

Freedom's Journey

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Introduction

Welcome to Freedom's Journey, a Biblical 12-step study with a focus on Jesus Christ as the only true and lasting remedy for sin. This study, although you can do it as a personal devotion, is best utilized in a positive group setting with a mature believer as a facilitator. Rather than merely focusing on sin's dominion over those struggling with addictions, it is important to gain an understanding of the power of God's Holy Word as our means of deliverance from habitual sins. The group does not have a particular emphasis on any one addiction; rather it stresses the vulnerability that is common to man regarding our tendency to make sinful choices along with the importance of allowing the engrafted Word to secure and maintain our freedom in Christ. Whether you are a repentant sinner, a struggling addict or a family member that has been challenged with dysfunction from your past, you will find the information life changing. It is recommended that you take this journey with a support system around you since some of the information and activities may be difficult to digest at times. Looking back to painful issues or memories may seem counter productive to moving forward but most individuals struggling with sin in the present have areas from the past to reconcile. Most importantly, know that God himself paid the price to secure your deliverance from sin's bondage on the cross of Calvary over 2,000 years ago and is excited about you discovering freedom's path. Let us be inspired by the same Words of Truth that the Lord declared to the Israelites as they stood at the brink of the Red Sea, facing a vast ocean before them and the enemy in hot pursuit behind them:

"Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today." Exodus 14:13a (NIV 2011)

Take His hand and watch him part the waters for you. Be ready for this amazing God to lead you in Freedom's Journey.

Twelve Step principle

Confession of Principle 1 - "Realize I'm not God. I admit that I am powerless without Christ to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable."

Confession of Principle 2 - "Earnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to Him, and that He has the power to help me recover."

Confession of Principle 3 - "We make a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God."

Confession of Principle 4 - "We have taken an inventory of ourselves and our ways and have come up short in comparison to God's Standards."

Confession of Principle 5 - "We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

Confession of Principle 6 - "We are entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

Confession of Principle 7: "We humbly ask Jesus to remove all our shortcomings."

Confession of Principle 8: "Make a list of all persons we have harmed and become willing to make amends to them all."

Confession of Principle 9: "Make direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."

Confession of Principle 10: "Continue to take personal inventory and when we are wrong, promptly admit it."

Confession of Principle 11: "I will work through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with God and my understanding of Him, praying only for the knowledge of His will for me and the power to work it out."

Confession of Principle 12: "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we will carry this message to others, and practice these principles in all our affairs."

LESSON 1: STEPPING OUT

Confession of Principle 1 - "Realize I'm not God. I admit that I am powerless without Christ to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable."

Scriptural support for this principle:

Romans 7:18 (NIV) - *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I can not carry it out.*

Matthew 5:3 (NCV) - *They are blessed who realize their spiritual poverty, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.*

Revelation 3:17-21 (NASB) - *Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

DENYING OUR REALITY

Exploring the issue of denial:

What are its effects on our lives?

1. **Repression**: The tendency to stuff down any emotion, feeling, or memory that causes pain and is unresolvable or uncontrollable in our eyes.

Solution: We must confess our tendency to control and manipulate our own lives and destiny by suppressing the conflicts we have been unwilling to face. We must purpose to stay open to facing any of these issues that God would bring to mind. It is important to recognize that God is faithful to guide us through any valley experience and to enrich our lives, as we yield in obedience to this journey, however painful it may seem. (Psalm 23, Hebrews 12:1,2, Psalm 66:16-20)

Biblical Application: EMBRACING GOD'S REALITY

1 Samuel 17 gives us an account of David's defeat of Goliath. The entire Israeli army was paralyzed with fear, unwilling to confront this conflict. This shepherd boy was willing to step out into the battle with this giant when other trained soldiers, including his brothers, cringed in defeat. What possible causes would paralyze this army of men when God had granted them so many miraculous deliverances (Pharaoh's army, Gideon, Joshua and the fallen walls of Jericho)? What might have been the heart

condition of Israel at this time? They had gone through the period of the Judges when everyone did “what was right in their own eyes”; they asked for a king like the other nations, transferring their trust in God to an earthly authority. How about David’s brothers? David was anointed and chosen King of Israel in the presence of all his older brothers in the previous chapter, though he did not move into that position yet. How might this event have affected their ability to trust God? What emotions might they have stuffed down deep in their hearts when they viewed this event firsthand? Embracing God’s reality may not always seem reasonable, but it is always the right thing to do. It may require us to face the giants in our lives, those things that seem impossible to man. It may also be something as simple as facing the daily tasks or routines of life. Whatever our reality may be, God promises to walk beside us. to strengthen us.

