God is illuminated. By saturating our minds with the Truth, our minds are renewed and transformed.

- Romans 12:1-2
- Matthew 22:37

4. Firmly Root Us
When our lives are rooted in God’s Word, we are like trees grounded in His love.

- Psalm 1:1-5
5. Helps Us Discern God’s Will
As we grow in God’s love and study His word, we learn to understand His will and obey it.

6. Provides Us Power in Spiritual Warfare
Knowing God and His Truth will enable us to ward off spiritual attack and resist believing the lies of the enemy.

- Ephesians 6:10-20

7. Enables Us to Refute False Doctrine
Christians are often bombarded with teaching that distorts God’s Truth and misrepresents His character. By spending time with Him and reading His Word, you will be able to stand up against such false teachings.

- Ephesians 4:14
- Hebrews 13:9

Seeking God Daily
Daily time spent pursuing God is a spiritual discipline that is learned over time as you seek to know Him more. It is often difficult at first to set aside time to seek God, because it requires the sacrifice of time that could have been spent elsewhere. But as you practice the discipline, you will find that it is actually difficult to go without it. Here are some prerequisites that will help you be successful in setting aside daily time to commune with God:

1. **Prayer.** Ask God to birth in you a desire to spend time with Him in prayer and find joy in reading His Word.
2. **Accountability.** Have someone hold you accountable to spending daily time with the Lord.
3. **Discipline.** Commit to spending consistent and quality time with God.
4. **Prioritization.** Organize your day around your quiet time. Perhaps you should make it the first thing you do in the morning. Treat it as you would any other important appointment.

The Importance of Having a Plan

1. If you want to get somewhere (closer to God), you first have to figure out how to get there. Failing to plan is planning to fail.
2. Structure ensures consistency in your daily quiet time with God. Procrastinating your quiet time will often result in you spending little or no time with God.
3. Having a plan gives you a place to go in your quiet times, rather than “wingin’ it” or “playing it by ear.”
4. It allows you to see what you have learned after you are done.

Practical Next Steps
Scripture does not specifically tell us how long our quiet times should be. Though, it is important to keep in mind that if we want to be transformed by God’s Truth – rather than being conformed to the world – ample time should be spent in Word and prayer. Ten minutes with God is probably not enough. Try spending half an hour with Him – twenty minutes reading
and reflecting on Scripture and ten minutes in prayer – and go from there. As you make spending time with God a habit, it will flow more naturally. There are many ways to focus your time spent with God. Here are a few that you can consider:

1. **Book Study.** Go through a book in the Bible with a commentary or study guide.
2. **Topic Study.** Survey an important theme or concept in Scripture and study what different verses throughout the Bible say about it.
3. **Memorization and Meditation.**
4. **Organize Your Prayer Life.** Some people find journaling helpful to record notes on Scripture and organize prayers.
5. **One-Year Bible**

**Conclusion**
Quiet times are life changing experiences. As you set aside daily time to seek God in prayer and the study of His word, you will begin to see your life, you attitude, and your relationship with God change. Your mind will be transformed. Approach your time with God as a discipline, consistently seeking Him.

**Application Questions**
1. Do you spend time with God daily? What does it look like?
2. How can your quiet times with God be improved? What are the next steps to ensure these changes are made?

**Memory Verses**
Psalm 119:9-11
Psalm 1:2
Romans 12:1-2

* How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?
Fellowship

Philippians 2:1-4
1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Introduction
The Biblical Greek word for fellowship is “koinonia.” It is usually translated in English to “communion,” “fellowship,” “sharing in common” and “partake.” The usage of Greek words belonging to the koin-family refer primarily, though not invariably, to participation in something rather than to association with others, and there is often a possessive word (genitive) to indicate that in which one participates or shares. “Sharing” or “fellowship” arises out of the common sharing of something. This is Christian fellowship: sharing together in Christ.

Many times, Scripture speaks of sharing or partaking in Christ together and the effects it should have on us. The Bible makes clear that our fellowship in Christ should lead to unity. The fact that we share in Christ is the most important thing about us; it is a bond that we need to continually take to heart and practice. Even the sacrament of communion is not just a ritual, but is a symbolic demonstration of (what should be) a communal reality. We practice communion, which is another word for fellowship, so that we can remember Christ together.¹

Why is Fellowship Important for Believers?
1. It Brings Glory to God. Fellowship is part of God’s creative design. We are made in His image.² God, being triune in nature (Father, Son, Spirit), is in relationship with Himself. Therefore, we are to reflect God’s relational character by having a relationship with Him and others. From the beginning, God clothed man as a symbol that they were His people.³ Throughout the history of mankind, God initiates with man that they would live in relationship with Him.⁴ By having relationships with others, we further reflect God’s relational nature evident in the Trinity.⁵ Also remember, Jesus commanded us to love one another. We are able to resemble Jesus by being His followers and being in unified relationships with God’s people. Because of this love for one another, people will know that we are His disciples. Therefore, Jesus is glorified when we live as the people He has called us to be. It brings glory to God when we are in fellowship because that is how He designed us; we fulfill His creative design, and thus glorify Him, when we live to be as He created us – in fellowship.
   ♦ John 17:20-23
   ♦ John 13:34

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:26
² Genesis 1:26-27
³ Genesis 3:21
⁴ Genesis 9:9, 12:1-3
⁵ Genesis 2:18
2. **We Need Each Other.** We live in a world hostile towards God.\(^6\) The life of faith in Christ requires perseverance, for it is he who stands firm until the end that will be saved.\(^7\) Loving our brothers and sisters in Christ is repeatedly commanded in order that we may:

a) Encourage each other to run the race well  
b) Not fall away from Christ  
c) Experience help in times of weakness  
d) Model the character of God to one another

This is not to say that all relationships with fellow believers are easy because our bond has such depth. On the contrary, relationships with fellow believers can be extremely difficult (which is obvious by the number of exhortations towards unity written in the New Testament). Even though unity with fellow believers can be extremely difficult, we need to renew our minds and do our best with the Holy Spirit’s help to live accordingly.

- Hebrews 3:12-14  
- Ephesians 4:3-6, 11-16, 25, 29-30  
- Philemon 1:4-7  
- Philippians 2:1-4

**What Does Fellowship Look Like Practically?**

As seen in passages above, it is about attitude and action. Because we are one body that has been called to spur one another on, to love one another, to be one with each other and the Lord, we need to have this mentality. Additionally, like all aspects of our faith, we need to act on it. We need to actively love our brothers and sisters in Christ, encouraging one another in our faith, pursuing unity and overcoming disunity. But how do we do this? There are many ways, but it starts with intentional pursuit of the church, namely the people of God.

Christian activities such as Bible studies, prayer meetings, and getting involved with a local church are great starting points to experiencing fellowship. It takes intentionality because fellowship does not always come easily. It takes perseverance because loving one another can be very hard. It takes conviction that it is something we must pursue because the Lord has commanded it, and therefore we must pursue it wholeheartedly.

- Romans 12:9-13

**Application Questions**

1. What is fellowship?  
2. Why is it important to spend time with other Christians?  
3. How important is fellowship in your life today?  
4. Where could you find supportive Christian fellowship on a consistent basis?

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?*

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\(^6\) Romans 8:7  
\(^7\) Matthew 10:22
The Local Church

Hebrews 10:24-25
24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The Meaning of “Ecclesia”
The word “church” is derived from the Greek adjective “kyrialos” which means “the Lord’s house” (i.e. Christian place of worship). In the New Testament, however, “church” is translated from the Greek word “ecclesia,” which mostly refers to a local congregation of Christians.

The Background of “Ecclesia”
“Ecclesia” was actually used among the Jews in the Old Testament for the “congregation” of Israel. An ecclesia was a meeting or assembly. Its most common use was for the public assembly of citizens duly summoned.¹

In his writings, Paul uses the word ecclesia in context of the O.T., referring to Israel as the people of God. Implicit in the word is the claim that the church stands in direct continuity with the O.T. people of God. The origin of Paul’s image of the church has been derived from the O.T. idea that as each part receives its function from the whole, so the whole is weakened when any part fails.

Ecclesia is never used in reference to a building, but rather as the assembling of the saints for worship. As such, ecclesia can designate:
1. The believers who gather in a particular home as a house church.²
2. The totality of believers in one place.³
3. The universal or Catholic Church. It is clearly used in reference to the body of all believers twice in Colossians⁴ and nine times in Ephesians.⁵

The demonstrated usage of ecclesia is suggestive of Paul’s concept of the church. The local congregation is the church; the totality of all believers is the church. Thus we conclude that the church is not conceived numerically but organically, which means:
1. That the whole power of Christ is available to every local congregation.
2. That each congregation functions in its community as the universal church functions in the world as a whole.
3. That the local congregation is no isolated group but stands in a state of solidarity with the church as a whole.

¹ Acts 19:39
² Romans 16:5
³ Romans 16:1; Colossians 4:16
⁴ Colossians 1:18, 24
⁵ Ephesians 1:22, 3:10
The Continuity of “Ecclesia”
Matthew 9:35 says, “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.”

Jesus did not see a disconnect between historical Judaism and the N.T. churches, per se. He and His disciples did not form a separate synagogue nor start a separate movement. His disciples formed an open fellowship within Israel whose only external distinguishing mark was their discipleship to Jesus.

The promise given to Israel 6 to be fulfilled at the day of the Lord has now been fulfilled, not to the nation, but to a group of people who believed in the kingship of Jesus. The first Christians did not break away from Jewish practices, 7 their Christian faith was simply added to their old Jewish religion. We must not think of the Church as a new institution but a refurbishing of a godly principle, specifically the importance of the congregating of the people of God. Unity of the people of God is declared through its members. The idea that the unity of the church found expression in some kind of external organization or ecclesiastical structure finds no support in the New Testament.

The Importance of Unity and Diversity
The importance of the church is often misunderstood because ecclesia is often viewed as merely a human fellowship, bound together by a common religious belief and experience. While this is true, our understanding must be more robust: The church is a creation of God through the Holy Spirit. This makes the importance of unity and assembly very significant. In fact, the oneness of the ecclesia is the theological meaning of the several extensions of the Pentecost in Acts. The Spirit came first to the Jewish believers, then to the Samaritans believers, then to Gentiles, and finally to a little group of disciples of John the Baptist. These four comings of the Spirit mark the four strategic steps in the extension of the ecclesia and teach that there is one ecclesia where all converts are baptized or identified by the same Spirit.

Believers simply make an earthly demonstration of a heavenly reality. In both Colossians and Ephesians, Paul generalizes his use of “church” to indicate the spiritual and heavenly significance of each and every local “body” which has Christ as its “head,” and by which God demonstrates His manifold wisdom through the creation of “one new man” out of all races and classes. In God’s purpose, there is only one church gathered under the headship of Christ. But on earth, it is pluriform, seen wherever two or three gather in his name. Like the believer, the church is both local and “in heaven.” 8

The early Christians understood that they were bound together because they were together bound to Christ. In a sense, their fellowship was a foretaste of the fellowship of the now present and also coming Kingdom. Considering this, it was inconceivable that a believer should be such in isolation. To be a believer meant to share with other believers the life of the coming king, while living in the midst of and presenting the gospel to the world.

The unity of ecclesia is one of spirit and life, of faith and fellowship. It is a unity that is realized in considerable diversity. It is a unity that should exclude schism in the local congregation, 9 which expresses itself in appropriate self-assessment 10 and in mutual love and

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6 Acts 2:16
7 Acts 2:47, 5:13
8 Hebrews 12:23
9 1 Corinthians 1:13
10 1 Corinthians 10:33
affection,\textsuperscript{11} which means the end of racial distinctions,\textsuperscript{12} and which should exclude doctrinal and religious aberrations.\textsuperscript{13}

- 1 Corinthians 12:12-13
- 1 Corinthians 12:25-27
- Romans 12:5

**How Was “Ecclesia” Carried Out?**

Acts 2:42-47 says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

For the first three centuries A.D, the meeting place of Christians was private homes, not distinctive church buildings. The pattern was of many smaller “house churches” – separate congregations, analogous to Jewish synagogues. This was also the pattern of the Pauline churches.\textsuperscript{14} Their distinctive practices included:

1. Baptism in the name of Jesus (Goal of identifying/initiating new members).
2. The presiding of the Lord’s Supper (Goal of fellowship and memorial).
3. Regular attendance at instruction given by the apostles (Goal of teaching and fellowship).
4. Fellowship on a household basis, which Luke described as being ‘the breaking of bread and the prayers’ (Goal of Fellowship).

There were fixed patterns of ethical instruction in regard to social and political obligation. It is unknown who regularly administered baptism or presided at the Lord’s Supper, though both ordinances are mentioned. How frequently or on what days the church assembled is also unknown. The most evidence we have for what took place at a church assembly is found in 1 Corinthians 11-14. There was no organizational link between Paul’s churches, though there were natural affinities between churches in the same province.\textsuperscript{15}

**Why Should I Be Involved in a Local Church?**

It is puzzling to hear a believer say they desire to follow and grow in Christ yet they do not attend church. You might have heard someone say, “Church is not a building, it’s people, therefore I do not have to conform to man’s tradition.” Although the verses below discuss the importance of fellowship, we should not allow our basis behind the importance of the local church fall on just these two isolated texts.

\textsuperscript{10} Romans 12:3
\textsuperscript{11} 1 Corinthians 12:25-26
\textsuperscript{12} Ephesians 2:16
\textsuperscript{13} Colossians 2:18-19
\textsuperscript{14} Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15
\textsuperscript{15} Colossians 4:15-16; 1 Thessalonians 4:10
The reason why we resort to these texts is partly because there is no particular verse that says, “You should attend church.” Already discussed above, the Bible seems to teach that the most convincing argument is founded in some of the major themes of the Bible, principally the mandates of community and love.

- Hebrews 10:25
- Philemon 6

Is Our Attitude Aligned With the Biblical Principle?
Many are guilty of disparaging the idea of attending the local church. Usually the reason is because we do not want to perform out of tradition or get caught up in the game of religiosity. Instead, we desire to have authentic worship. At a glance, these comments can seem very pious, but upon dissection, they do not seem to hold up against the desires of Christ.

- Mark 10:1
- Luke 1:8-9
- Luke 4:16
- Acts 17:2

This is not a maneuver to declare that traditions have an inherent significance. Indeed, there are many traditions that are man-centered. But it is obvious that Jesus, Paul and devout first-century believers took seriously their customs, embracing them not because of tradition but because of God’s principle.

The mandate of the church was birthed through the Spirit and has the continuity and principle infrastructure of the temple and synagogue. Jesus entered into and desired fellowship because of God’s mandates pertaining to growth, unity, love, and fellowship. For us to examine Jesus’ ways and then not follow his example should cause us to assess our attitude about today’s church and hopefully realign them with God’s mandates.

Application Questions
1. What is your attitude toward the church?
2. What have you learned about the church?
3. How does what you have learned affect your attitude toward the church?
4. Do you give all of yourself to the body, or do you hold something back?
5. What are two ways you can help foster unity in your local church?

Memory Verses
Hebrews 10:25ff
1 Corinthians 12:12-13
1 Corinthians 12:25-27

* How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?
The Importance of Right Doctrine

2 Timothy 4:3-4
3 For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

Introduction
Doctrine in the Old Testament has the meaning of “what is received” or “something heard; news or announcement.” The idea of revealed teaching is chiefly expressed by “Tora,” which occurs 216 times and is rendered as “law.”

In the New Testament, two words are used in describing doctrine and they both mean “the act and the content of teaching.” It is used of the Pharisees’ teaching and several times in the Pastoral Epistles.

It is clear from Scripture that doctrine refers to the body of teaching that is the truth claims of Christianity. This includes foundational principles – such as who Jesus is – and more minor principles – such as what Christians should or should not eat. Whether it is of crucial or secondary importance, all the teaching that comprises Christianity is called doctrine.

Is There Such a Thing as “Correct Doctrine”?
There are two levels to this question. First: is there such a thing as absolute truth (objective right and wrong)? Second: is Christianity a religion of absolute truth with one set of doctrine, or is it a collection of subjective philosophical advice that people can tinker and tailor with to fit their situation?

To clarify, absolute truth is that which corresponds to reality. It is the way things objectively, unequivocally are. Christianity is a religion of absolute truth because it is grounded in history. Either Jesus was born, crucified and raised or He was not. It cannot be both. Something cannot have occurred in history and yet still be “true for you but not for me.” We may not always know exactly how historical events occurred, but we can do our best to search for what truly took place. Only when we as Christians are in search of true history can we understand our faith in its entirety.

Once we see that Christianity and the Bible are historically reliable, we then need to understand God and what He has revealed to us. We must wrestle with another question: is the God of the Bible one who has a specific set of doctrines, or one who allows multiple variations of doctrine to fit each person’s need? The former is true, but the latter is more popular acceptable in culture.