2. Exhaustion (spiritual, physical and emotional): The present is difficult to face when we have failed to allow God to help us with past struggles. Exhaustion can take on many forms. A temporary “fix” for this situation is working feverishly to help others, some of whom have more pain than we do. This becomes a band-aid for our own wounds as we become engulfed in the trials of others. We will tend to surround ourselves with those who are looking for a miracle cure and we become the doctor, tending to their wounds in an enabling way. As we become fixated on the problems of others, exhaustion quickly follows. We can never give to others what we ourselves have been unable to receive. Another form of exhaustion is depicted in Psalm 51:3. Trying to maintain life with a guilty conscience can be emotionally draining. We will discuss this Psalm later in more detail. The fruit of a guilty conscience can lead us to taking on various volunteer positions or becoming consumed with other good deeds and activities. The person involved in this type of “atoning work” is trying to pay for past sinful behaviors and actions. Exhaustion, and spiritual burn-out, can take place when we attempt to correct our past failures and shortcomings with rigorous acts of our own righteousness that God labels as “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6).

Points to Ponder

- Do you compare yourself to others whose conditions are much worse than your own?
- Do you relish T.V. shows that highlight the “drama” of others, enjoying their defeat and patting yourself on the back for not being so bad?

We may not be directly involved in atoning work, but still attempt to find relief from our own exhaustion by observing those that are caught up in a bigger rat race than we are experiencing. BEWARE! This type of coping can become a magnet to attract more drama in our own lives.

Solution: Surround yourself with spiritually mature individuals (peers, pastoral and mentor figures) who will encourage you to confront your own issues of failure and defeat.

Biblical Application: TURN TO THE LIGHT

Turn to: Proverbs 28:13. As long as our sins and failures sit in darkness, unacknowledged, they will grow like a cancer, eventually infecting every area of our life. We will only prosper as we reconnect with our Creator in humble repentance. Sinfulness could have been refusing to confront situations that God wants to resolve and heal (Hebrews 10:38,39).

READ: II Samuel 12:1-13

Nathan confronts David with the secret sin that David was denying. David's response was to admit his past issue of failure and accept his consequences. David finally repents in Psalm 51. Looking to Jesus as our role model, along with other successful Christian mentors will keep our focus where it belongs. We must look ahead towards the victory knowing it will only be gained as we face the shameful issues from our past, accept our God-given consequences and press on to triumph. (Hebrews 12:1-7).

3. Isolation: Fear is disguised in many ways. It may hide behind anger, or fits of rage, worry, or even a tormented thought life. Fear can also be isolating ourselves from others and uncomfortable situations. We tend to run from any circumstances or relationships that confront us with what we are trying to avoid.(Jonah)

Solution: Recognize our need for the body of Christ and their need for us.

Biblical Application: WORKING TOGETHER

Turn to: Galatians 6:2, I Corinthians 12:4-31. Scripture asks us to bear one another's burdens. There are trials and situations designed to bring us into a fuller recognition of the many membered body of Christ and the interdependence we have on one another. We must also recognize that we can become socially, emotionally and spiritually stunted the longer we are in isolation. Remember that people who have stayed in isolation for long periods of time may take some time to adjust to being in relationship with others. Many times we have developed negative behavior patterns that are hard to break.

Homework

1. Circle areas that are manageable. Place a box around areas that are unmanageable at this time.

time management	employment	nicotine/smoking	relationship to siblings
caffeine	food	electronics	material possessions
drugs	prescription drugs	sexuality	relationship to spouse
mood/emotions	alcohol	church attendance	relationship to parents
peer relationships	finances	relationship to children	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

2. In order to cope with dysfunction, families tend to have specific roles for each member. This is usually an unconscious decision that results from the temperament or vulnerability of the individuals involved. In your family of origin what role/roles did you most closely resemble? (circle)

PEACEMAKER (tends to want peace at any cost), ***HERO*** (driven to succeed to erase family shame), ***SCAPEGOAT*** (usually blamed for family problems even when not at fault), ***CLOWN*** (uses humor to cover pain), ***TROUBLEMAKER*** (gives up hope of family being successful and engages in risky and unrestrained behaviors sometimes as a payback for family dysfunction)