Correcting Wrong Doctrine
The Bible makes clear that there is right doctrine and wrong doctrine. It is also clear that we should guard right doctrine and teach it carefully, while we are to rebuke false doctrine. In the
Old Testament, there were God’s prophets and false prophets. When Satan tempts Jesus, he quotes Scripture, but he distorts it.⁷ We clearly see that there is a right way and a wrong way to use Scriptures. Jesus opposed these false teachers, no matter who they were and what their societal status may have been. Jesus modeled that He would confront anyone who taught wrong doctrine.

Most of the epistles include some sort of warning against false teachers and were sometimes written for the purpose of exhorting the readers to guard right doctrine. Even if the epistle does not include the words “false teacher” or “doctrine,” it is clear that many of the epistle writers were counteracting false teachers and their teaching.

- 1 Timothy 4:15-16; 1:3-7
- 2 Timothy 4:2-5
- Titus 1:9-16; 2:1
- 2 Peter 2:1-3
- Romans 16:17-19
- 1 Peter 3:15-18

In Galatians 2:11-21, we see how wrong thinking affects a church leader and has the potential to affect those under his influence. Paul rebukes Peter (who was with Jesus, and one of the early church leaders!) because of his bad doctrine, which was affecting him and his hearers. Specifically, Peter feared the ‘circumcision group’ (a group teaching bad doctrine) and was being influenced to believe that Gentiles needed to behave like Jews to truly be saved. Because of this, Peter did not eat with the Gentiles. When Paul “saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel” he rebuked Peter. Paul knew that if Peter started believing another gospel (observance to the law) that this would be very detrimental to both Peter and others that he influenced.

We are to be like our Father in thought, attitude and action. That means that we cannot understand Him enough. We must commit our lives to learning about Him, being willing to change our thinking about any aspect of life. This only happens by pursuing and guarding right doctrine.

**Guarding Doctrine and the Canonization of the Bible**

Even though the Bible we read today was not canonized until the 4th century, God’s Truth – which was written in the letters that circulated the early Church – was strictly guarded. The New Testament documents did not become authoritative for the early Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; rather, the Church included them in its canon because it already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and apostolic authority.⁸ Therefore, the only thing that has changed is not that we have the complete Scripture (because we have always had the revelation of how to love God and others) it was just that the people guarded the truth that was revealed to them up to that point.

To be sure, the formation of the Bible does not guard it from being distorted; it just solidifies what should not be distorted. It sets parameters on what should be protected. It actually gives us a specific task. Rather than guarding ‘truth’ that is indeterminate, God tells us what is true and says, “Guard it.”

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⁷ Matthew 4:1-11
⁸ Bruce, F.F. *New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*
Major and Secondary Issues of Doctrine

Many ask, “Can I just focus on the major issues of doctrine and not worry about the smaller stuff?” The Bible does show that there is a hierarchy of learning. However, it is never seen in Scripture that we ought to focus on more important matters and not worry about the less important. In fact, whenever the Bible shows a difference between the two, it is not to show that there is such a hierarchy, but to reveal the wrong understanding of hierarchy.

- Matthew 23:23-24

An argument could be that in this text we witness Jesus Himself say that there are some matters of the law that are more important than others. This would mean that some teachings of God are more important than others. For the reader to stop there would be exegetically irresponsible. As we read the context in addition to the affirmation of the end of v. 23, “You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former,” it is clear that Jesus’ point was not to show that there are more important teachings than others in the Scriptures, but that if you are to practice the smallest of teachings, how do you not practice the major strands of doctrine?

Jesus’ assumption in this text is twofold: first, that the professing believer understands both small and large teachings in Scripture. Second, you should not practice one and neglect the other. He never assumes that one should take credence. It would be unbiblical to say that Jesus teaches us to focus on “major” doctrines versus “minor.”

Why Even Bother?

Even people who dearly love Jesus often say: “We can’t know everything about Scripture. How do we know who is right on what issue?” “Why even bother trying to fully understand the book of Revelation when all we need to know is that we win in the end?” “I don’t want to make my devotional time overly-intellectual.” “I would rather trust the Spirit than analyze a sermon.”

Although we are to be sympathetic to believers with such baggage, it is also our duty as to help them understand that this kind of thinking leads to people saying that God gave us Scriptures but did not mean for us to understand it. This fatalistic thinking is unbiblical.

Although we cannot know all things, we can know some things. We might get discouraged because of the complex nature of God’s Word, but to simply be hands-off is bad stewardship. We cannot allow disagreements from other denominations about a doctrine discourage us from understanding more about God and His ways.

Truth and Insight Are Not Synonymous

Be weary of teachers that interpret the Bible in a new and innovative way. Maybe you have heard someone say, “I like this or that teacher because they present the Scriptures in a way that I have never heard before” or “I am amazed at how I can get something different out of a passage each time.” The danger is not these statements themselves, but that neither of these statements asks the question, “Is what I am hearing true?” The person seems to focus more on new insight and fresh ideas than critically assessing if this is what Scripture actually teaches.

- 2 Timothy 4:3-4
Does Knowing Too Much Hinder Your Affection for Jesus?
No, it informs your worship! Knowing more about God and His story allows us to better understand our faith and to worship Him more clearly. As God designed it to be, our mind and our heart work in sync; what we know affects how we feel. The epistles’ designs even demonstrate this. They give teaching about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, salvation, etc. (the indicative) and then instruction on how to live in light of this teaching (the imperative).

What Guarding Right Doctrine is Not
Sadly, if the pursuit of right doctrine is not done in a godly manner, it can bring about discord and idol worship. Discord occurs when people either do not rebuke with humility or do not receive correction with humility. The result is fractured relationships. Based on the dreadful experience, the rebuked person can very easily end up approaching Scripture in a skewed manner. However, when people disagree with humility, damaged relationships and skewed Bible study are not the result. Disagreements do not have to cause discord and hinder people from pursuing sound doctrine. Those who disagree in a godly manner can diverge and still have dialogue because the goal is glorifying God, and edification of the body. We need to pursue godliness and disagree with humility (without resulting in discord).

Another danger is idol worship. The Bible is clear that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Paul is teaching that knowing something in itself is meaningless – or harmful – if it is not accompanied by love. The result is that the person will become boastful and not demonstrate love.

Having biblically sound doctrine allows us to maximize our capacity to worship God. Worshipping God and building up of the body are the focus; this is why Satan tries to fill us with lies about the importance of growing in this area.

Why Do People Believe it is O.K. to be Biblically Illiterate?
1. Satan’s job is to deceive.
2. We are lazy.
3. We do not want to offend anyone or seem arrogant. Therefore, we live our lives as practical postmodernists who say there is not absolute truth.

Application Questions
1. What are practical ways you can begin to search and guard sound doctrine?
2. Have you ever been told something about Scripture only to later find out that it was actually unbiblical?

Memory Verses
2 Timothy 4:3-4
Matthew 4:4
Colossians 2:8

* How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?

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9 1 Corinthians 8:1
Doctrine of Grace

Galatians 2:16
16 know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

What is Grace?
A common definition describes grace as the unmerited favor of God toward man. In the Old Testament, the term that most often is translated "grace," is *hen*; in the New Testament, it is *charis*.

The word *hen* occurs around sixty times in the Old Testament. There are examples of man's favor to man as well as the grace of God demonstrated toward man. The term occurs most often in the phrase favor "in your (i.e., God's) sight" or "in the eyes of the Lord." This assumes the notion of God as a watchful master or king, with the one who is finding favor, a servant.¹

While faith is the human response to divine grace,² faith itself is also a gift from God.³ We as humans cannot generate faith on our own. God must will us to have it. Faith, too, is a display of God’s grace. The doctrine of election has two functions: it extinguishes human independence and self-righteousness and shows that God is perfectly free in bestowing favor.⁴ Every step forward in the Christian life,⁵ from our call⁶ to repentance⁷ to salvation,⁸ is due to grace.

What is Legalism?
Completely opposed to the concept of grace is the concept of legalism. It appears that the Bible shows to forms of legalism:

1. **Personal Legalism**
   - When we adhere to God’s rules because we want His favor.
   - When we adhere to God’s rules because we want favor from others.

2. **Communal Legalism**
   - When we add rules (not found in the Bible) for ourselves and others to follow.

Legalism v. Grace Motivation
When God originally gave the law, He did so as an act of supreme grace. People were in darkness and did not know what God required. The law said, “This is God’s standard. Live according to it. He will save you.” However, the Pharisees took this law and changed it from an act of grace to a great burden. Their thinking became, “This is what I must do. If I fail, God will punish me. If I do it, I will be righteous and God has to accept me.” This philosophy is contrary to what God intends. Jesus exposed this incorrect thinking and revealed the correct thinking.

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¹ Elwell, Walter A. "Entry for 'Grace'". "Evangelical Dictionary of Theology." 1997
² Romans 5:2, 10:9; Ephesians 2:8
³ Ephesians 2:8
⁴ Ephesians 1:1-6; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5
⁵ Romans 5:1-2
⁶ Galatians 1:15
⁷ 2 Timothy 2:25
⁸ Ephesians 2:8-9
Incorrect Thinking: a Person Can Earn God’s Favor
Jesus proved that no one, not even the Pharisees, could keep the law. (In fact, the Pharisees were corrupt fakes who did not act according to the spirit of the law.) Because the law was something than no one could fully keep, no one could boast in earning the favor of God. His favor could only be given by grace.

Correct Thinking: Pursue Holiness Motivated by Grace
Jesus advocates good works that are done in the following manner:

1. Recognize that your works flow not from your own effort or talent but through a gift given by God. He gets all the glory, not us.
2. Pursue righteousness, not to gain favor, but because you have already received favor in spite of your failures.
3. Encourage freedom in Christ for others under the umbrella of holiness.

Am I Legalistic?
Here are a few questions we can ask ourselves as we personally assess our love for God and others:

1. Do I believe I have deserved the success in my life?
2. Do I perform to gain the approval or admiration of others?
3. Do I believe that how I pray will force God to respond?
4. Do I insist that others adhere to the preferences of my life instead of (or in addition to) the principles of Scripture?

Whenever we live as if our works warrant the favor of God, then we are living in line with the erroneous acts of the Pharisees. God has saved us so that we can live a life of holiness, motivated out of gratitude for the grace he has already bestowed upon us. We are to live as new people of God, “saved by grace,” not those who attempt to earn their salvation.

Application Questions
1. What is grace? Why is it important?
2. Is your service of God and others motivated by grace or legalism?

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?

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Gray Areas

1 Corinthians 10:23-24
23 “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive. 24 No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

Introduction
There are several teachings in the Bible that are clearly articulated with little or no dispute, such as the condemnation of fornication, lying, and stealing. We do not have to extensively investigate the Bible in order to figure out its position on such matters. These issues could be called black and white areas. However, there are many issues that the Bible does not take an absolute stand on. We call these gray areas.

What is a Gray Area?
Gray areas are issues that Scripture does not take a dogmatic stance on, or at the very least, issues that Scripture does not discuss in depth. Instead, the Bible gives Christians the liberty to make God-glorifying decisions based on their convictions.

What Are Some Examples of Gray Areas?
Drinking, dating, kissing, gambling, smoking, clothing, music, movies, television, birth control, dancing, spending your money, home schooling, working moms, etc. Every one of the topics mentioned above are either never discussed in Scripture or are discussed only in brief. Scripture does not teach that any of these things are categorically sinful.

Spiritual Preference (Gray Areas) v. Spiritual Principle (Black and White Areas)
Debates regarding gray area issues have caused major rifts between individuals, communities and churches. This is because we have blurred the understanding of spiritual preference v. spiritual principle.

A spiritual principle is teaching specifically found in Scripture. For example, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 says, “It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God…” After reading this, we see that sexual immorality is not a gray area. There is no ambiguity and therefore no room for freedom. It is clearly wrong to view pornography, fornicate, etc. With spiritual principles, we are called to speak truth, bear humility, and love as we appropriately correct a brother or sister who is acting against a principle clearly taught in Scripture.

A spiritual preference is a believer’s decision to do or not do something that is based on personal biblical convictions in tandem with their freedom found in Christ and the fact that Scripture has left them with the responsibility to decipher what is most God-glorifying.

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1 James 5:19-20; Matthew 7:5-6
For example, if one believer decides to refrain from kissing until marriage, while another decides to kiss on the second date, is one believer more right than the other? No. The Bible says nothing on this topic. Therefore, there is freedom for the individual to choose what is best.

Dissension often occurs when we begin making our own spiritual preferences spiritual principles in others’ lives. Continuing the above example, it is fine for a Christian to choose not to kiss until marriage. However, when that same person begins to tell others that kissing before marriage is sin or somehow less spiritual, they are making their preference a principle, therefore putting others in unbiblical shackles.

**Why Is It Wrong To Make Our Spiritual Preferences Spiritual Principles?**

1. **It is Sin.** To judge any person apart from their sin is indeed sinful. All other matters are to be judged by the only Judge and Lawgiver, our Heavenly Father.

2. **It Disregards the Intentional Unity and Diversity That God Has Created.** The Lord has created everyone with distinctions that bring together a holistic community. To not celebrate differences in others (that do not bring harm to the body or denounce the glory of God) belittles one of the reasons God created us - namely that He would be glorified through our diversity while at the same time being glorified through our unity.

3. **It Does Not Display Grace to Others.** God has modeled the need for giving grace to others by giving grace to us through the sacrifice of His son, Jesus Christ. Christians need, desire, and willingly accept God’s grace and often expect grace from others without judgment. Still, one of the most difficult things for Christians to do is to actually give grace. The main reason many present their preferences as principles is due to a lack of love shown practically through giving grace.

**How Do I Know When To Do Something Or Not?**

There are five main questions that Scripture teaches that we should ask ourselves in order to answer this question (of course, all these questions are under the umbrella of “does this honor God?”):

1. **Is it Sin?** If the Bible teaches that something is sin, then it is sin. Do not do it.

2. **Does it Negatively Affect a Fellow Believer?** Paul’s answer to this question embodies the tension between freedom and love. We have this tension presenting itself in the church in Corinth. There is a group of believers who see certain food as unclean and others who do not. Paul forbids active participation in feasts in the temple. However, he clearly sides with those who feel that such foods are not unclean. Christians are free in Christ to partake of any foods; nothing is unclean in itself. Paul clearly

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2 1 Corinthians 4-5
3 John 17; Romans 12
4 Ephesians 2:5
5 1 Corinthians 8:10
6 Romans 14:14
advises Christians to eat whatever they buy in the market without raising questions of conscience. 7 Those who have scruples against such food are to exercise love by not condemning those who have no such scruples. On the other hand, those who feel free to eat are to show love by not despising those with strong scruples. 8 Love requires that when those with a free conscience find themselves in a situation where the exercise of their freedom would offend and lead other Christians to sin, they are to abstain.

It is obvious that such abstinence is recommended only in cases where the weaker Christian would be actually caused to sin. Otherwise, the whole standard of conduct in such matters would be decreed by the rigidity of the weakest members. If the weaker brother’s conscience is to govern the behavior of Christians generally, then Christian morality is inevitably bound in the fetters of a weak Christian’s strict procedures. Paul’s clear point is that personal freedom must be tempered by love for other Christians and even love should not be abused.

3. Does It Affect Your Testimony To Unbelievers?
Each Scripture reference below is a clear demonstration of how Christian witness can either positively or negatively affect unbelievers.

- 1 Corinthians 6:5-6
- 1 Corinthians 14:22-23
- 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12
- 1 Timothy 3:6-7

4. Does It Go Against Your Conscience?
The Bible teaches that the conscience is a very important guide. In fact, to do something against your conscience is acting in sin. We see this clearly in Romans 14:22-23 in which Paul explains that those whose conscience offends them must not eat while those whose conscience is clear are free to eat. At the same time, the conscience is not the court of last appeal. It is not an autonomous self-sufficient guide. 9 The implication is that the conscience at best is a guide of relative value. One can have a clear conscience, and yet be guilty of wrong in the sight of God. In 1 Timothy 1:5 and 19, Paul links a good conscience with sincere faith. When people depart from the faith, their conscience can become seared or hardened 10 so that it is not a safe guide. All this suggests that the conscience of the Christian must always be exercised in the light of the divine revelation in Jesus Christ.

5. Is It Unwise?
Biblical wisdom is both religious and practical. Stemming from the fear of the Lord, 11 it branches out to touch all of life. Wisdom gleans from the knowledge of God’s ways and applies it in the daily walk. Worldly wisdom, though it may be religious, has no anchor in God and therefore is doomed to

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7 1 Corinthians 10:25
8 Romans 14:3
9 1 Corinthians 4:4
10 1 Timothy 4:2
11 Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7, 9:10

57
Therefore, to make unwise choices does not necessarily indicate one has sinned. Although it is not sin initially, the Bible teaches that a lack of wisdom usually leads to sin.

**Conclusion**

It is important for believers to understand the difference between spiritual preference and spiritual principle in order to not only live lives that are grounded theologically, but also live in the freedom that Christ offers us through His death and resurrection. Also, remember not to make your spiritual preferences another person’s spiritual principles. Finally, when evaluating spiritual preferences and spiritual principles, remember to ask yourself if it is sin, if it negatively affects fellow believers, if it affects your testimony to unbelievers, if it goes against your conscience, and if it is unwise.

**Application Questions**

1. Do you give people grace in gray areas?
2. Do you remember a time where you were not given grace in a gray area? How did it feel?
3. What are some gray areas in which you tend to judge that you can begin to be gracious in?
4. What are practical ways you can begin to believe the best in others?
5. Are your decisions answering the five questions in ways that are pleasing to God?

**Memory Verse**

Ephesians 2:4-5

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?*

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12 Isaiah 19:11; Ezekiel 28:2; Obadiah 1:8
13 Ephesians 5:15; Proverbs 12:23
Eternal Perspective

1 Corinthians 3:10-15
10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

Introduction
We are tempted every day to have a temporal perspective rather than an eternal perspective, to live as if our current lives is all there is. Knowing how and in what way to invest our lives is a struggle for every follower of Christ. We must continually renew our minds so that we may live in the reality of God’s purpose for us and in the knowledge that we will either be rewarded for the stewardship of our lives or suffer loss on the Day of Judgment.

Eternal Perspective
Our life on earth is but a tiny speck on the timeline of eternity. There is infinitely more disparity between a human lifespan and eternity than a drop of water and the ocean. In light of this reality, we ought to live for God’s eternal purposes, not our shortsighted temporal purposes.

David, knowing he was tempted to hope in the material treasures of this life, asked God to remind him of this reality, to remind him that our lives are extremely short. Our lives are so tiny that David uses words like “fleeting,” “nothing,” “breath,” and “phantom” to describe man’s life.

Eternity Past ←----------------------------------------------*----------------------------→ Eternity Future

Your Life

The Bible encourages us to live with an eternal perspective. Look at other passages that remind us of the brevity of life and the infinitude of eternity:

- Job 14:1-6
- Psalm 89:46-51; 144:3-4
- Proverbs 31:30
- James 4:13-16

Many of Jesus’ parables remind us of keeping an eternal perspective, such as the parable of the rich man who stored up things for himself, the parable of the weeds, the parable of the hidden

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1 Psalm 39:4-8
2 Luke 12:13-21
3 Matthew 13:24-30
treasure and the pearl, the parable of the ten virgins, and the parable of the talents. In addition, the whole goal of the book of Revelation is to remind the believer that the life we see on earth is not reality. It warns of the deception of the evil one who tries to convince us that we should invest wholly in this life. Revelation also highlights the truth and glory of God’s plan and purpose. Revelation encourages the believer to be a faithful witness for Jesus until the end, to live a life that is eternally rewarded.

Throughout Scripture we see people who stop living for God and start living for temporal goals. In the very beginning, Eve wanted knowledge of good and evil for herself, believing Satan rather than trusting God and His plan. The story of the people of Israel is similar: they distrust God’s plan and eventually worship other gods. We see men in the Psalms cry out to God, fighting the temptation to place hope in temporal goals like accruing wealth and power.

Likewise, examples abound in the New Testament. Jesus condemns the religious teachers for the earthly rewards that they seek. He contrasts this by describing the lifestyle of disciples who seek to please the Father alone and thus are promised eternal rewards. Paul also exhorts his readers to live not for the sensualities of this life, but to live as those who trust in God. As we have seen, this is not an uncommon struggle, but we must all persevere by renewing our mind in the eternal truth of Christ.

Conclusion
Paul Washer once preached, “These Olympians, how majestic they are, but only for a moment. They start training when they are four and five years old; they never do anything but train until they're twenty-two, they run a nine second race for a medal they hang up and that's it...Oh, this life is a vapor.”

Application Questions
1. Write down a few verses that remind you of the glory of God’s plans.
2. Your life is an investment. What are you investing in?
3. Are you asking God how you should spend your time, talents and treasures?
4. What are some of your temporal temptations?

Memory Verses
Matthew 13:44
Matthew 6:19-21
1 Corinthians 3:10-15

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?

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4 Matthew 13:44-46
5 Matthew 25:1-13
6 Matthew 25:14-30
7 Psalm 73:1-3, 17-20
8 Matthew 6:1-8
9 Ephesians 4-5
10 http://illbehonest.com/Live-for-Eternity-Paul-Washer
Raising Our View of God

Psalm 145:5
They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works.

Introduction
J.I. Packer wrote that, “The word majesty, when applied to God, is always a declaration of His greatness and an invitation to worship.” We serve a God that is infinite, eternal and almighty, but do we really regard Him as such? Too often, it is easy for us to view God through the same lens we view people; we may believe that He has forgotten about us or that He has lost interest in us. Nothing could be further from the truth! Our God is perfect and holy. He is compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love. He is our healer, sanctifier, Father and so much more. The very thought of Him should spur us to worship. So, how do we begin to raise our view of God and give Him the praise that is due?

There is a direct correlation between how we view someone and how we treat someone. When we have an accurate view of who we are speaking to, it will affect the way we speak to them. It is the same way with God. If we want to find more joy in Him, revere Him more, and worship Him wholeheartedly, we must try to understand just how awesome and majestic He is. We must raise our view of God.

God’s Revelation and Israel’s Reaction
It is easy for us to look through the Old Testament and think, “Those faithless Israelites! What were they thinking?” If it had been us, we probably would not have behaved much differently. Here are several examples where God revealed Himself, His might and His faithfulness:

1. Moses performs signs before the people.
2. God sends the ten plagues.
3. God uses Moses to part the Red Sea.
5. God provides manna and meat to eat.

Despite God’s persistent faithfulness, Israel demonstrates an attitude of ungratefulness, disbelief and bitterness. Because of their lack of faith, they revert to a state of disobedience.

- Exodus 16:3, 313, 32:1
- Joshua 212:2-3
- 1 Kings 1118:26-29

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1 Packer, J.I. Knowing God Devotional Journal. 82.
2 Psalm 145:8
3 Exodus 15:26
4 Exodus 4:29-31
5 Exodus 7:1-11:10
6 Exodus 14:20-21
7 Exodus 15:25
8 Exodus 16:1-13
9 Exodus 17:1-7
Our Disease
The examples given from the Old Testament allow us to understand man’s natural inclination to not regard God as highly as He deserves. Natural man is sinful, and without being touched by God, we cannot understand the ways of the Spirit.

- 1 Corinthians 2:14
- 2 Corinthians 4:3-4
- John 3:19
- Ephesians 4:17-18
- Isaiah 59:9-10

An Accurate View of God
A.W. Tozer said that what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. We must correctly understand the nature of God. We must study His attributes. An attribute of God is a perfection of His being; a quality that, without which, God would not be God. It is not what we imagine, visualize or analogize Him to be like, for when we do these things we start with things that are like us and our experience, which will lead us to an incorrect image of God, which is idolatry.

1. **God is Self-Existent.** He is uncreated; He owes His existence to no one and to nothing. He is therefore obligated to no one; responsible to no one, accountable to no one, for anything He chooses to do. He is indebted to nothing. He is perfectly, completely, uncontrollably, unchangingly free. God said, “I am that I am.” This is the ultimate statement of self-existence. He is limited, bound, obligated, and completely understood by no one. He is to be feared and revered. We should not offend Him.

2. **God is Self-Sufficient.** He needs nothing for His continued existence. He has life in and of Himself; He is the dispenser of life. He is unlike us, in that He is all He needs. He is therefore never threatened, deprived, or “blackmailed.” Conversely, nothing can promote or elevate His position – He has it of Himself, and the creatures He has made are powerless to change Him. He therefore does not need us to believe in Him – man’s doubt does not affect Him in the least, because He is what He is in Himself, without regard to any other. To believe in Him adds nothing to His perfections; to doubt Him takes nothing away.

3. **God is Supreme.** He rules and reigns freely above all that exists. His will is therefore never effectually resisted, His power never restrained, and His purposes never frustrated.

4. **God is Sovereign.** He does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases.

- Isaiah 46:10
- Psalm 115:3

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10 Tozer, A.W. *Knowledge of the Holy.*
11 Exodus 3:14
12 1 Chronicles 29:11-12; 2 Chronicle 20:6; Psalm 2:1-5
13 Job 23:13, 42:2; Psalms 115:3; Proverbs 21:1,30; Ephesians 1:11; Romans 11:36
14 Pink, A.W.
Daniel 4:35
There is therefore no “Law of Right” to which God must conform or be subject. He is a law unto Himself, so that whatever He does is right. God is not subject to law, nor is His law arbitrary. God’s ways are right and good because He is the standard; goodness and rightness are His very nature.

5. **God is All-Powerful.** He has the ability to actualize whatever He pleases. His power is like Himself – infinite, incomprehensible, cannot be checked, restrained, or frustrated; not acquired; independent of recognition; self-existent; self-sustained. Venues of His power include creation, preservation, and judgment. Our response should be to tremble, trust and praise.

**Practical Next Steps**
Saturate your mind with the Word. God’s mighty attributes are brimming from each page of the Bible. Spend time meditating on it, memorizing it, and letting its truth transform your mind.

- Romans 12:2
- Psalms 119:14-16
- 1 Peter 2:2
- 1 Timothy 3:15-16
- Hebrews 4:12

Elevate your view of God. Seek Him earnestly and ask Him to transform your view of Him.

- Romans 11:33
- John 1:14
- Hebrews 1:3
- Colossians 1:15-17
- Isaiah 46:5-9

**Conclusion**
It is simple enough to reel off a list of God’s adjectives – merciful, righteous, gracious, etc. But when times get tough, will you choose to still view Him in the same way? A.W. Tozer compared possessing the right concept of God to having a strong foundation of a building. “Where it is inadequate or out of plumb,” he wrote, “the whole structure must sooner or later collapse.” Take a few moments and meditate on the knowledge of what you have learned. Begin praying that God transform your view of Him and give you a window into His splendor of majesty.

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15 Isaiah 45:9
16 Genesis 1; Psalm 33: 6, 9
17 Colossians 1:17, Hebrews 1:3
18 Ezekiel 22:14
19 Psalm 96:9
20 Psalm 27:1
21 Exodus 15:11
Application Questions
1. What are some particular areas in your life that show you are thinking inaccurately about God? Perhaps you do not want to trust God with your money or a relationship.
2. What does the Bible say about the inaccurate thinking?
3. What are practical ways that you can begin to live according to what the Bible says and not your own understanding? Share these goals with your discipler.

Memory Verses
Psalm 145:5
Isaiah 40:28

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?
Tithe

Deuteronomy 14:22
Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year.

Introduction
Many Christians wonder what they are supposed to do when the tithe basket is passed to them in the pew. Do they give all they have? Do they let it pass by? Should they feel guilty? Should they give impulsively? This document will answer these pressing questions.

The Concept of Tithing: Does It Originate With the Jews?
Tithing is not one of the covenant stipulations (Ten Commandments), but it was a custom in the ancient world. Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians and Canaanites all practiced tithing before Israel became a nation. It did not originate with the Mosaic Law, nor was it peculiar to the Hebrews.

What Were the Hebrews Required to Tithe?
In a word: everything. The seed of the land, the fruit of the trees, and their herds and flocks all were to be tithed. Tithing was plain and simple for Israel: they gathered their harvest and counted the tithe out from what they gathered. If they had 100 carrots, they counted them out, and every tenth carrot would be set aside for the Lord. They gave the first fruits of the land to God in order to display their dependence on Him. In the same way, they gave God every the tenth animal, ensuring that they did not purposely give the weaker animals to God.

To Whom Were the Tithes Paid?
Because God saved the lives of the Jewish firstborn at the time of the first Passover, the firstborn technically belonged to God, but the Levites (one of the tribes of Israel) were to act in the service of God instead. As those set apart to the service of God, they were not expected to go to war or to have to grow their own food within a tribal area. They were to be scattered throughout the Promised Land to live among the people, and they were to be supported by the people’s tithes.

Therefore, the tithe is given to God as the Israelites present it as an offering to the Lord. Then God gives the tithe to the Levites. Because of the nature of their status and functions in the community, they had no means of income to ensure their support. In return for their service, they were to receive the tithe of the people of Israel.

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1 Leviticus 27:30-31
2 Exodus 11:5; 12:2-13
3 Numbers 3:12-13; 40:51
4 Numbers 1:3; cf. v 49
5 Numbers 35:1-8
6 Numbers 18:21
7 Numbers 18:21
8 Numbers 18:21, 24
Levites were not allowed to keep the whole of the tenth. They were directed to present an offering that was to be taken out of the tenth, which represented a tenth of the tithe. This was given to the priest.9

- Malachi 3:6-10

Did the Israelites Fulfill Their Tithe Requirement?
No. In Malachi’s day, the people had stopped tithing and giving their offerings due to their attitude of neglect toward the things of God.

Old Testament Conclusions
1. God saved His people and they were indebted to Him with their lives.
2. The firstborn technically belonged to God, but the Levites were to act in the service of God instead.
3. The people were to give to the Lord their tithe (a tenth of everything) and God was to give it to the Levites as they serviced the Lord.
4. Offerings were given above tithes as oaths given to the Lord because of His goodness or to help the people of God, as well as giving to the poor and marginalized (Deut 26:12).
5. Israel was not faithful in giving to the Lord and therefore they were not blessed by God.

What Does the New Testament Say About Tithing?
2 Corinthians 9:6-8 says, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”

Here we have the setting of two congregations – one in Macedonia and one in southern Greece – being contrasted. We have already seen Paul praise the Macedonians for their generosity;10 now it is the Achaean’s turn to act.11 Paul’s honor is at stake because their tardiness in completing the matter puts in question his encouragement of them. Above all, Paul wants the money gift to be both freely forthcoming and generous in its amount. He uses a number of ways to express this truth,12 especially in the latter verse: “I want it to be forthcoming as a generous gift, not as money wrung out of you.”

Those who contribute generously to the Jerusalem collection will give as a farmer gives away his seed in expectation of a rich harvest of produce. The appeal is continued and directed to thoughtfulness and joy in giving. They are not to give unwillingly, compulsively, or out of pressure. If the Achaean’s fulfill their responsibility in making their offering, they may count on God to sustain the endeavor by granting them both the desire and ability to share.

Paul wants believers to make a concerted effort in making sure that the people of God are taken care of. Tithes and offerings are encouraged by the New Testament authors.

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9 Nehemiah 10:39
10 2 Corinthians 8:1-5
11 2 Corinthians 9:3
12 2 Corinthians 9:2,5
How Much Should We Give?
If we look at the New Testament and study Christ, we see that it is not about the rules but about the heart.\textsuperscript{13} We see Paul echo this sentiment in his second letter to the Corinthians. He does not tell the people to give 10%. He urges them to make Christ-centered decisions on giving, using the gospel as the guiding force. Likewise, we are left to make Christ-centered decisions with the gospel as our guide, while realizing that God’s standards have never decreased throughout redemptive history.

Giving With the Gospel as Our Guide
Whenever we are in the position to give (which is whenever God graciously gives us stuff), we must use those opportunities to demonstrate God’s character. Below are a few character traits that model the character of God and guided Paul’s exhortation of the Corinthians:

1. **Generosity.** This is the habit of giving freely without expecting anything in return.
2. **Follow Through.** When we say we are going to do something, we need to do it.
3. **Sacrificial.** The needs of the body are just as important as our own welfare.
4. **Cultivate a Heart of Giving.** Paul did not want the believers to give out of compulsion, yet at the same time he wanted them to take steps of giving while learning to be givers.
5. **Give What You Can.** We need to give responsibly and not provide when we do not have.
6. **Not Begrudgingly.** God does not want us to be reluctant or forced to give.
7. **Sober Giving From the Heart.** Our giving should be thought out and reflective.
8. **Prayerfully.** Ask Jesus what and when you should give.
9. **Cheerfully.** There is great joy in equipping God’s people for the ministry and serving others.

Application Questions
1. Do you give with the character of God in mind?
2. Do you give to God’s servants and to the poor?
3. Will you make a plan to go through each character trait above and be held accountable to give according to them?
4. Will you let your discipler know your income and hold you accountable to your giving goals?

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?*

\textsuperscript{13} Matthew 5:21-48
Stewardship of Wealth

1 Timothy 6:6-10

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Kingdom-Focused

Like anything in life, money can be used either for God’s purposes or for our own. It can be either a tool or a trap. When used as a tool for building God’s kingdom, money bears testimony to both our hope in Jesus Christ as Savior and to our delight in Him as the great reward of life. But when money becomes a trap, it replaces God as our master.

In our efforts to think of money as a tool, it is imperative that we understand that what we think of as our money is literally God’s. Money is loaned (not given) to us, that we might invest it for the kingdom as good stewards of our master’s wealth.

Though the word “stewardship” is thrown around a lot in Christian circles, let us be clear: stewardship is godly only insofar as building God’s kingdom is the aim. Because God’s kingdom is not of this world, stewardship may bear little resemblance to practical earthly wisdom. In a kingdom that is built one believer at a time, godly stewardship means funding the work of discipleship.