3. We all have "hot buttons". These are the situations or circumstances that become a catalyst for creating more conflict in areas that are already unmanageable. These triggers can cause us to overreact and spin out of control. They may consciously or subconsciously remind us of past hurts or failures. What are your triggers? (Examples: fight with boss, roommate conflicts, confrontation with a past issue I have been avoiding, harsh words and put downs from those I value, lack of affirmation for a job well done, family disputes, personal failure)

Please list any that would apply including your own ideas of triggers. List them in order of intensity.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

4. Examine the life of David and the rich man through the following passages: (Matthew 19:16-22, II Samuel 11, II Samuel 12:1-13)

Contrast the men's responses to the authorities in their lives. What was the outcome/result of each encounter?

Which biblical character does your life resemble at this time? Explain your answer.

5. What steps have you taken to step out of denial?

6. What steps are you willing to take to step out of denial?

7. Who are those you can trust to hold you accountable through this journey?

8. Explain your heartview of God. How can this view of God help or hinder you in this journey? Optional: you can draw a picture that expresses your view.

**Be prepared to discuss homework in class.
Discuss homework from previous session**

PRIDE: THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Pride is our own attempt to bring dignity into our lives through self effort.

Examples:

1. Tower of Babel- Gen.11:1-9

The people populating the earth at that time decided to construct a city with a tower to reach Heaven. The Lord responded to this vain human effort by scattering the people and their languages.

2. Haman - Esther 3:5; 5:9-14 ; 6:6; 7:10

Haman made every effort to bring down Mordecai for not bowing to him. He constructed a gallows to hang him, plotted the annihilation of his people, the Jews, and tried to manipulate the favor of the King. Haman's plan backfired and he was hung on the same gallows he had built for Mordecai.

In both instances, God intervened and the pride of the individuals/community brought their demise.

READ: Proverbs 11:2, Proverbs 16:18

The beginning of this lesson focused on denial, but we must take a deeper look at what elements of our lives have kept us in the place of denial. Why do we deny our condition? Why do we deny help for our unmanageable life? Why do we tend towards enabling help rather than help that will lead to brokenness and surrender? Though many of us may discover deep shame based fears that cause us to cover up our faults and failures, it is important to understand that the underlying roots of shame can be PRIDE.

Discussion: DENYING OUR CONDITION

“Covering up” for losses we have experienced can be a learned behavior. Many of us have had past generations teach us to be experts at covering up shame issues rather than confronting them. They lacked the understanding to teach us healthier resolves to our shame. We may have learned to use religious facades or masks to cover what we are trying to hide.

READ: Genesis 2:16-17, Genesis 3:1-8 (The fall of man/woman in the garden.)

This is the entrance of the issue of shame upon mankind injected into humanity through Satan's deception. They lose the original “clothing” of His Glory (made in His image), and become fearful and ashamed. They make an attempt to “cover” this shame with their own “clothing”, which is fig leaves! What are the fig leaves we have used to cover the shame we experienced from breaking God's commands? This includes the role playing discussed in the homework on page 3.

READ: Genesis 3:12-13 Our fig leaves can come in the form of excuses or blame transfer rather than taking responsibility for our actions.

Did you use role play, excuses, or facades as a “cover- up” for your weaknesses or failures?

Circle one: Yes No

If yes, describe: _____

Solution: Present ourselves before God without the “fig leaves” (excuses, cover ups, etc.)

READ: Isaiah 1:18-20, I John 1:9

This would include bringing our sinful condition before the Father and confessing our sins. This also includes confessing the facades (fig leaves) we have used to cover our shame.

Biblical Application: DIVINE COVER- UP

Once we resist the enemy's temptation to transgress and cover up, we must be proactive in receiving and putting on the clothing God has designed for us (Genesis 3:21). Redemption restores our position with the Creator by imputing righteousness and exchanging it for our filthy rags or fig leaves (Isa. 64:6, Romans 4:1-8). The animal became the "sacrifice" needed for mankind's transgressions, symbolizing the sacrifice of Christ that was to come, and the skins became the clothing they needed to cover their nakedness. For mankind today, Christ became our sacrifice, the innocent for the guilty much like the animal that was obviously slaughtered for Adam and Eve's clothing. The clothing we now have, as a result of that sacrifice, is Christ himself.