Kingdom-focus drives contentment. We work honest jobs, avoid burdensome debt, and plan for future expenses, not because we want to build bigger houses or put more into our retirement accounts, but because we want to free up more for God’s work. We determine our needs not on basis of comfort or financial security, but by how our possessions increase or decrease our ability to share and image the gospel to those around us. Then we pass along the rest to others.

What We Use Money For

The money we give away can be divided into roughly two categories, though the categories are far from being mutually exclusive. First, we use wealth to supply God’s army in the war for souls. We find where there is need – locally and globally – and we give. This giving is not an afterthought; it requires sacrifice and planning. Second, we use money to help meet the needs of those who do not have enough. Even as our needs for food and clothing are being accounted for we do our best to make sure others have those things too.

God purposefully provides for some of His people in abundance. It is not so they can build bigger barns, attics, and garages to store it all in. Nor is it so that our stuff can sit around collecting dust and being eaten by moths. Our addiction to material wealth is always satisfied at

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1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12
2 Romans 13:8
3 Deuteronomy 18:4, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2
the expense of compassion and justice for the under-resourced in our world. Rather, God gives generously in order that his disciples can show the world what Christ-like love looks like.⁵

Money as an Idol
While money is not inherently evil, it can easily become a trap and a distraction. Whether we have a little money or a lot, it can occupy our thoughts to such a degree that it becomes an idol and chokes out the fruit of believers.⁶ We can fall in love with its ability to provide comfort and security and power. When that happens our eagerness for money replaces our desire for God. The sobering reality is that while you cannot earn your way into heaven, you can certainly misuse money in ways that land you in hell.⁷

The Bible speaks of many financial sins that accompany money idolatry. These include being continually torn between whether to obey God at financial loss or disobey God in order to retain wealth (as with the rich young ruler),⁸ giving from pride so that others will be impressed with your generosity and praise you,⁹ getting into the slavery of debt,¹⁰ enviously coveting the success and possessions of others rather than rejoicing with them,¹¹ a diminished fear of the Lord,¹² laziness,¹³ not providing for one’s family,¹⁴ poor financial planning leading to poverty,¹⁵ not leaving a generous financial legacy to your children and grandchildren,¹⁶ becoming a heretic because it is profitable,¹⁷ becoming selfish and therefore a bad friend,¹⁸ and robbing God by not giving to the cause of his ministry.¹⁹,²⁰

What about you? Greed is real and plagues even the best-intentioned Christian. In what way is money an idol in your life? Are you falling into any of the financial sins listed above? Step back from yourself, for a moment, and ask a few questions of your life:

1. Do you find yourself thinking that money is yours – earned by you, to be spent by you, and for you?²¹
2. Does God get the first and best of your money or does he get the leftovers?
3. What resources do you need to effectively bear God’s image and make disciples? Are you content to have just these needs met?
4. Do you purchase things for utility or for status?
5. Do you worry about money or providing for yourself what God promises to provide?²²

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⁵ 2 Corinthians 9:8-13
⁶ Matthew 13:22
⁷ Matthew 25:14-46; James 2:16-18; 1 John 3:16-18
⁹ Matthew 6:1-4
¹⁰ Proverbs 22:7
¹¹ Ecclesiastes 4:4
¹² Proverbs 15:16
¹³ Proverbs 13:4
¹⁴ 1 Timothy 5:8
¹⁵ Proverbs 15:21-22; 21:5
¹⁶ Proverbs 13:22; 19:14
¹⁷ 1 Timothy 6:3-10
¹⁸ James 4:1-4
¹⁹ Malachi 3:8-10
²¹ Deuteronomy 8:8-10
²² Matthew 6:25-34
6. Do you use things until they wear out or do you constantly “update”?  
7. Are you addicted to buying things? Or, can you enjoy things without owning them?

**The Danger of Prosperity Theology**

Sadly, money is one area that the church gets wrong all the time. Jesus knew this would be hard for us, which is why about a quarter of His recorded words are in reference to resources that we are to steward.²³ Paul, likewise, warns us against greed. In contrast to the godly and content in 1 Timothy 6:6 are the false teachers Paul speaks of in the verse below.

* 1 Timothy 6:3-5

How it must grieve our God to see the false churches and false ministers of our day that encourage greed under the guise of Christianity. In this so-called “prosperity theology,” God is about you getting yours. He becomes a means for getting what you wanted before you came to Him, a way of satisfying your desire for other gods.

Some say that, “by receiving Jesus Christ, obeying the Word of God, and meditating on this important truth about abundant living, prosperity can become a reality. I’m not just talking about having a lot of money in the bank, even though God does want us to prosper financially. I’m talking about a quality of life that is marked by an overflow of peace, health, wholeness, and provision.”²⁴

This sounds nice enough; an ego stroke for a fallen humanity bent on making gods of ourselves. But God does not promise our faith will lead to an overflow of physical “peace, health, wholeness, and provision.” The abundant life promised us in Scripture has nothing to do with our possessions.²⁵ Nor does God offer us a formula for worldly success: do A + B and get C. Such a mindset puts us in control, not God. When we start speaking material and physical blessing into existence, *ex nihilo*, we are playing god and the glory goes to us and our exceptional faith.

Such a human-centered mindset requires a great deal of forgetfulness with regards to Scripture. Forget, for instance, that Scripture condemns the desire to get rich and warns us again and again of the deceitfulness of money. Forget also that Scriptures tell us to store up treasure in heaven and not amass wealth on earth.²⁶ Forget the direct connection Paul makes in the passage above between the corrupt minds of false teachers and treating godliness as a means to financial gain. To be so forgetful is to lose sight of God as the goal. It is to make much of money and what money can get us here and now. The focus in greed is on the temporary and visible, rather than the unseen and eternal reward of Jesus Christ. Remember, though, that godliness is content with having its basic needs met. This is for God’s glory and our good.

We can be content with the necessities of life because the deepest, most satisfying delights God gives us through creation are free gifts from nature and loving relationships with people. After your basic needs are met, money begins to diminish your capacity for

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²⁴ Creflo Dollar. Total Life Prosperity: God’s Will. http://www.creflodollarministries.org/BibleStudy/Articles. This quote is used, not because Mr. Dollar is alone in his thinking, but as a representative of thousands of churches and pastors who have lost sight of God as the goal and see “godliness as a means of financial gain.”  
²⁵ Luke 12:15  
²⁶ Matthew 6:19-20
these pleasures rather than increase them. Buying things contributes absolutely nothing to the heart's capacity for joy.  

**The Rich Young Ruler**

Simplicity and generosity are our safeguards against the deceits of wealth. This is precisely why when Jesus called others to seek His kingdom first, the call sometimes came with instructions to leave behind or sell one’s possessions. Consider the story of the rich young ruler found in the following verse:

- Matthew 19:16-25

Some Christians do not have to seek wealth out in order to have it. Whether through family ties or natural talents, they simply have money. While it is possible to have wealth and seek Christ, it is, what theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls, an “ultimate possibility” of the Christian life. We cannot assume that we have the grace of inner detachment from wealth unless we have first literally left all of it to follow Christ. Only in doing so can we know that we truly do hold loosely to wealth.

For those who consider their wealth as a testimony to God’s pleasure with them, consider the man in the passage above. His riches were not proof of his faith. They were what kept him from single-minded pursuit of Christ. We do not glorify God by having possessions or talents. We glorify God by enjoying Him and investing our earthly treasure in ways that bear eternal returns. Obedience is the only measure we have of God’s favor in our life. Bonhoeffer continues:

The difference between ourselves and the rich young man is that he was not allowed to solace his regrets by saying: ‘Never mind what Jesus says, I can still hold on to my riches, but in a spirit of inner detachment. Despite my inadequacy I can take comfort in the thought that God has forgiven me my sins and can have fellowship with Christ in faith.’ But no, he went away sorrowful. Because he would not obey, he could not believe.

This is not a call to voluntary poverty. Christ never extended such a call generally, so we cannot either. While the love of money is evil, making money is not. We need to be pursuing employment and making money in order to pay for food and shelter and clothing and to fund ministry opportunities (both ours and others). In this process, some folks will become wealthy and others will not. Some will sell everything while others will not. In either case, our decision is to flow from our preeminent focus on Christ and desire to see his kingdom expanding in times and places.

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27 John Piper, from a sermon entitled Money: Currency for Christian Hedonism delivered on October 9, 1983 at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota
28 1 Timothy 6:17-19
29 p. 82 Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1st Touchstone edition 1995
31 p. 80 Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1st Touchstone edition 1995
32 This is determined through reflection on how, through Christ’s power, your resources can be best used to advance his kingdom. See Luke 12:32-34; 18:22; 19:8, and Acts 4:37. The people in these passages gave varying amounts, yet they were each approved. If your wealth stands between you and God get rid of it entirely. Otherwise, continually pour it into the work of the kingdom over time.
Like the shrewd servant in Jesus’ parable, disciples are to use everything at our disposal to make ourselves friends for eternity. We do so by inviting folks into the family of God. We cannot take anything with us. So, while we have earthly resources, we should be using them to fund the efforts of holistic discipleship.

Spending Wisely
The first step in bringing your finances under God’s rule is to analyze your spending. What you do with your earthly treasure says a lot about where your heart is. Write down your current income and expenditures. Revisit the questions above and consider a few more. Are you spending more then you make? Are you enslaved to debt? What are you spending your money on? Are there changes you can make to free up money for ministry (your own and others)?

Rather than asking, “How much house, car, television, cell phone, computer, etc. can I afford?” we should be asking, “Where is God moving and how can I put my resources behind those efforts?” God’s people have always been expected to give him back their first and best. If you add up all the “tithes” in the Old Testament, the Israelites were giving upwards of 25% of their income back to God. Nowadays, we set ourselves a much lower bar, if we set one at all.

In offering our first fruits, we are also demonstrating trust. By giving the first part of every paycheck to work aimed at building God’s kingdom, we show the world that our hope rests on God’s ability to provide for our clothes and food. If we are honest though, we often refuse to give our first and best because we cannot stop worrying about providing for our daily needs. Such worries are easy to justify in our mind. After all, who can do life without food to eat or water to drink? But to Jesus, such worries are a symptom of an unbelieving heart. He told His disciples not to worry.

- Matthew 6:31-33

Notice that Jesus does not dismiss our needs as unimportant. He actually intends to provide for them. But our needs are not the most important thing, God’s kingdom is. Absolute, unflinching trust in God as a capable and desiring provider is paramount to stewardship. Which is why, when God wants to show what giving to His kingdom looks like, He uses the poor as His example. Consider Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthian believers.

- 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

The goal in all of this is not poverty, but that there will be equality. To achieve this equality, Scripture challenges all believers towards rich generosity. And the metric that we are given to measure our generosity, is the example of those who gave “beyond their ability.”

Though it may seem strange at first, we ought to budget in such a way that allows for our generosity both through established ministries and for our own direct acts of compassion to our

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33 Luke 16:1-8
35 To put things in perspective, only 27% of evangelicals clear the traditional 10% bar in their tithing. More than 1/4 of American protestants give nothing. Median giving for a Christian is $200 (= 0.5% of after tax income). Things are not getting better, they are actually getting worse over time. Info taken from pages 396-397 of Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe by Mark Driscoll and Gary Breshears. Crossway 2010.
36 Ex 23:19; Lev 23:10; Nu 3:13; Neh 10:35; Rom 8:23; Jam 1:18; Rev 14:4
37 See also Jesus comments on the widow’s offering in Mark 12:41-44
38 2 Corinthians 8:14-15
neighbors. Those of us who have more than we need would do well to set a cap on our expenditures at or slightly above what is required to maintain our own ministry, including the daily needs of food, shelter, and clothing. Invested everything else in God’s kingdom. This is not a rule, just a thought. The cap can be adjusted as your ministry and the ministries you give to change.

Christian stewardship will look strange indeed to the world around us. We will be considered fools for our squandering of resources on others, who may or may not be grateful for what we offer them. Even within the church at times, folks will not understand us. They will call us irresponsible for giving until it hurts, well beyond what the world considers our ability. Yet, they will be getting a glimpse of God’s generosity through us. We will become as the Macedonians to the Corinthians.

Principles for Giving

1. **Aim for Holistic Ministries.** By ‘holistic,’ we mean those ministries that are committed to meeting both physical and spiritual needs. When we give to ministries (including our local church) that are more committed to one than the other, we end up reinforcing a very harmful dichotomy with the Body.

2. **Start with Your Community.** Take time to get to know your community. Find out what its particular needs are – literacy, trade skills, stable housing, or financial wisdom – and focus your energy on those. If Christians are already working holistically on those issues, join them. ^39^ Do not waste time or energy or resources reinventing a ministry, just to get your name on it.

3. **Go to the Nations.** Other countries have needs too, often even more pressing than our own. In addition to a lack of gospel witness there may be inadequate food, education, infrastructure, clean water, or basic health care. Support efforts through local bodies in these countries both individually and with your local church. If helpful go, but consider whether the money it takes to get you there and back would be better donated directly to the body of Christ in that country.

4. **Join Hands for Sustainable Change.** Though handouts are easy to give and meet acute needs, over the long run these can become degrading and disabling. Consider pooling together time and talents to start viable businesses that meet the basic needs the needs of the body and the poor. These ventures can be for-profit or not-for-profit, but the goal should always be developing people rather than increasing return on investment.

5. **Stay the Course.** Change takes time. Bringing a new believer from rebirth to reproducibility may take years. Are you prepared to put in that time? Are you prepared to give others that time? Will you commit to ministries that are faithful to meet physical and spiritual needs, regardless of the harvest?

Take Inventory

^39^ Matthew 19:27-30; 2 Corinthians 4:16-17
Next, take an inventory of your possessions. What things do you need to minister to your local body and community? Compare that to what you actually have. Do the things you own add or detract from your ability to image God and make disciples?

When you have taken these steps, let a trusted Christian friend take a look at your finances and your resources. Invite him or her to speak truthfully; to critique your budget and offer advice. Take their input and come up with two or three concrete applications that you can put into place over the next one to two weeks.

For most, if not all of us, putting God-first in the area of resources will involve giving something up. Our spending will change and our joy-sapping load of possessions will be lightened. Whatever you choose to make that a reality, my prayer is that you would eagerly anticipate the sacrifice as an opportunity. God asks a lot of us, but He promises so much more—both now and in the life to come.

At every turn, we must fight to maintain the tension between accountability and legalism. While we ought to guard against extending our individual applications into a requirement for others, we still hold other Christians—particularly our leaders—accountable to be free of the love of money. Only through generous application of the Lord’s grace and love can this tension be maintained.

In spite of the dangers, it is imperative that you apply God’s word to your life. Truth which is first born in our hearts, is proven by our concrete actions. We cannot say we believe in God and then not seek to honor him with every part of our life, especially money. Consider writing your applications down and asking that same trusted Christian friend who reviewed your finances to keep you accountable to implementing your ideas.

**Conclusion**

Remember a few key points: our time, talent, and treasure are on loan from God with the purpose of being invested in ways that advance God’s rule in the lives of men and women. Our basic needs are defined by our ministry, not our survival. Gospel-advancing generosity is the key to maintaining godly contentment. Faith is demonstrated by giving back to God the first and best of what he has given to us regardless of our circumstances.

**Application Questions**

1. What should money be used for?
2. Is money an idol in your life?
3. What can you give away or sell to provide for the needs of others? For example, are there clothes you are not wearing, tools you are not using, cars you are not driving, or houses you are not living in?

**Memory Verse**

1 Timothy 6:6-10

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?*
Social Concern – Caring for the Poor and Marginalized

Proverbs 31:8-9
8 Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. 9 Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Introduction
In the church today, it seems that God’s concern for the poor and marginalized is often overlooked. We give necessary attention to spiritual matters, but often completely neglect the physical. A reading of the Law, Proverbs, Prophets and New Testament will clearly show that God exhorts His people to actively care for the poor while admonishing any mistreatment of – or indifference toward – the needy.

Social Concern in the Law
Throughout God’s law – which are his nature-revealing instructions for holy living – we see the care, provision and redemption of the poor and marginalized highlighted.

- Exodus 22:21-23
- Leviticus 23:22
- Leviticus 25:39-43
- Deuteronomy 15:7-11

We see God command His people to treat the poor and marginalized fairly, to make provisions for them, and allow them to be released every Year of Jubilee. He also commands His people to give generously, not begrudgingly.

Social Concern in Proverbs
Proverbs – God’s declaration for wise and skillful living – repeatedly gives us instruction on how to respond to the reality of God’s concern for the poor and needy.

- Proverbs 14:21
- Proverbs 14:31
- Proverbs 28:27
- Proverbs 31:8-9
- Proverbs 19:17
- Proverbs 22:9
- Proverbs 21:13
- Proverbs 22:22-23
- Proverbs 29:7
- Proverbs 17:5

1 Marginalized is a term that refers to those who are prevented from having attention, power or influence.
Notice the practices that are condemned in Proverbs: oppressing the poor, mocking the poor, gloating over disaster, shutting our ears to the cry of the poor, exploiting the poor, crushing the needy in court, closing our eyes to the poor, and not being concerned about justice for the poor. Ignoring the poor shows just as much contempt for God as actively oppressing the poor.