READ: Colossians 3:9-15

The wording "put on" indicates that we must take action! It is also a visual reminder that we have spiritual clothing that can cover us.

Discussion: PUTTING ON SPIRITUAL CLOTHING

How can this understanding solve the dilemma of putting on facades?

What benefit do we get from "putting on" this spiritual clothing?

Colossians 3:15 "And let the _____ of God rule in your hearts, to the which also you are called in one body; and be ye _____."

Peace and gratitude become the byproduct of putting on Christ, which is in sharp contrast to the result of putting on fig leaves.

When we fall short, we are at a crossroad. The next step we take determines if we are following after Adam and Eve's fallen nature and the consequences it brings or the redemption plan of Christ with the benefits it provides. See the following illustration:

Sin-----> Fig leaves (denial, excuses, blame transfer)-----> shame, guilt, alienation from God.

Sin-----> Atonement (admitting, confessing, forsaking)-----> peace, gratitude, intimacy w/God.

If we choose the latter we can have the proper influence on those around us and enjoy the fellowship of others: ***"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."*** - ***Colossians 3:16 (KJV)***

SPECIAL WARNING: "BEWARE: MISERY LOVES COMPANY"

Securing our freedom includes understanding the tools our adversary uses to hook us back into the same cycles of sin and defeat (I Peter 5:8). Satan, our adversary, the king of pride, suffered with a lack of contentment. He was unwilling to accept the assignment and position given to him by the Creator. He wanted to be lifted higher and his pride caused his fall. He rebelled, creating a mutiny in heaven and

bringing many with him.

His assignment and position: Ezekiel 28:13-15

His mutiny: Isaiah 14:12-14

His consequence: Isaiah 14:15 (NIV) “But you are brought down to the _____ (Hell), to the depths of the _____.”

Misery loves company! Satan is still in the business of gathering the discontented. He wants to bring others down with him to the pit of destruction. Our issues of misery become the bait Satan uses to bring about our downfall. Satan tempted Eve into believing that she didn't have everything she needed. This thought enticed her to reach out for what she thought would bring gain. Curiously guided by the Serpent's crafty words, she foolishly sacrificed the glory of God for something that would bring misery and discontent. Independent of God's plans, Adam and Eve disobeyed and pursued what He had commanded them to avoid. Death and destruction quickly followed. Stay away from the miserable and those who grumble about their lot in life. Recognize when you are falling prey to this poison in your own life. Avoid the “pit” of discontentment.

The fig leaves, excuses and cover-ups began in the garden and are still here to entice us today. Although we may derive a temporary peace from putting on facades and acting out various roles in different social settings and circumstances, this will always lead to guilt, frustration and exhaustion setting us up for the next "fix" to cover up our shame. Living a double life always brings torment (James 1:8).

DENYING BIBLICAL SOLUTIONS TO OUR UNMANAGEABLE LIFE

God offers solutions that involve complete restoration - why do we deny it? This homework assignment will give us a specific example of why we can sometimes deny the cures God provides for our unmanageable life.

Homework

ENABLING HELP vs. BIBLICAL SOLUTIONS

READ: *II Kings 5: 1-14*

- 1. What was Naaman's position/title? (vs.1)***
- 2. What problem did Naaman have that he could not manage on his own? (vs.1)***
- 3. Who recommended a solution to his problem? (vs.2-3)***
- 4. What was the solution? (vs.3, 10)***
- 5. What was Naaman's initial response to this solution? (vs.11)***

6. Be prepared to discuss why God would have chosen this solution.

Many times God will provide a way out of our unmanageable life by confronting us with the very same issues that have caused our addictions. This is always for our benefit and serves to provide a lasting solution rather than a “magic cure”. The goal is to get to the root issues that caused the addictions.

7. List any previous solutions that you have rejected in the past.(rehab opportunities, counseling, accountability, etc.)

-
-
-
-
-

8. List any delusions and “magical cures” that you may have engaged in that eventually led you back into bondage. (This includes superficial religious solutions and relationships.)

-
-
-
-
-

Be prepared to discuss the homework in class.

Discuss homework from previous session.

PRIDE’S ENEMY: BROKENNESS AND SURRENDER

What does brokenness and surrender look like?

READ: II Samuel 11: 1-17

Discussion:

1. What was David's downfall? (vs.1-5)

2. What did David do to remedy this unmanageable situation? (vs 6-17)

READ: II Samuel 12:1-20

3. How did God choose to confront David's hidden sin? (vs.1-9)

4. What were the consequences of David's hidden sin?

a. Family Strife: "Behold I will raise up _____ against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy _____ before thine eyes, and give them unto thy _____ and he shall _____ with thy wives in the sight of the sun." (vs.11)

b. Death for his household: "Howbeit because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely _____." (vs. 14)

5. What was David's response to this confrontation? (vs.13)

6. What was David's response to the consequences he received? (vs.16-20)

Initially, David foolishly chose the fig leaf response to sin, which involved covering up his shameful acts. God gave him an opportunity through Nathan's rebuke, to take responsibility for his actions. This second opportunity resulted in repentance and David turned his heart towards God.

READ: Psalm 51

Repentance is God's solution to our unmanageable sin. It is choosing atonement over the fig leaf solution. True repentance includes brokenness and surrender.

As long as David chose the fig leaf solution, he was in torment.

7. Many of us work furiously at looking very manageable on the outside, while our secret life is falling apart. We might spend hours on our outward appearance or labor endlessly on projects that make us look good to others. What evidence do we see that might indicate David's internal life was unmanageable even before this confrontation with Nathan took place? (Psalm 51:3,11,14)

Discuss the difference between outward vs. inward evidence of unmanageability. Some of us can hide the internal consequences for a long time without any tell-tale signs for others to see.

8. The full circle of repentance includes offering our lives to God in our brokenness. Which words of this Psalm indicate that David completed the repentance process? (vs. 13-19)

Brokenness and surrender take courage. We tend to retreat from the uncomfortable unveiling of our weaknesses and shortcomings. Anything hidden in darkness will grow and become more unmanageable (Psalm 19:12-13). We become like a little child attempting to hide the evidence of our disobedience, when it is really quite obvious to others.

Closing Scripture:

Psalm 32 (ASV)

A Psalm of David

1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered.

2 Blessed is the man unto whom Jehovah imputeth not iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no guile.

3 When I kept silence, my bones wasted away Through my groaning all the day long.

4 For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: My moisture was changed as with the drought of summer. Selah

5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, And mine iniquity did I not hide: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto Jehovah; And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah

6 For this let every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: Surely when the great waters overflow they shall not reach unto him.

7 Thou art my hiding-place; thou wilt preserve me from trouble; Thou wilt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah

8 I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will counsel thee with mine eye upon thee.

9 Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding; Whose trappings must be bit and bridle to hold them in, Else they will not come near unto thee.

10 Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; But he that trusteth in Jehovah, lovingkindness shall ***compass** him about.

11 Be glad in Jehovah, and rejoice, ye righteous; And shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.

***compass - surround, envelop, to enclose, assemble around, to encompass**

The Lord's hand is heavy upon us when we are living out our "fig leaf" lives. David indicates that his bones were wasting. I wonder if he was experiencing arthritis? He also described this season of his life as the drought of summer. Anxiety and fears rob our bodies of moisture. He could not get away from the guilt of his sin. Hidden sin has a physical effect on our lives! In place of guilt and all that it brings, David's choice to repent and receive all that confession brings is evident in this Psalm. He chooses God's covering which is only available as we acknowledge and confess our sin. The benefits listed in Psalm 32 for making this choice are:

1. forgiveness 2. protection in overwhelming times 3. preservation and deliverance from trouble
4. instruction, teaching and counsel in God's ways 5. God's lovingkindness 6. gladness, rejoicing and joy

Take the time right now to confess Principle 1. Rejoice in knowing that God delights in His children drawing close to Him. Consider the many blessings that await us when we come to Him in true repentance.

LESSON 2: MY WEAKNESS, HIS GRACE

Confession of Principle 2 - "Earnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to Him, and that He has the power to help me recover."

Scriptural Support for this principle:

Hebrews 11:6 (NKJ) - *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

Philippians 2:13 (KJV) - *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure*

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NLT) - *Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.*

MY WEAKNESSES, HIS OPPORTUNITIES

We all struggle with weaknesses in our flesh. It is up to us to make a decision to draw closer to Christ during these times. When we focus only on our weaknesses, it tends to increase the drive to do what is contrary to the Spirit. As we continue in these cycles of defeat, the guilt and condemnation we experience when we fail can prolong the rehabilitation process. As we become renewed to His way of doing things, focusing on His power, we will grow in His grace to overcome. The way in which we view our weaknesses can make the difference in whether they make or break us.