Notice the practices that are blessed by the Lord: being kind to the needy, lending to the poor, being generous, sharing food with the poor, giving to the poor, caring about justice for the poor, speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves, judging fairly, and defending the rights of the poor and needy. Being kind to the needy is even equated with honoring God, while oppressing the poor shows hatred for our Maker.

Social Concern in the Prophets
We see God speak through the prophets to rebuke Israel for their disobedience, including oppression of the poor and marginalized and a lack of concern for justice.

- Isaiah 10:1-3
- Malachi 3:5

In Isaiah 58:6-7, the Lord deplores those who claim to be religious yet do not “loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, set the oppressed free and break every yoke.” The kind of religion that God honors is “to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter” and “when you see the naked, to clothe him.”

Social Concern in the New Testament
The New Testament echoes God’s heart for the poor and marginalized that we saw displayed throughout the Old Testament.

- James 1:27
- Galatians 2:10
- Acts 6:1-6

The early church modeled social concern. In Acts 6, seven godly men were designated by the leaders of the church to focus their attention on caring for the widows. (In this passage, widows represent marginalized people; people that have a difficult time or are unable to care for themselves.) In 1 Timothy 5, Paul gives specific instruction to the body of Christ on how to care for widows. Also, James acknowledges our tendency, even as believers, to favor the rich and ignore the poor. He commands believers not to show favoritism because God has not “chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him.” Quoting Jesus and the Old Testament, James says that to keep the royal law is to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Who is My Neighbor?
An expert of the law asked Jesus this exact question in Luke 10:29. Jesus answered the man with the story of the Good Samaritan. In this story, Jesus teaches that His followers must be a neighbor. They must ask themselves, “Who can I be a neighbor to,” rather than, “Who exactly do I have to love and who can I not love?” Jesus was teaching that a person should be a

2 James 2:5
neighbor to *everyone in need*. The ultimate neighbor was Jesus, whose compassion exposed the Jewish religious leaders’ lack of concern for those who were perishing. Jesus wrapped up His teaching with the command that His followers were to live like the true neighbor from the passage, showing mercy to those in need.

**Why We Lack Concern for the Poor and Marginalized**

Hopefully, the theological framework provided in the previous section has helped to build conviction in your heart concerning God’s desire for the Church to care for the poor and marginalized. Given the Biblical support surrounding this aspect of God’s kingdom, why do many Christians still fail to demonstrate significant concern?

1. **Ignorance.** We do not learn what the Scriptures say about caring for “social” issues in life.

2. **Poor Theology.** Platonic thought has crept into Christianity. Many of us were taught that the soul is all that matters and we should be indifferent toward the physical realm. While the believer is exhorted to live for eternal purposes and not just temporal ones, the body and its needs are never passed off as second rate or something to be ignored.

3. **Sin.** Our tendencies towards selfishness and laziness tell us that it is just easier to ignore social issues. We tend to forget the poor, thinking that we cannot do anything about their poverty or we convince ourselves that they are not our problem.

4. **Overcompensating.** We are afraid that if we give too much attention to the social needs of the world we will be accused of preaching the “social gospel.” Just because some secularists and spiritually dead churches have abandoned the precious truth of Christ does not mean that we alter God’s kingdom agenda in retaliation. We need to stay the course in pursuing God’s kingdom agenda in both spiritual matters and social/physical matters.

**Ways We Justify Our Neglect of the Poor**

1. **“I am Only Around Those Who Are Well Off.”** Have you seriously considered these questions: why do you live where you live? Have you surrendered this decision to the Lord? Are you showing favoritism by avoiding poor people or low-income neighborhoods? Are you clinging to comfort or justifying your inaction? Often, the reason we do not care for the poor is because we do not know the poor. Are you putting yourself in a place where you can invest in relationships and truly love your neighbor as yourself?

2. **“The Bible is Only Concerned With the Spiritually Poor.”** On the contrary, the Bible encourages spiritual poverty, because it leads us to understand our spiritual need for Christ’s Lordship. Further, the Scriptures we have used in this document support the theological framework of caring for the physically poor.

3. **“Do the Poor Really Experience Injustice and Exploitation?”** Look around. Where are landfills placed? How is zoning done? Do the poor who live near you have opportunities for redemption or are they stuck in cycles of poverty? What government policies are keeping the poor in poverty, rather than helping them out of it? Are certain ethnic or other types of groups seemingly stuck in the cycle of poverty? If efforts are being made towards serving the poor near you, are they helping to alleviate poverty (empowering individuals) or are they quick fixes to the problem of poverty (band aids that enforce the cycle)?
We do need to be discerning in whom we help and how we help (not creating dependency, not being patronizing, etc.). In 1 Timothy 5:3-16, Paul instructs the body of believers to help those widows “who are really in need.” He instructs family members to care for their poor family members first, allowing the church to care for those who have no one to help them. He instructs the church to give to the widows who are over sixty who have modeled good character (most likely because they are unable to earn money for themselves). We know that some (not all) people that need help will not do their part in working. Proverbs warns us that laziness, the love of pleasure, and alcohol abuse will lead to poverty.³ It does not say that people who struggle in these areas are not to be cared for, but it is clear that these things will need to be changed in order to bring about true reform.

Conclusion
The Bible is clear that the church is to advocate for the poor and the marginalized in the world, caring for their needs and pursuing justice on their behalf. We are not to neglect spiritual needs for social ones, nor social needs for those that are spiritual. The two areas of need are not in opposition. On the contrary, Christ demonstrated care for the whole person, body and spirit. As His followers, we must demonstrate the same, not allowing bad theology, laziness and poor excuses to keep us from addressing the social needs of our communities.

Application Questions
1. Do you have relationships with those who come from a background of poverty? If so, how are you involved with them?
2. Do you actively seek to understand the plight of the poor and marginalized?
3. Do you give generously? Are you mindful of whether or not your generosity is helping or hurting?
4. After reading this document, how has your perspective changed?
5. Make a plan for how you can better understand the plight of the poor and needy. Then, make a plan for how to better pursue justice for the poor and marginalized.

Memory Verses:
James 1:27
Proverbs 31:8-9
Matthew 25:34-40

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?

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³ Proverbs 20:13, 21:17, 23:20-21
Sex

Genesis 2:24
That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Introduction
Sex is a three-letter word that pervades much of our culture. However, it is a culture that has perverted God’s design of it. This document should help us understand what the Scriptures tell us about God’s original design for sex; within marriage as well as our individual sexuality, and also give hope in the face of the brokenness we may have experienced as a result of the perversion of sex in the world.

THEOLOGICAL

God’s Design
“In the beginning God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.” With the creation of humans, we see God designing people to bear His image. God purposely creates two distinct sexes. This concept is foundational to the understanding of who we are as humans and to understanding our sexuality and gender as a part of our image-bearing identity. We see this further at the end of chapter two of Genesis. The distinct creation of woman was so man and woman could become one flesh, united together as husband and wife. Right away, we see God’s design for our sexuality to be expressed and fulfilled strictly within marriage between a man and woman. This is a beautiful thing. As Genesis 2:25 reminds us, they were “both naked and they felt no shame.” God created sex as something to be celebrated and enjoyed within marriage. It is the ratifying act of the marriage covenant before God. It seals the commitment between a husband and wife before their Creator.

Consequences of Sin
It is not until sin enters the world that shame exists (the first thing that Adam and Eve realize after they disobey God is their nakedness; thus, covering themselves with fig leaves). God’s design to enjoy each other’s nakedness was corrupted by the fall. Something meant for good is now tainted with shame, a feeling of guilt and the desire to hide. From this point forward, we see Bible history laden with stories of abuse, homosexuality, jealousy, greed, selfishness, immorality, prostitution, rape, orgies, pornography and so on. Our ability to experience a good gift has been marred. The consequences of sin are apparent through the confusion of sexual identity, adultery, sexual impurity and abusive relationships, which pervade our society.

Hope in God’s Redemption and Restoration
This would be truly tragic if not for the redemptive nature of God, which leaves us with joyous hope; hope that the broken understanding of sexuality can be restored for His glory. By faith

1 Genesis 1:27
2 Genesis 2:18
3 Genesis 3:7
4 Genesis 7:20-27, 12:10-20; 2 Samuel 11
5 Job 19:25
we can be new creations in Christ!⁷ We can now experience the good gift of sex within marriage, understand God’s design for our sexual identity, and find healing from sexual abuse of any kind.⁸

**PRACTICAL**

Now that we have a greater understanding of the theology of sex, we can see how that plays out in our lives as we seek to have a gospel-centered perspective. As you read through the following ask the Holy Spirit to work in your heart, and allow God’s word to penetrate your very being. May you allow these principles to guide you to live out God’s design for sex.

**Pursuing Purity**

One question to ask is: are you pursuing holiness with your sexuality or are you seeing how much you can get away and still be “saved”? The Bible does not give us all the do’s and don’ts about sexuality, but it does however give us numerous principles to apply. Scripture does not explicitly lay out whether kissing before marriage is wrong, it does not say anything about masturbation, it does not give guidelines for how should dancing, nor does it tell us if girls should wear a one or two piece bathing suit. But remember, it has principles that can help us check our hearts to see if we are honoring God concerning such things as lust and modesty. Here are a few verses that deal directly with living out God’s design for our sexuality.

- Galatians 5:16-25
- Ephesians 5:3
- 1 Corinthians 6:18-19, 10:13
- Matthew 5:27-30
- 1 Corinthians 6:18

**Homosexuality**

Scripture makes it clear that any sexual relationship outside of marriage between a man and a woman is a violation of God’s design. In Scripture, we see Leviticus 18 and Romans 1 specifically condemn sex between members of the same gender. If one struggles with same sex attraction, we are called to surrender that daily to the Lord, asking for the power of the Holy Spirit to help not give in to the temptation but to live out God’s design for your sexuality.

This is not a sin to be demonized above any other sin. But it is yet another area in which we see the brokenness of our sexuality.

- James 1:13-15
- Genesis 1:27

**Healing From Abuse**

One of the most devastating consequences of the perversion of sex is when it is manifested in abuse. To experience true healing from abuse is not an overnight event. It often takes time and work to experience freedom, and this freedom is only found through God. Throughout Scripture we see the nature of God as being one who heals not only our sins but also our physical,

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⁶ Galatians 3:13  
⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:17  
⁸ Colossians 1:13-14
emotional and mental brokenness.\(^9\) We can run to our Lord with our burdens, seeking refuge in Him and allowing Him to do the work in and through us. We can also cling to the Truth that God is a perfectly just and all will have to account their actions before Him.

**Psalm 147:3** - God heals our broken hearts.
**Psalm 103:3** - God heals our diseases.
**Psalm 10** - God hears the cries of the oppressed.
**Matthew 11:28-30** - We can run to Jesus with our burdens and find rest.
**Matthew 18:5-6** - There is judgment for those who mistreat children.
**Philippians 1:6** - We have the promise that when God begins a good work in us, he completes it.
**1 Corinthians 13** - We may have to relearn what love is after we have been sent mixed messages through abusive relationships.
**Romans 12:1-2** - Renewing our minds is a daily battle to replace the lies with the truth of who we are.

**Sex in the Covenant of Marriage**

Sex – the way God designed it – is to be celebrated! Sex is God’s gift to us, not only for reproduction but also for unity in marriage through a pleasurable experience. The Song of Solomon is full of erotic imagery and poetry. One look at this book and we will be reminded of the joy that comes from sexual relations with one’s spouse. As mentioned in the theological basis for God’s design, sex is the covenant seal. Thus, every time a husband and wife have sex, it is a reminder of what they committed to each other before God.

Sex, although a very natural thing, can take a lot of work within marriage for many different reasons. This document will not explore all the possible reasons here but may the reminder of God’s design for sex spur you on toward honoring God with your sexuality in marriage as you seek to reflect his image.

**Song of Solomon** - Sex is to be enjoyed by a husband and wife!
**Genesis 2:24; 4:1** - Sex is the covenant seal between a husband and wife.
**Genesis 2:24-25** - There is no reason for shame when having sex in marriage.
**1 Corinthians 7:1-5** - We are called to serve our spouses sexually in marriage.
**Mark 12:31** - Love as we want to be loved.
**Ephesians 5:28** - Husbands are called to love their wives as they love their own bodies.
**1 Corinthians 13** - Remember what Love is.

**God of Redemption**

We experience the redemption of God when we put our faith in Jesus; our sins are traded for the righteousness of Christ. However, the fullness of our redemption is being worked out while we are still in this life. As we surrender all areas of our life to God, His Spirit continues to make us more like Christ, perfect and holy.\(^10\) This includes our sexuality. Our journeys will look different depending on what our pasts look like. Our story may be that we have already had sexual intercourse, oral sex or simply been intimate with partners outside of marriage. It may be that we have committed adultery, struggled with a pornography addiction, or had sexual relations

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\(^9\) Exodus 15:26b
\(^10\) Romans 8:29
with the same gender. Our story may be one where we have prided ourselves on being so pure that the attempts to be intimate with our spouse brings great shame. No matter what our journey has been, God redeems all. No sin is too big or too small to be covered by the blood of Jesus. Let the truth of God’s Word permeate your mind, heart and actions.

1 John 1:9 - When we confess and repent, we are forgiven and made righteous
Romans 12:1-2 - Transformation takes place through the renewing of our minds, replacing lies with truth.
Colossians 3:5-17 - We are called to put to death our old ways of life.
2 Corinthians 5:17 - We are new creations in Christ!

Conclusion
Sex is good! It is something we can celebrate when experienced between a man and a woman in the context of marriage. Understanding God’s design for sex can better help us to see how the consequences of sin have perverted what sex is. Although our understanding of our sexuality been broken as a result of sin, we do have great hope in Christ. We have the hope of redemption and the ability to experience the wholeness of God’s design through the victory over sin that Christ completed his death and resurrection. Praise the Lord!

Application Questions
1. What is your story? Where is the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart? What truth do you need to be reminded of or convicted of concerning God’s design for sexuality?
2. What are some of the lies that you believe about sex? And what does the truth of God’s word say about them?
3. What are next steps to more fully live out the gospel and experience of the power of our risen Savior?

Memory Verses
Genesis 2:24
Song of Solomon 2:16
1 Corinthians 7:3-4
Psalm 147: 3

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?
**Sexual Purity**

**1 Thessalonians 4:1-3**
1 As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. 3 It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality;

**Introduction**
God’s standards regarding sin are high in action, thought and attitude. He calls for holiness, which includes sexual relations. The Scriptures are clear that the Lord has created sex only for the context of marriage to a member of the opposite sex. 1 In 1 Thessalonians 4:1-3, Paul urges his brothers to live in order to please God, and goes on to say that it is God’s will that you should be sanctified (made holy, growing in holiness). In calling us to be a people for Himself, He has called us to be a people that resemble Him. Paul goes on to give us some examples of how we should live in order to please God, saying, “That you should avoid sexual immorality, that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him.”

If we truly surrender ourselves to the Lord, we will have a pretty good idea of what we should and should not do. We not only need to avoid sexually immoral activities, but also we need to focus on controlling our bodies in a way that is holy and honorable to God.

**Pursuing Holiness**
Why should we do this? 1 Thessalonians 4:6-8 goes on to say that the Lord will punish men for all such sins, that He did not call us to be impure but to live a holy life. Because we have been given Christ’s righteousness, let that be what motivates us to pursue holiness in our lives.

God commands us to do things so that we can understand how to be more like Him and also so we can see His great love and care for us. Behind every negative command are positive principles for our delight. Specifically, God’s commands to wait for sex until marriage is given to both protect you and provide for you. Just as a mother tells her son not to touch a hot iron so that he does not burn himself, God gives us boundaries and limitations for our benefit. Such is the case in sexual activity before marriage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protect</th>
<th>Provide</th>
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<td>Your mind from the images of past relationships.</td>
<td>Freedom to enjoy your future spouse without distracting mental images.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You from mistrust and suspicion in relationships.</td>
<td>A foundation of trust for your current and future relationships.</td>
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<td>You from confusing the intensity of sex with the intimacy of love.</td>
<td>You with intimacy: True knowledge of the other person outside of the physical.</td>
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<td>You from the fear and consequences of sexually transmitted diseases.</td>
<td>You peace of mind as you enter a marriage commitment.</td>
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<td>Your Christian testimony.</td>
<td>Integrity in your Christian witness that ministers to others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your fellowship with God.</td>
<td>The abundant life.</td>
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1 Genesis 2:24; Leviticus 18
2 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6
3 Romans 12:1-2
We need to also remember that our bodies are Temples of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, the temple was to be kept holy. Since it was set apart for the Lord’s service, it must be kept undefiled. So, what then does this have to do with our sexual purity?

- 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

**Sexual Impurity**

What is sexual impurity and when do we know when something is sin? There are things in Scripture that are clearly sin, which will not be addressed here because they are clear (all types of sex before marriage, adultery, etc.). However, there are more gray areas than rules in our pursuit of purity.

Specifically, what about holding hands? What about kissing? What about being alone together? There are three important questions to ask yourself as you decide whether or not you should do these and other gray areas.

1. **What Are My Intentions?** There is a distinct difference between trying to be holy and trying to find loopholes.
2. **Does This Honor God?** In your heart, can you feel comfortable doing this? Touch is not inherently evil; it is lust and not being able to control your body that dishonors God.
3. **Does This Cause Me or My Boyfriend/Girlfriend to Stumble?** This is key because often a small touch on the hand will not lead to sin, but greater amounts of touch (even on the hand) can lead to increased temptation for sexual activity. It is important to know that in relationships, as emotions grow for one another, the desire for physical intimacy grows. This is important to take into account in order that we understand the reality of this increasing temptation for sexual impurity.

Asking these questions allows us to understand how we can honor God and our fellow man in our relationships. In these gray areas, we need to seek God and follow our convictions. At the same time, we need to give people freedom to have different convictions in these gray areas.

**Fleeing Sexual Immorality**

Sexual purity is very difficult and it is easy to compromise. As God’s children submit to His ways, trust Him and grow in His likeness, they are taking steps to flee sexual immorality and it greatly glorifies God. God cares about our heart and mind, not just the outward action.

In Matthew 5:27-30, Jesus says that even looking at a woman lustfully is adultery, and that His disciples need to take this seriously, even gouging out our eye or cutting off our hand to avoid adultery. He uses dramatic speech to make His point; that He takes sin seriously, and that people who do not take sin seriously are not his disciples – (we know this because 5:29 & 30 says they will be thrown into hell namely, those not taking sin seriously). We have been given the power of the Holy Spirit to flee sexual temptation.

- 1 Corinthians 10:13

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4 1 Corinthians 6:18-20
Forgiveness – A New Start
One of the greatest mistakes people can make is to assume that since they have failed to keep God’s command regarding sexual purity, God wants nothing to do with them. This is simply not true. God is well aware of our sinful tendencies – that is why Jesus Christ came.

For King David, what began with a stare led to adultery, unwanted pregnancy, and murder. This is about as bad as it gets. But consider what happened next. David admitted his sin and asked God for forgiveness. Like David, we can receive God’s complete forgiveness and receive a clean start.

* Psalm 51

Some Important Steps to Take:

4. **Confess the Sin.** Specifically name your sin before God and ask His forgiveness.

5. **Forgive Yourself.** If you are not willing to forgive yourself, you are saying two things to God: that Christ’s death was not enough for your sins and you are a higher judge of what can be forgiven than God is. God’s grace is extended to you out of His heart of love. When you do not forgive yourself, you throw God’s grace right back into His face. If God’s grace cannot cover your sin, it cannot cover any sin.

6. **Yield Yourself to God.** Ask God to fill you with his power to honor him with your body and to say no to future temptation, and trust His Spirit to work in your life.

7. **Bear Fruits of Repentance.** Repentance means turning around, changing one’s mind. This might mean breaking off a relationship or perhaps making a decision not to be alone together. Whatever it is, your actions should show you have changed. The individual who professes to be a Christian but who continues to practice sin should realize that he or she might not be a Christian at all.

God’s complete love and forgiveness enable us to make a clean start and to live a life pleasing to Him.

Conclusion
Sexual purity is not taken lightly by God. He is perfectly just. He knows what is best for your life and He has made His laws clear. By following God and aligning your life to His ways, you are bringing great honor and glory to Him. Sexual purity is not easy. Always keep your intentions in check and know that God is faithful. He will always provide a way out and will never give you more than you can bear.

Application Questions
1. How does your view of God affect how you live out your sexuality?
2. How does your view of yourself before God affect how you live out sexuality?
3. Think of your current situation (single, dating, married) and ask yourself how far you can go in pursuing holiness?
4. Are there areas you would like accountability?

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5 1 John 1:9
6 John 14:21; 1 John 2:3
7 1 Corinthians 10:13
Appendix: Sexual Purity for Men

Proper View of Women
1) Most images we lust after portray women as sexually animalistic and physically perfect.
2) But in reality, women’s sex drives are highly relationship-dependent, and their bodies are not nearly as idealistic.
3) Pornography, therefore, has its roots in fantasy, not reality.
4) But fantasy seeks to make the deluded one believe he has found truth, and it does so by using seemingly believable distortions of reality.
5) Hence, feeding our fantasy lives is dangerous – it removes us from reality.

Pursuing Women
1) Choose wisely
   a. Are there observable qualities in her that I desire in a life mate?
   b. Are we running at about the same pace spiritually?
   c. Are there any obvious red flags in her life that would make me uncomfortable pursuing her before God (present disobedience, immaturity, etc…)
   d. Is it obvious that Christ is the Lord of her life?
   e. Does she carry herself in an honorable and respectable way?
   f. Am I myself walking closely with God at the time I seem attracted to her, or am I far from Him relationally when I think of her?
   g. Do I enjoy being around her?

2) Check your motives
   a. Why am I pursuing her?
   b. What is it about her to which I am attracted?
   c. Am I more interested in getting to know her physically than I am socially, emotionally, or spiritually?
   d. Do I feel comfortable being honest with God about my intentions towards her?
   e. There are plenty of physically pretty women out there – it is the one that is beautiful because of who she is that you want.

6) Clearly communicate your intentions
   a. Puts her at ease, in that she knows where you are coming from and why you have suddenly started paying so much attention to her.
   b. Shows her respect – you are being up front and honest with her.
   c. Compliments her – you are valuing her enough to pursue her and communicate your intentions.
   d. It places you in a leadership role, which is where godly women want you to be.

Foster the Friendship
1) Take your time and have fun with her. Marriage is about spending your life with your best friend. So when you are picking a mate, it is wise to be most concerned with seeing what kind of friendship you can foster with her.
2) HANDS OFF!
a. Physical escalation is effortless; deceleration is nearly impossible.
b. Becoming extremely physical while dating can have extremely adverse emotional and spiritual effects on the woman you date.
c. *The Question* – Am I diligently avoiding evil, or walking the line?

**Memory Verses**
1 Thessalonians 4:3-6  
1 Corinthians 10:13  
1 Corinthians 6:18-20

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?*
Temptation and Testing

1 Corinthians 10:13
And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

What is Temptation?
“Tempt” means “test” in an unrestricted sense. It is only since the 17th century that the word’s connotation has been limited to testing with evil intent. The biblical idea of temptation is not primarily of seduction, as in modern usage, but of making trial of a person, or putting him to the test; which may be done for:
1. The benevolent purpose of proving or improving their quality (usually prove or try is a metaphor from metal refining).
2. The malicious aim of showing up his weaknesses or trapping him into wrong action.

How and Why does God Test Christians?
God tests His people by putting them in situations that reveal the quality and sincerity of their faith and devotion, so that all can see what is in their hearts. God allows the trial to be His method of purifying the believer as metal is purified in the refiner’s crucible. He strengthens their patience, matures their Christian character and He leads them into an enhanced assurance of His love for them. Through faithfulness in times of trial men become “approved” in God’s sight.

How and Why Does Satan Test Christians?
Satan tests God’s people by manipulating circumstances, within the limits that God allows him, in an attempt to make them desert God’s will. Christians must constantly be watchful and active against the devil, for he is always at work trying to make us fall. There are four main schemes that Satan uses to succeed in the destruction of Christians:
1. He tries to crush us under the weight of hardship or pain.
2. He tries to urge us toward a wrong fulfillment of natural desires.
3. He tries to make us complacent, careless and self-assertive.
4. He tries to misrepresent God to us and create false ideas of His truth and His will.
Matthew 4:5 demonstrates that Satan can even quote (and misapply) Scripture for this purpose.

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1 Genesis 22:1; Exodus 16:4, 20:20; Deuteronomy 8:2, 13:3, 16; Judges 2:22; 2 Chronicles 32:31
2 Psalm 66:10; Isaiah 48:10; 1 Peter 1:6
3 James 1:12; 1 Corinthians 11:19; 1 Peter 5:10
4 Job 1:12, 2:6; 1 Corinthians 10:13
5 Mark 14:38; 2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 6:10; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:9
6 Job 1:11-2:7; 1 Peter 5:9; Revelation 2:10; Hebrews 2:18
7 Matthew 4:3; 1 Corinthians 7:5
8 Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 4:27
9 Genesis 3:1-5; 2 Corinthians 11:3, 14; Matthew 4:5
Are Temptations From God or the Devil?
The Bible makes it clear that ‘testing’ or ‘trials’ are the work of both God and the devil.\(^{10}\) They are testing situations in which the servant of God faces new possibilities of both good and evil, and is exposed to various inducements to prefer the latter. From the standpoint of being lured into evil, temptations are Satan’s work; but we must keep in mind that Satan is God’s tool as well as His foe,\(^{11}\) and it is ultimately God who leads His servants into temptation,\(^{12}\) permitting Satan to try to seduce us for purposes of His own.

Though temptations do not overtake men apart from God’s will, the actual prompting to do wrong is not of God. The desire, which impels to sin, is not God’s, but one’s own, and it is fatal to yield to it.\(^{13}\)

How Do We Triumph over Temptation and Testing?
God’s desire is for the Christian not to fail in temptation,\(^{14}\) while Satan’s desire is for the Christian to fail and eventually give up (become an apostate). The Christian can please God in the time of testing by applying the following truth into their lives:

1. **Believe the Truth.** Take God at His word! God promises that a way of deliverance will always be open when He allows Satan to tempt Christians.\(^{15}\) Whenever being tempted to sin ask yourself, “What lie am I believing?” Then begin to replace that lie with truth from the Bible. Finally, live according to that truth and refuse to believe the lie.

2. **Understand the Difference Between Temptation and Sin.** We have to understand the difference between being tempted and sinning. A believer may easily condemn oneself because of a temptation or desire. After perceiving that they have already failed and reached a point of no return, they continue on to sin. The Bible never teaches that a believer will never have a sinful desire (which is temptation); the Bible only teaches not to gratify your sinful desires (which is sin).\(^{16}\) We must remember that temptation is not sin, for Christ was tempted as we are yet remained sinless.\(^{17}\) Temptation becomes sin only when the suggestion of evil is accepted and yielded to.

Understand Our Nature and God’s Power
In the Lord’s Prayer we humbly confess that we are prone to sin and thus plead with Him not to allow us to be brought into situations or conditions that involve grave temptation to sin. Those who sincerely pray for forgiveness of their sins, long to be enabled not to sin again. Thus it is fitting that the petition to “not lead us into temptation” follows “forgive us of our sins.”

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\(^{10}\) Luke 22:28; Acts 20:19; James 1:2; 1 Peter 1:6; 2 Peter 2:9  
\(^{11}\) Job 1:11, 2:5  
\(^{12}\) Matthew 4:1, 6:13  
\(^{13}\) James 1:14  
\(^{14}\) James 1:12  
\(^{15}\) 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Peter 2:9  
\(^{16}\) Galatians 5:16  
\(^{17}\) Hebrews 4:15; Matthew 4:1; Luke 22:28
God never tempts anyone to do evil, but He controls the circumstances of our lives. Christ taught His disciples to ask God not to expose them to temptation, and to watch and pray, lest they should “enter into” temptation (yield to its pressure) when at any time God saw fit to try them by it. We must live in the fact that it is not only our resolve but also God’s grace that allows us to pursue holiness.

**Take Radical Steps Not to Sin**
In Mark 9:43-48, Jesus encourages the radical initiative to eradicate the possibility of sin in one’s life. Jesus meant a disciple should take prompt, decisive action against whatever would draw him away from his allegiance to God. Whatever tempts a disciple to cling to this world’s life must be removed much as a surgeon amputates a gangrenous limb. Although we rely on God’s power for deliverance, the Scriptures are clear about the mandate for men to take the initiative to pursue holiness.

**Pursue Accountability**
James 5:13-20 has traditionally been interpreted as a passage for God to heal sick people in the realm of the common cold. However, the context is clear that the sickness mentioned here is that of spiritual sickness. This particular context seems to be showing a backsliding person whom God wants to bring healing by using other Christians. Plainly, part of this healing comes through confessing and praying with other believers.

Having someone in your life to be authentic with about areas of temptation and struggle is essential. This person or people can continue to pray on your behalf while at the same time helping you stay accountable as you seek to honor God. Accountability is only a blessing if people really desire it. The Bible teaches that accountability is one way the Lord uses to bring healing in Christ.

**Application Questions**
1. What are three ways that you are tempted?
2. What does the Bible say about those temptations?
3. What are steps you can take to not gratify those temptations?

**Memory Verses**
1 Corinthians 10:13
James 1:12-13

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?*
Spiritual Gifts

Ephesians 4:11-12

11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

Introduction

Every believer is called to be filled with the Spirit – to yield to His rule in every area of our lives by continually putting off sin and putting on Christ-likeness. We confess, or agree with God about the existence and ugliness of our sin. Then we accept His forgiveness and turn toward God, reminding ourselves of His truth and allowing His Spirit to re-create that area of our lives for the good of the Body of Christ.

It is important to remember that, upon conversion, the Spirit indwells every member of the Body of Christ. He immediately gives us a new heart that is alive in Christ. But He does not stop there; the Spirit then births in us ongoing desire for Christ and moves us toward Him.1 As the Spirit lives in us, He bears fruit in us. It is inevitable, because God is good and can do no wrong. Good trees bear good fruit. And none of this is from ourselves. Even as we strive mightily against sin and for righteousness, we recognize that every step is made in God’s power 2 and every good work was prepared in advance by God Himself.3

Let’s now bring the abstract notion of fruit down to earth. While the list of fruits that Paul gives the Galatians – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – is perhaps the best known, it does not stand alone. Fruits are nothing more than godly characteristics that are listed and mentioned piecemeal through Scripture. The apostle Peter builds a similar case to Paul’s, starting with our participation in God’s power and divine nature through the Spirit and moving on to the development of godlike characteristics.

2 Peter 1:3-8

These characteristics are not optional. They are inseparable from true faith, which lives life based on the certain hope of reward found in Jesus Christ. We emphasize this now, at the beginning of our discussion of spiritual gifts with talk of spiritual fruit because it is all too easy to forget about our common calling when faced with the idea of particular gifts. Every believer is called to a life of balanced godliness and to make every effort to see godliness developed in the lives of others. Gifts are an additional grace in the life of the believer meant to increase their ability to see the body around them built up. Thus, gifts augment, not replace, our common calling.

Paul on Spiritual Gifts

With that foundation laid, let’s talk more specifically about the gifts. We will use Paul’s discussion in 1 Corinthians 12-14 as our framework as it offers the most thorough look of any passage in Scripture. Do not miss the emphasis on loving unity that runs from the beginning of the discussion to its end, for that is entirely the point of gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

1 Ezekiel 36:26-27
2 Colossians 1:29
3 Ephesians 2:10
**Spiritual Gifts v. Natural Gifts**

While there are many disagreements in the discussion of spiritual gifts, there are a few things that everyone should be able to agree on. First, spiritual gifts are all given by the same Spirit, the Holy Spirit and third member of the Trinity. As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out, this differentiates spiritual gifts from natural gifts.

We all have natural gifts, but the spiritual gift, which any one of us may possess, is something separate from and entirely different from this. It is a gift that is given directly to us by the Holy Spirit. Let us go further and say that it does not even mean the heightening of a natural gift. Some people have fallen into that error. They have thought that what a spiritual gift really means is that a person’s natural gift is taken hold of by the Holy Spirit and heightened or made more vivid so that it therefore becomes a spiritual gift. But that is not what the Scripture would have us believe. A spiritual gift is something new, something different.4

Not only are they given by the Holy Spirit, they are given according to His sovereign will. In other words, He gives gifts “just as he determines”5 and arranges “the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.”6 This takes away any room for entitlement on the behalf of the receiver. As Lloyd-Jones explains further:

It is He who decides and not us. He decides what particular gift to give to a particular person. And I wonder whether we are going too far when we say that the idea of the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in the dispensing of these gifts carries implicitly not only the which and the to whom but also the when; that it is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit, in His sovereign power as one of the three Persons in the blessed holy Trinity, not only to decide what person and what gift, but also when to give particular gifts, to withhold them if He chooses and to give them if He chooses. He is Lord.7

**Spiritual Gifts and Unity**

The purpose of gifts is to bring about unity and maturity within the Body. This is the “common good” spoken of in verse seven and is made clear in the discussion that follows.