Look up "weakness" in the Strong's concordance and in the dictionary. Write the definition on the lines below:

List your weaknesses (destructive behaviors, habits, fears, etc.):

Take a serious look at the weaknesses you described above. Are any of these habits or flaws symptoms of a deep rooted problem? Though it is not productive to dwell on our struggles, when we examine them a little closer, they can be helpful in identifying the underlying causes of our addictions. You may

have to back up and consider the "triggers" in Lesson 1.

DIGGING UP OUR ROOTS

At the core of weaknesses lie the need to be noticed, valued and genuinely loved. When these needs are threatened, we can fall back into negative habits and patterns in order to control the fear of not measuring up. This can also be described as an identity crisis.

Discussion: How do our habits relate to the need we have to be noticed, valued and loved?

Example: One man became a heavy drinker at a young age. He was raised in and out of orphanages, attending strict religious schools that paraded his condition of poverty in a way that brought deep shame. He never quite measured up to society's status quo. After getting married, obtaining a degree and working in the corporate world, he faced many challenges for which he was unprepared. When a boss didn't like his work or stated any improvements needed, the feelings of inferiority would flood him. He would immediately turn to alcohol to cover this all consuming problem. He never really discovered the connection his weakness had with his unmanageable alcoholism.

GRACE REVEALED

Let us look closer at our third supporting Scripture passage. Read II Corinthians 12:9. Rephrase this passage using the definitions for weakness that you found in the dictionary and concordance.

Discussion:

- **How did Paul view his weakness?**
- **Why would Paul boast about something that seems to make him ineffective?**
- **How does this relate to our last lesson on how pride effects our unmanageable life?**

Grace is not positive confession, working tirelessly, or trying harder. Grace is the most amazing virtue God has given us. Though its meaning can be difficult to put into words, for the purpose of this discussion we will simplify the definition with the following equation:

$$\text{GRACE} = \text{GOD'S ABILITY} = \text{GOD'S POWER}$$

Substitute the wording "God's ability" or "God's power" each time you see grace mentioned in the following passages:

Ephesians 2:4-9

Titus 2:11-12 (NIV)

Hebrews 4:16

READ: Romans 8:11

We tend to see "grace" from a limited understanding or as God looking the other way when we sin. Though we know that God, through Jesus, has chosen to give us unmerited favor through His sacrifice on the cross, we forget that His resurrection has also been made available to us as an example. He did not only provide forgiveness. The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead lives in us! We cannot stop short of this power in our own lives. It will enable us to move past our weaknesses and to live a resurrected life in Jesus Christ.

For a greater understanding of how grace, or God's ability, relates to our weaknesses and opportunity to experience the resurrected life, let us join the Israelites for a small but significant part of their wilderness journey.

READ: Numbers 13

Discussion: (or homework) Many of us view a prideful person as a braggart who gloats in his own success. There is another form of pride we see evidenced in the ten spies who did not agree with God's plan.

Why did the ten spies doubt that the mission of entering the promised land would be a possibility? (vs 28)

1. _____
2. _____

How did these ten men describe the "strong people"? (vs 31-32)

Write out verse 33 below:

READ: Numbers 13:1-3

Who was speaking in this passage?

What was being given to the Israelites?

When God gives a gift, He gives us the ability to receive it. The ten spies did not agree with God; they did not agree with His promise to give them this land. How does this relate to the supporting Scripture Hebrews 11:6?

Who were the diligent seekers in this story?

1. _____ 2. _____

What was the difference in Caleb's view of the giants vs. the view's of the other ten men? (vs.30-31)

The ten men described themselves in comparison to the giants of the land. What word did they use? (vs. 33) _____

What was the ten men's view of God?

With your new understanding of grace, how do you think these men would have been more successful if they had looked upon God's ability rather than on their own?

What is your promised land? What is the vision you have for your future that continues to appear like a carrot before a horse or as an unsurmountable, unattainable goal?