- 1 Corinthians 12:12-20

Paul uses the imagery of the body is to reinforce in the minds of his audience the purpose of spiritual gifts. As Christians, the reality is that we have become members of the body of Christ and every member of the Body of Christ has been given a gift by the Spirit.8 With the gift comes the opportunity and responsibility to build up the body by developing and using our gift for the good of other believers. As Paul says elsewhere, the goal of building up the body is that “we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”9

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5 1 Corinthians 12:11
8 1 Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 4:7
9 Ephesians 4:12–13
Every local body should aspire to be mature, with each of its members doing his or her part to build up the whole. Only then, Paul says, will we be giving the world a full and accurate image of its God. Though the church is made up of an incredibly diverse mix of individuals, we have one Spirit living in us all. Our diversity working in otherworldly unity is the defining characteristic of the church in the world.¹⁰

**Spiritual Gifts and Diversity**

A third principle that is readily apparent from the text is that every single Christian receives a gift that is necessary to the life of the Body, but varying in regard to value and honor. The great danger of varying natural and spiritual giftings within the Body is that they will distract from its unity, which is why Paul gives so much time to talking about the interdependence of the various parts of the Body.

- 1 Corinthians 12:21-31

The fact that Paul says “eagerly desire the greater gifts” leaves little room for discussion about varying value among gifts. It is not hard to imagine that the order of gifts – apostle, prophets, teachers, miracles, healings, tongues, interpretation – is purposeful and denotes, in descending order, their value to the church. However, even more significant is where Paul goes from this point. He proceeds to write one of the best known chapters in all of the Bible on the “most excellent way” of love.

- 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

**Spiritual Gifts and Love**

This brings us to our fourth principle regarding gifts: all gifts are to be used within the context of love for others. Without love, even the most gifted of humans gains nothing. As Lloyd-Jones points out, love is the measure of a person’s spiritual state, not giftedness:

Paul is most concerned to emphasize that whatever the gift, it must be used in love, which, indeed, entitles us to say that you should never estimate or judge a person’s spirituality solely in terms of the gifts that are possessed. These two things do not always run parallel. A man or woman may have a remarkable gift and yet may be failing in certain respects, so you cannot always equate these things...You will often find in the history of the Church, and especially perhaps in the history of revivals, that God has chosen men and women with few natural gifts and has given them some remarkable spiritual gifts. I repeat, on both counts we must never be quick to make deductions about people solely on the basis of the gift that they possess. There are these other factors that have to be brought into consideration. So all the gifts must be used in love. Ultimately they are of no value to us and we shall not profit by them unless we use them in love. The gift may be used, as God could use people like Cyrus and others in the Old Testament, but it does not necessarily tell us anything about the state of the soul.¹¹

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¹⁰ John 17:23  
No Universal Gift
The last principle that seems readily obvious from this passage is that there is no universal gift. While some will argue that a particular gift, such as tongues, will be manifested by all who are baptized of the Holy Spirit that is simply not what we see in this passage. Instead Paul points again and again to the uniqueness of our gifts. Everyone gets one, but not everyone gets the same one. This is the clear implication of Paul’s questioning, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?”12

Specific Spiritual Gifts
Now let’s move on to consider specific gifts. Most of the disagreements come here and center around which gifts are still being given today. Are all gifts meant for the Church at all times? Or were some temporary and others permanent? For these questions there is no final answer. But, as we move through the list of gifts we will offer you some food for thought. Please understand that the following list, just as any in Scripture, is not meant to be exhaustive but representative. Any aspect of godliness that is given in an extra measure of grace can likewise be thought of as a gift.

1. Apostleship. The word apostle means “messenger” or “one sent by another.” In a general sense, we are all “sent ones” of Jesus Christ as each of us is called to go and make disciples on His behalf. However, the gift of apostleship carries with it very specific criteria as Easton’s Bible dictionary explains it was characteristic of the apostles and necessary that 1) they should have seen the Lord, and been able to testify of Him and of His resurrection from personal knowledge;13 2) they must have been immediately called to that office by Christ;14 3) they must be infallibly inspired, and thus secured against all error and mistake in their public teaching, whether by word or by writing;15 4) and possess the power of working miracles.16 In light of these criteria, many Christians believe that the twelve disciples and Paul are the only ones who have had this gift.17

2. Prophecy. In biblical terms, a prophet is a spokesman for God, speaking both in God’s name and His authority. As Easton’s Bible dictionary explains, “The foretelling of future events was not a necessary but only an incidental part of the prophetic office. The great task assigned to the prophets whom God raised up among the people was ‘to correct moral and religious abuses, to proclaim the great moral and religious truths which are connected with the character of God, and which lie at the foundation of his government.’”18 While all Christians are called to be truth-tellers, the gift of prophecy entails the distinction of bring new revelations from God to his people. Many believe that this gift existed only prior to the closing of the canon of

12 1 Corinthians 12:29-30
13 John 15:27; Acts 1:21, 22; 1 Corinthians 9:1; Acts 22:14, 15
14 Luke 6:13; Galatians 1:1
15 John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:13
16 Mark 16:20; Acts 2:43; 1 Corinthians 12:8–11
17 The most notable exception is the Roman Catholic Church which claims “that she has been receiving revelation exactly as the apostles and prophets did, that she is as inspired as they were, that certain truth has been revealed to her since the end of the canon. That is why the Church has promulgated its doctrine of the immaculate conception and, more recently, the assumption of the Virgin Mary, and so on. It is claimed, you see, that the bishops are the continuation of the apostles and that there is inspiration today as there was then.” (Lloyd-Jones, D. M. (1997). God the Holy Spirit (267–268). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossways Books).
Scripture – a foundation upon which the church has been built and has no need to add on to.\textsuperscript{19}

3. **Teaching.** This involves reminding others of God’s truth and instructing them to obey it. In contrast to prophecy, teaching involves continually retelling God’s age-old truths in relevant ways and not attempting to bring forth new truth to God’s people. Teaching is clearly expected of every Christian. It was in Jesus’ mind an essential part of making disciples\textsuperscript{20} and has been an expectation of God’s people as early as the days of Abraham.\textsuperscript{21} However, the gift of teaching is an additional grace, which is to say that some will be more effective at bearing fruit through teaching than others. In choosing our teachers we must remind ourselves that this gift is a spiritual one and has nothing to do with natural talents or training.

4. **Miracles.** The miracles of the apostles and other leaders of the early church were performed in Jesus’ name, in continuation of His ministry and in the power of the Spirit that He sent. As with other spiritual gifts, the debate of whether the gift of miracles was confined to the apostolic age continues. But we may at least say that the New Testament miracles were distinct from any subsequent ones by virtue of their immediate connection with the full manifestation of the incarnate Son of God.\textsuperscript{22}

5. **Speaking/Interpreting Tongues.** Speaking in tongues is the spiritual gift that generates the most controversy today. The following seem certain: 1) speaking in tongues is a Spirit-inspired utterance; 2) the regulations for its use make it clear that the speaker is not in ecstasy or out of control, but rather, the speaker must speak in turn and must remain silent if there is no one to interpret;\textsuperscript{23} 3) it is speech unintelligible to both the speaker and other hearers, and is directed basically toward God. The interpretation of tongues is an obvious companion to speaking in tongues, precisely because of the unintelligibility of the latter. The interpretation of what the speaker said is for the benefit of the community.\textsuperscript{24}

The previous list only included gifts that Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:29-30. Other spiritual gifts listed in Scripture include: service, exhortation, generosity, leadership, mercy, faith, wisdom, knowledge, helps, and evangelism.\textsuperscript{25}

**Conclusion**

After reading through the above descriptions, you may well find yourself wondering what your particular gift is. In any case, gifts are discovered over time as you take part in the life of the Body. Everyone has gifts, though not everyone will know or see their gifts quickly. Some gifts will take years to show themselves or be revealed. Any gift comes from the Lord. Thus, it does not flow from our natural talents nor can we create or conjure a gift up for ourselves. We must wait on His timing; we cannot force Him to do anything, let alone produce gifts in our lives.

\textsuperscript{19} See Ephesians 2:20 and Revelation 21:18-19
\textsuperscript{20} Matthew 28:18-20
\textsuperscript{21} Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 6:1-9
\textsuperscript{23} 1 Corinthians 14:27-28
\textsuperscript{25} Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11
Still, knowing our gifts and developing them through proper use is essential of the unity and maturation of the Body. So, ask the Lord for guidance in discovering and understanding your gift(s). Seek out the counsel of believers, specifically our leaders, disciplers, and other Christians with whom we enjoy regular contact for insight into your gifts.

In the process of obeying the Lord, you will find some things that seem to come more naturally and other things that do not. Explore the former without forsaking the latter aspects of godliness. Always remember, particular gifts do not excuse a neglect of those aspects of godliness that do not come easily.

All gifts should be discussed at a point of maturity in the believer’s life. That is to say, it is not among the first discussions that you would have with a new believer but only after a period of training and discovering how the Lord has particularly gifted a certain believer. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is for every believer and should be presented to a new believer after they have grasped certain doctrines, such as salvation, grace, etc. Discussing gifts with the believer comes after a time of obedience in holiness and godliness. Too many believers have been thrown into intense areas of ministry, without proper time to nurture his or her tender heart to obey the Lord. Nurture the young believer, expecting quality and consistently produced fruit, and give him or her time to truly take root in his or her faith.

Application Questions
1. What are some of the roles of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer?
2. What are the differences between fruits and gifts?
3. What is the Spirit’s primary goal and how do fruit and gifts contribute to that?
4. Take a sober look at your life. Is there an area in which you feel like you have been given an additional measure of grace in order to bring Jesus glory? Would (or do) others agree with you about the gifting?
5. How have you used your gift(s) in the past? Did it benefit the body or yourself?

Memory Verse
1 Corinthians 12:29-30
Romans 12:6-8

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?
Caring for God’s Creation

Genesis 2:15
15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Introduction
Caring for creation is hard work, and our American culture mentality of “I do what’s best for me” completely opposes it. We are bombarded with messages and advertisements telling us to make life easier and more convenient, and our own selfishness tendencies tell us “no one else is doing it” and “my contribution really won’t make a difference.” We may know that we have been given dominion over creation, but often we do not pause to consider what this means.

- Genesis 1:1-2:15

In this passage, we see God create. We see Him create intentionally and orderly. He creates for the first three days (day/night; sky/water; water/land), and fills what He created for the next 3 days (sun/stars/moon; sea creatures/birds; animals/mankind). With each step, we see the Lord create each “according to their kinds.” And with each step, the Lord sees what He made and declares that it is good.

God’s View of His Creation
Let us draw a few conclusions about God’s view of His creation.

1. God Appointed Humans as Stewards of His Planet. Genesis 2:15 says, “The Lord God placed man in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” He makes man’s position in relation to the rest of creation clear in Genesis 1:28 as He tells man to “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Man is given a special role of authority and power over all creation. It is important to note that the “dominion” that God gives man is not a selfish mentality but an authoritative-yet-responsible mentality. He has given us great honor in this position.1 God has entrusted us as stewards with His creation, as we work, care for and rule over it. Let us resist the urge to merely think about creation as something to serve our individual needs.

2. Everything God Made is Good. After creating the light, sky, earth, plants, sun, moon and stars, birds and fish, terrestrial animals, and finally man and woman, God looks at what He created and declared, it is good.” He made each and every insect, variety of grass, ape, bird, etc. with great intentionality, and He values what He has made. God affirms His creation.

3. God Loves the World He Created. He loves the whole world. We often read John 3:16 as “God loves the people in the world,” but this is not what it says. While mankind is special amongst all creation, it is clear that God loves all of His creation and all of it will one day be re-created.2

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1 Psalm 8:3-9
2 Romans 8:18-25
4. **What God Made Belongs to Him, Not Us.** From the creation account to Psalms to Jesus’ parables, we see very clearly that everything is the Lord’s. This should give us great humility regarding our surroundings.\(^3\)

5. **God Told the Land and Animals to be Fruitful and Multiply, Not Just Humans.** Therefore, we should be concerned with their ability to do that (i.e. not decreasing their habitats/food supplies when unnecessary or for wasteful purposes).

6. **Everything Was Created to Glorify God.** The Scriptures are clear that all of creation exists to bring glory to God. Everything is expected to acknowledge and appreciate God’s power, majesty, holiness, wisdom and love.\(^4\)

7. **God Reveals Himself Through His Creation.** God uses creation to display His own marvelous qualities and nature. “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”\(^5\) He uses His creation to draw people out of darkness to Himself as people see His beauty displayed on earth.

**Common Misconceptions**

Before we get practical on how to live this out, let us first deal with some common misconceptions regarding creation.

1. **The Earth is Going to Burn Up.** This is poor (though popular) theology. God is not going to destroy the earth, but re-create it. Rather than annihilating all creation, God will transform creation into its originally intended unmarred state.\(^6\) Even though God will redeem what sin has marred, to absolve ourselves of responsibility completely disregards the principles of stewardship that God has given us.

2. **God Gave us the Earth to Use, So We Shouldn’t Worry.** God did give us the earth to support the needs of all living things, and He has allowed us to use its resources for that end. However, He is the owner and He gave it to all of us. We receive creation from our predecessors and pass on the responsibility to steward it for generations to come.

3. **People Are Vastly More Important Than Nature.** It is true that God has created man to be most prominent in His creation, as He specifically made man in His image. Though God has given man great responsibility and honor, He has made and called all things “good.” Therefore, people and nature should not be made enemies. God does not ask us to choose one to care for. Both are made by His hands and are loved by Him. He expects man to live in such a way that both people and the rest of creation are nurtured. On a practical note, to suggest that nature can be disregarded or treated as second rate is ignorant. We are just as dependent on creation as are all the other living creatures we share the earth with. The more marred the earth is, the more humankind suffers.

4. **My Efforts Won’t Make a Difference.** While it is discouraging that only a few people attempt to care for God’s creation, God never allows us to disobey simply

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\(^3\) Exodus 9:28-30; Psalm 50:10-11; Psalm 24:1-3  
\(^4\) Psalm 103:20-22; Psalm 145:21; Isaiah 55:12-13; Psalm 96:11-13  
\(^5\) Romans 1:20  
\(^6\) Matthew 19:28; Acts 3:21; Romans 8
because others are. We must acknowledge and respond to our mandate to steward God’s creation.

Do We Have an Impact on Creation?
While some things are up for debate, many are not. We can clearly see with our own eyes many of the negative effects that human activities have on creation, like factories with hazardous smoke stacks and corporations that dump chemical waste into rivers. And although there is disagreement among scientists about climate change and humankind’s impact on it, the majority clearly sees a strong correlation. There is great consensus that many negative effects have been had on our air, our atmosphere, our oceans, our freshwater and our land.

We must admit that keeping the environment clean and unpolluted, caring for all species, leaving the earth as undamaged as possible for the next generation models reverence for our Creator, love for our fellow human beings (even those yet to be born), and the selflessness of Christ to a self-consumed world.

Analyzing Our Society: Consumerist and Wasteful
To properly see ourselves in relation to the earth, we need to step back and look at our culture from the outside. We live in a consumerist and rushed society; one that is overtly indulgent and self-focused. We are told to “get all you can, can all you get, and sit on the can.” In the United States alone, we represent only 5% of the world’s population, and yet we consume 30% of the world’s resources and produce 30% of the world’s trash. Our houses have grown larger (the average house doubled in size since the 1970s) as our families have shrunk in size. The more space we have, the greater tendency we have to buy more stuff to fill it – stuff that accumulates, needs to be managed, cleaned, organized, and then disposed of when we no longer find pleasure in it. We consume twice as much as we did 50 years ago.

Practical Next Steps
As we grow conviction about our role as stewards of God’s creation, our view of how we interact with our surroundings should change. Our minds and hearts should increasingly see life through His lens, which should begin to shape our daily choices. Below are three suggested starting points.

Reduce Waste
1. Buy Less. Recycling is good, but good stewardship begins by with careful purchasing. Analyze before you buy. Think about your purchases for at least a week before buying to make sure they are wise purchases.
2. Choose Reusable Options. Consider using cloth diapers, cloth napkins or old kitchen towels.
3. Buy in Bulk and Reduce Packaging. Bulk purchases save both money and packaging. It also saves trips to the store. You can split bulk items with a friend, freeze items, put into airtight storage containers, etc. Try to eliminate individual size

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7 In January 2006, 86 evangelical Christian leaders issued a statement entitled “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action” that was based on the claims: 1) human-induced climate change is real; 2) the consequences of climate change will be significant, and will hit the poor the hardest; 3) Christian moral convictions demand our response to the climate change problem; and 4) the need to act now is urgent.
containers (i.e. yogurt, soda, juice boxes, etc.). Nearly a 1/3 of our household garbage comes from packaging.

4. **Recycle and Repurpose.** Find new purposes for things you no longer need (i.e. old clothes as rags, jars as food storage containers, etc.).

5. **When You Buy, Buy Quality.** As much as possible, try to buy things that will last a long time. This not only saves you time, but saves unnecessary disposal of cheap materials.

6. **Buy Used Instead of New.** When you can, make the most of used products. Think soberly about what really needs to be “new.”

7. **Reduce Junk Mail.** Do not receive catalogs that you do not need and get your name removed from junk mail.

8. **Compost.** Make your soil richer while reducing the amount of waste that needs to be hauled away from your home.