***Be prepared to discuss the homework in class.
Discuss homework from previous session.***

DIS-GRACE: SATAN'S TOOL

Our adversary likes to torment us with thoughts of disgrace, reminding us of past failures and promising defeat instead of success. One of the ways he accomplishes this plan is by getting us to focus our attention on our own weaknesses and inabilities. This self-focus is another form of pride that keeps us from acknowledging God's provisions, power and promises in our lives. Any action we participate in that leaves God out of the equation is a form of self exaltation. When we allow anything other than God on the throne of our lives, pride is in operation, seeking to destroy our belief in God's promises.

READ THE FOLLOWING PASSAGE:

This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile. - Jeremiah 29:10-14 (NIV)

The ten spies wandered in the wilderness because of their unbelief and failure to trust the grace of God to fulfill His plans for them. Joshua and Caleb entered into the promised land after that unbelieving generation died off. Even after obtaining the promised land, the Israelites eventually stopped trusting in the Lord and began to mingle with those who were worshipping other gods and bowing down to idols. They were sent away from the promised land and forced into captivity with the nation of Babylon for 70 years. The above promise was given to them as a reminder that God would gather them once again and bring them back from their captivity. It doesn't matter how many times you have left your promised land or never succeeded in obtaining your promised land. The Lord is simply looking for people who will diligently seek him and turn their hearts back to Him so that He can fulfill His promises to them.

His grace is sufficient for whatever giants you are facing in your life. Paul faced many obstacles. As a former persecutor of the church, he faced the temptation to walk in the condemnation of his past. After becoming a Christian he was brought before kings and leaders to be accused and condemned for following Christ. He struggled with his own Hebrew people who believed he had forsaken his righteous upbringing. He had many excuses to give up, but he pressed on toward God's plans for his life. He knew that God's grace was big enough to compensate for his own shortcomings.

Will you allow pride to keep you in bondage to the "giants" in your life or will you make a decision today to enter into your promised land?

Read our second supporting Scripture. Remember that God is working in you, through the Holy Spirit, to accomplish His will for your life. It is not about what we can do but what He can do through us.

Take the time to pray about what God wants you to inherit. Pray about the plans He has for your life and make sure your vision lines up with His. His plans for you will always succeed as you yield to His Spirit. Let us close with this comforting reminder from Christ himself:

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. - Luke 12:32

LESSON 3: **WORSHIP: A DECISION TO SERVE**

This lesson does not have any homework assignments.

Confession of Principle 3 - "We make a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God."

Scriptural Support for this principle:

Romans 12:1 (NIV) - *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.*

Isaiah 26:13 (Amplified Bible) - *O Lord, our God, other masters besides You have ruled over us, but we will acknowledge and mention Your name only.*

1 Corinthians 7:22-23 (Amplified Bible) - *For he who as a slave was summoned in [to union with] the Lord is a freedman of the Lord, just so he who was free when he was called is a bond servant of Christ (the Messiah). You were bought with a price [purchased with a preciousness and paid for by Christ]; then do not yield yourselves up to become [in your own estimation] slaves to men [but consider yourselves slaves to Christ].*

WHO DO WE SERVE?

The apostle Paul devoted much of his teaching to the difference between slavery to our addictions and the position we enter into as "blood bought" believers in Christ. It is important to recognize that when we come to Christ we must reckon with the former masters that once ruled our lives. For some of us, the master is our will and way of doing things and for others it is life - dominating habits or relationships that constantly take the place of God. For this reason, Paul's desire was to convince the Corinthians that they were to be Christ's servants and not the servants of men. As Christ's servants we no longer have a slave/master relationship with anything or anyone other than Christ!

Whether the master is nicotine, drugs, pride, anger, negativity or an unhealthy relationship, we must decide who or what we want to serve. Joining with Christ means breaking our relationship with our former masters.

Are you ready to make that decision?

YES **NO**

If we choose not to acknowledge the slavery that dominates our lower nature, we will seriously compromise our intimacy with God. When Jesus becomes our master, our next step is to renew our minds with the Word of God. This practice of being made new will feed our spirit and make it stronger. We will be more able to resist the temptations that once enslaved our lives.

We will be looking deeper into the understanding of the slave/master relationship with the Lord. First,

we will examine our concept of authority so that we can see how this can affect our ability to forsake our ways to walk in His Truth. As we study this together, keep the following passage in mind:

***“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”
John 8:32 (KJV)***

Exploring our concept of father or authority figures and how it relates to serving:

Take a moment to ponder what thoughts come to mind relating to authority figures. Take time to write those words or phrases below. Some of you may relate more to a female authority - that is O.K. The idea is to dig into your concept of authority no matter what the gender.