9. **Give Away Your Money.** A great solution to overconsumption is being generous.

**Eliminate Toxic Material Usage**

1. **Use Healthy Cleaning Supplies and Avoid Toxic Materials.** Use healthy cleaning supplies and avoid toxic materials. Most toxins in our homes are ones we brought in via our cleaning supplies. Not only do they pose health risks for some people, but they leave our houses moving down the waste stream, ending up somewhere else in creation. Use nontoxic supplies, i.e. baking soda, vinegar, lemon juice, salt, borax, etc.

2. **When Possible, Buy Organic.** We often think that organic is just about not consuming chemicals and pesticides for ourselves and our families through the foods we eat. It is that but so much more. By purchasing foods from “organic” farmers, we build up the businesses of farmers who don’t spray their fields with artificial fertilizers and pesticides, which run into the soil and then as it rains get washed into our waterways.

**Use Less Fossil Fuel and Use More Renewable Energy Sources**

1. **Eat Real, Local Food.** In the U.S., fruits and vegetables travel an average of 1500 miles. By purchasing real local food, we eat healthier (more nutrients, less artificial preservatives and ripening chemicals used), we prevent environmental damage (by requiring far less transportation), and encourage local economy by helping sustain local farmers. Buy from local farmers at the farmers market, join a CSA (community supported agriculture), or even better grow your own. Eating real food (not processed), improves health and decreases packaging and energy usage needed to convert crops into “food products.”

2. **Conserve Energy.** Know how much energy your family consumes. Set goals to reduce your consumption each year. Be specific on how you can accomplish this (i.e. shorter showers, heat turned down, add storm windows, etc.).

3. **Use Less Fossil Fuel.** Live close to work. Consolidate your trips. Drive a more fuel-efficient vehicle. Bike or walk when possible. Consider the impact of your carbon footprint (e.g. use carboncounter.org).

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8 Take advantage of garage sales, craigslist.org, freecycle.com, etc.
9 Use resources like dmachoice.org/consumerassistance.php, greendimes.com, and 41pounds.org
10 2 Corinthians 8:7
4. **Do Building Remodels and New Builds Right.** Research the latest energy efficient materials and techniques and incorporate as many as possible into your plans when re-modeling or building from scratch.

**Conclusion**

God has given us clear mandates to care for and steward His incredible creation. We must take this to heart, and we must recognize that this surfaces a huge battle in our hearts. Are we willing to give up what we want for the sake of others, creation, and our Creator? John Stott said, “We must learn to think and act ecologically. We repent of extravagance, pollution and wanton destruction. We recognize that human beings find it easier to subdue the earth than they do to subdue themselves.”

**Application Questions**

1. What is your view of God’s creation?
2. Have you found yourself buying into any of the stated lies?
3. What is your biggest inhibitor in stewarding creation?
4. What aspects of creation do you care well for now?
5. How can you begin to make changes? Write out a specific plan.

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?*
Parenting

Ephesians 6:4
4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Introduction
The task of parenting is both a privilege and responsibility. The awesome reality can quickly feel overwhelming in that God entrusts these helpless little image-bearers to us. Whether parenting biological children, adopted children or foster children, parents experience great joys and hardships as they navigate the ins and outs of child rearing. It is common to question numerous parenting decisions on a daily basis. How does God expect us to handle this profound responsibility? What does healthy parenting look like?

Mandate to Bear His Image
In the beginning, Genesis establishes God as the Creator of all things, culminating with the creation of humanity.1 “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”2 Then, God blesses the man and woman saying, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.”3 God, who has authority over humanity, then gives humanity authority over His creation and asks that humanity steward the earth well, reflecting Him in that stewardship. We are most human when we reflect God well.

So what is the implication of man being created in the image of God? It does not mean that man physically looks like God, but that he, like God, was created with a spiritual nature and a moral likeness to God. Unlike any other part of God’s creation, Man was created to reflect God’s character (His love, compassion, kindness, mercy, grace, patience, etc). However, sin has distorted this image and only in Christ is this likeness fully restored.

Through parenting, God has graciously allowed humanity to be “image bearers.” As parents, we sometimes realize this in the literal sense by our children physically resembling us, however it is also realized in the spiritual sense. Our children, like us, are born into sin and often we see them resemble the same sin tendencies we have as a result of our parenting. In their sin, they too wear a distorted image apart from Christ. In Christ, we are born again and have the right to be called children of God, and by the power of the Holy Spirit we can truly bear God’s image, resembling Him in spiritual and moral likeness.4 So, how do we raise children that bear God’s image?

God’s design for parenting expands far beyond childbearing. Scripture clearly requires a strong parental role in a child’s spiritual direction. Parental influence is paramount in shaping a child’s worldview.

Mandate to Teach God’s Ways
After relaying the Law to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, Moses declares to them an important statement, found in the verse below.

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1 Genesis 1
2 Genesis 1:26a, 27
3 Genesis 1:28
4 John 1:12-13, 3:3-7; 1 John 5:18-19
Deuteronomy 6:1-9

We see in the above passage a mandate for Israel to meditate on the law of the Lord at all times, doing everything possible to impress it on the hearts of the children. This passage equates obedience to the Law with long life and prosperity.\(^5\) It places great emphasis on the need for Israel and the generations to come to fear the Lord and keep His commands. This mandate continues to be true for Christian parents today.

As Spiritual Israel,\(^6\) the Church today is given the same directive in parenting.\(^7\) Empowered by the Holy Spirit, parents are instructed to teach their children God’s ways. Children need to be guided toward true wisdom and understanding, which can only be found in a relationship with Christ. Therefore, parents must be intentional about teaching their children that God’s ways lead to life.\(^8\) Specifically, Scripture exhorts parents to faithfully and purposefully teach children in the ways of the Lord by imparting truth, modeling dependence, training in righteousness and correcting disobedience.

**Impart**

The Deuteronomy 6 passage exhorts parents to impress the commands of the Lord on their children’s hearts, taking every opportunity given to impart to them the truth of God’s Word. As parents, we are to instruct our children in the Word when they are sitting or walking, when they get up in the morning and lay down in the evening. We are to surround them with the Word of God. So, do we honor this command in our parenting or is it optional? Do we feel ill-equipped to teach are children the truth of God, because in our own lives we fail to make time for study in His Word? Do we believe falsely that the role of teaching our children is to be left to our Sunday School teachers and youth group leaders?

The Word of God is vital to our lives and the lives of our children. We know God through His Word (His character, His faithfulness, His standards and His wisdom) and we understand ourselves as well (our sin and our need for a Savior). If we fail to teach our children the story of God now, we can only hope that they will one day come to know the Lord later in life. We must believe that true life is in the Word of God and impart that life to our children.\(^9\) We rob our children when we nurture their need for nutrition, physical activity, and mental stimulus, but neglect their need for God. For it is written, Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.\(^10\) We must obey the Lord concerning our children’s need for His instruction.

**Model**

As we instruct our children in God’s word, we must also model that we believe God’s truth ourselves. Children quickly reach a stage after birth where they mimic everything they see their parents doing. They pretend to drink coffee like mom, or they say they are going to work like

\(^{5}\) See also Joshua 1:8  
\(^{6}\) Romans 9  
\(^{7}\) Ephesians 6:4  
\(^{8}\) Psalm 119  
\(^{9}\) John 1:4, 6:48; 1 John 5:12; Luke 12:22-34  
\(^{10}\) Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 3:3
dad. They watch everything we do and with them reflecting us like mirrors, we become much more aware of the things we do as parents. They bear our image, but who do we reflect? As already stated, we were created to reflect God. In Christ, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to reflect God. Like Paul, we should be able to say to our children, “follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”\textsuperscript{11} Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we should seek to model Christ in character,\textsuperscript{12} in prayer,\textsuperscript{13} and in dependence on the Father.\textsuperscript{14} In all things, we need to pursue holiness and model submission to the Lord. Our children are watching us very closely and they will do what we do. Do we love our children with Christ-like love, modeling compassion, long-suffering and grace? Do we model what it looks like to be broken about our own sin: confessing, repenting and receiving forgiveness? Do we spend time with God in His Word, showing Him to be the first priority in our lives? Do we demonstrate His character in our relationships with our spouses, friends, employers, etc? We must take seriously our role as God’s image bearer in parenting.

**Train**

As we model dependence on the Lord, we must train our children in righteousness, equipping them to obey the Lord. Both imparting truth and modeling obedience are essential to the equipping component of parenting, but this next section will focus on empowering our children toward obedience to the Lord. “Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it.”\textsuperscript{15} How do we train our children to make decisions that honor the Lord?

As parents, we have the responsibility to point are children’s hearts toward honoring God in every area of life. We were created to worship and reflect God, but sin has blinded our eyes and the result is misdirected worship and a blurred reflection. Without Christ, our children, like us, are misguided in their worship. We see this everyday in the lives of our kids. They worship play, toys, snack-time, anything that brings momentary pleasure. They will either worship God or idols. So, how do we inspire our children to worship God and not fun?

The greatest part of the training component of teaching is the act of guiding the hearts of our children toward worshipping God. Does the home environment provide an atmosphere where the heart of God is known (think of the TV shows watched, music listened to, words spoken, character displayed, etc)? Do we challenge the idolatry in our child’s heart with God’s truth? Are we lazy in our parenting, making excuses for the way our children behave? What are some ways, we can train our children to think about the deeper things of God? Do we allow are children to feel the weight of their sin condition or do we pump their heads with a false sense of self, showing more concern for their self esteem than their brokenness concerning God’s standards? We must actively train our children in how to honor the Lord by guiding them toward worshipping Him. We must teach them how to pray, show God’s love to others and repent of their sins. We must share the Gospel with them often, giving them the opportunity to choose Christ and righteousness through Him. We must never grow tired of praying for our children, remembering that they are the Lord’s and He has a plan for them. There are no easy answers. We must think creatively about how we can equip and empower our children to make decisions that honor the Lord. This may look like intentional conversations, ministering together

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\textsuperscript{11} 1 Corinthians 11:1  
\textsuperscript{12} Philippians 2:1-11  
\textsuperscript{13} Matthew 5:5-14  
\textsuperscript{14} John 5:19  
\textsuperscript{15} Proverbs 22:6
to others who are broken and in need of the Christ, or teaching them to pray when they experience the weight of their disobedient and sinful hearts. Whatever the case, we must not give the responsibility of training our children to other people and we cannot afford to be lazy concerning this mandate.

Correct
It is impossible to guide our children toward worshipping God, without providing them correction for sin. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God (child of God) may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Correction is a blessing from the Lord. The definition of the word correct is “to make right.” When we correct our children in the Lord, we acknowledge their wrong and lead them toward righteousness. When we hesitate to provide our children correction, we hurt them and lead them toward destruction. Ironically, we often fail to discipline our children, because of a warped sense of what love is. Children often reject discipline (at least initially) and because we hate to see them hurt we fail to correct them. The Scriptures reveal that correction is loving. God corrects us out of love, wanting us to reflect His holiness. We must do the same with our children.

What does correction look like? We must pray that our motivation in correcting our children is loving. Correction done out of anger can be extremely hurtful. It is important to remember that our children’s sin is, primarily, against God. This should sadden us and inform our heart’s motivation for the corrective action. They have broken God’s standard and it is important for them to know it. We must reveal the truth of God as we correct. Once their sin is revealed, there must be a consequence for that sin. The child needs to understand that there is a consequence to sin, but correction must also be redemptive. Explain to the child, the penalty for sin and that Christ paid the penalty. Guide the child in asking for forgiveness and receiving forgiveness. We must assure the child of our love and allow them to experience reconciliation and grace. Is it important that we truly extend forgiveness in this process as Christ has forgiven us. We cannot hold grudges or harbor anger toward our children lest they believe the lie that grace is earned. No, grace is a gift and we must be careful that we do not shame our children or hold things over their heads in our effort to “teach” them. The gospel should be central in our correction, for in the gospel we recognize the awesome holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the redemptive love of Christ and the beauty of grace. We must fight the lie that discipline will hurt our children. Discipline in love leads to righteousness.

Lies in Parenting
1. My Child Needs a Friend, Not a Parent. Parents who buy into this belief tend to have a hard time recognizing the authority of the parent in the relationship. They fail to acknowledge the responsibility of the parent to guide a child toward righteousness. This may be the result of insecurities they developed from their own upbringings, where authority was either abused or nonexistent. Also, they may have an unhealthy desire for the child’s approval.

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16 2 Timothy 3:16  
17 Job 5:17-18  
18 Proverbs 29:15; 5:12-15; 15:5, 10, 32; 12:1  
19 Hebrews 12:5b-6  
20 Proverbs 22:15, 23:13-14
• **Lie:** Authority is negative and love equals approval.
• **Truth:** God is our authority and he has given us a place of authority over our children. We are to exercise this authority in love, not dominating our children but accepting God’s mandate to parent them well. Christ did not exercise authority in a domineering way, but in humility, He became a servant, paying the penalty for our sins. When we exercise authority that guides our children toward righteousness, we demonstrate great love to them.

2. **My Child’s Success in Life is My First Priority.** Parents who buy into this belief tend to make idols out of their children, putting their wants and desires first. The child gets everything they want and seldom gets told no. These parents can be overly concerned with their child’s performance in life and how their child is perceived by others.

• **Lie:** Children belong to their parents.
• **Truth:** Children belong to God and, like their parents, are called to be about His kingdom and priorities.

3. **My Child is Only Deserves My Love When He or She Obeys Me.** Parents who buy into this belief tend to dominate their children, demonstrating a warped notion of authority. They may place the emphasis of a child’s worth on behavior instead of being made in God’s image.

• **Lie:** That a child’s sin is primarily against the parent and not God, and his worth is defined by his obedience.
• **Truth:** A child’s sin is against God primarily, and he has value because he is made in the image of God.

4. **My Needs Take Priority Over the Needs of My Children.** Parents who buy into this belief may be passive or neglectful in their parenting. They tend to lack conviction that parenting is both a privilege and responsibility. The passive parent may be present, but not actively involved in parenting. Also, the parent may be altogether absent.

• **Lie:** Children are a burden and parenting is optional.
• **Truth:** Children are a joy and a gift from the Lord. Hopefully, the things already discussed in this document has built conviction that active parenting is a mandate from the Lord.

5. **My Child Will Learn If He or She Experiences Shame and Ridicule.** Parents who buy into this belief tend to have a warped view of sin, correction, and grace. They often belittle their children, hoping it will result in obedience. They may also use fear or intimidation to manipulate obedience from a child.

• **Lie:** That shame corrects sin and that criticism is more effective than approval.
• **Truth:** Jesus died for our sin and our shame. Acknowledging a child’s sin and correcting him is meant to be redemptive and lead to reconciliation, not condemnation.

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21 Philippians 2:6-11
22 Genesis 18:19
23 Matthew 19:14
24 Ephesians 6:4
**Single Parent and the Covenant Community**

Single parents face an additional challenge in parenting that can often leave them feeling overwhelmed and alone. While the spiritual mandate in parenting is the same as for a two-parent household, it can often feel like too much responsibility for one person. It is important to remember that you are not alone. God is with you and He has given you the Church. Trust the Lord and make yourself vulnerable to a Gospel-centered local body of believers. Invite people into your family life, allowing your children to experience redemptive community.

Covenant Community: do life together, not neglecting the needs of the single parent, the widow or the orphan.\(^\text{25}\) Realize that we are one body called to reflect Christ in our care for one another. We cannot view speaking truth into each other’s parenting as a cultural faux pas. When we participate in a child’s Dedication to the Lord, we are committing to walk along side that child, pointing him toward Christ in all things. Let’s uphold our commitment to God and one another in this area and provide a loving environment, where a child can experience God’s truth and grace.

**Conclusion**

Parenting is a mandate from the Lord. We cannot shirk our responsibility to guide our children toward worshipping God and expect them to have a godly world-view. The Lord has placed them under our authority, so that we will teach them how to bear God’s image well. We are to teach them God’s truth, model dependence on him, train them in righteousness and correct their disobedience in the years that they are entrusted to our care. We were created to reflect God. By the power of the Holy Spirit, let us think seriously about how we can grow families that bear God’s image and point others toward him. This task cannot be taken lightly. Pray that the Lord would continually build conviction in your heart concerning his design for parenting.

**Application Questions**

1. How much do you consider God’s purposes for your child in your parenting? Do you own the Spiritual mandate regarding parenting?
2. What lies do you believe about parenting that you are fighting to give over to the Lord?
3. Are there areas of teaching your children the ways of the Lord where you excel? Where is growth needed? Create a plan for growth.

**Memory Verses**

Deut. 6:1-9

2 Timothy 3:16

**Helpful Parenting Resources**

*Shepherding a Child’s Heart* by Tedd Tripp

*Gospel-Powered Parenting* by William P. Farley

*Don’t Make Me Count to Three* by Ginger Plowman

*Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name* by Sally Lloyd-Jones

*How does this document reinforce your belief in the gospel?*

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\(^{25}\) James 1:27