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 6. _____ |

Many of us may have experienced authority figures that relished in being the "master", but lacked in exemplifying the concept of fatherhood. This has caused many to move completely away from trying to understand various interpersonal relationships from a perspective of serving one another. The abuses we experience tend to unbalance our Biblical worldview and we find ourselves throwing the baby out with the bath water, yet the Biblical concept of servanthood is at the foundation of every successful relationship God has ordained. A loving father/authority figure would never give his child hoops to jump through without teaching him how to jump. ***A loving father is there to protect, defend, discipline, serve and bring honor to his child.*** We will find it easier to obey an earthly authority who is willing to give support and not just demand expectations. God's version of the master/servant role is not like the world's concept. We cannot expect children to have a servant's attitude toward a parent who is forcing unreasonable expectations upon the child and making harsh demands. This concept can be carried through in the workplace with the employer/employee role as well as in the church with the vital shepherd/sheep relationship.

What expectations did your earthly father/father figures/teachers/mentors have for you?

What struggles did you have to measure up to their expectations?

Were these figures in your life lacking in the description of a father that was stated above?

ADONAY: OUR NEW MASTER

“For I know that the Lord is great and that our Lord is above all gods.” - Psalm 135:5

“O give thanks to the Lord of lords, for His mercy and loving-kindness endure forever” - Psalm 136:3

Strong's Concordance definition of Adonay: Adonay is a Hebrew Word meaning Lord - a term only referring to the Lord God, but it is an emphatic form from a root word Adown that is used as a term of respect meaning "MASTER, LORD, OWNER, SOVEREIGN CONTROLLER" (human or divine). In the above passages, the psalmist is declaring his certainty in Adonay, our God, being above all others. The form of this term with a capital "L" refers only to the divine name of God in contrast to the term lord that can refer to a human master.

It was used by Samson, David, Ezra, Moses, Abraham, and many of the prophets to specifically address God. It was a term communicating the highest respect for and an understanding of their position before the one they are addressing. When addressing God as Adonay, they were saying something about God and something about themselves. They were the servants and He was the One to be served!!! It is not just describing God's character (sovereign), but POSITION (controller, master).

Let us look at an example of this concept in the life of Isaiah:

READ: Isaiah 6

Note verse 1(KJV): *In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.....*

Note verse 8 (KJV): *Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then said I, 'Here am I; send me.*

Isaiah was living in a very troubling time. Israel was backslidden and refused to acknowledge their condition. They were serving other “masters” besides the Lord. The Lord wanted to raise up the prophet to speak to a sinful people. It wasn't an easy job. He needed a humble servant who would surrender his **life** and **will** over to the Master's service. Isaiah was being asked to go to a sinful people who would not respond to his pleas for change. In other words, the mission God was calling him to would appear to be very unsuccessful in man's view of things.

Discussion:

- **Why do you think the Scripture uses the term “Lord” (Adonay) in these instances?**

- **What personal issues in Isaiah’s life could have interfered with his submission to this calling?**

Write out vs. 8 using the definition of “Adonay” in place of the term “Lord”. (You may select one or all of the defining words.) In the places where “I” is referring to Isaiah, put your own name in parentheses:

RECKONING WITH THE OTHER MASTERS

When considering the position God calls us into as believers, it could be frightening to know that we are being asked to surrender all of our control.

There may be situations/attitudes in our lives that would interfere with us saying, “Here am I, send me.” It is important that we examine the reason for any unsundered areas.

WHAT AREAS OF YOUR LIFE WOULD BE MOST DIFFICULT TO SURRENDER? (Briefly describe your particular struggle with that area after checking the ones that apply to you. Ex: financial - tithing, emotional - releasing past hurts from father, spiritual - struggle with consistency in devotions etc.)

FINANCIAL -

EMOTIONAL -

PHYSICAL -

SPIRITUAL -

OTHERS -

We need to remember that Christ himself gave up His will to the Father as an example for us to follow.

Read the passage below in two different translations:

Sacrifice and offering You do not desire, nor have You delight in them; You have given me the capacity to hear and obey [Your law, a more valuable service than] burnt offerings and sin offerings [which] You do not require. - Psalm 40:6 (Amplified Bible)

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. - Psalm 40:6 (NIV)

This passage speaks prophetically of Messiah, the One who would come to earth, sacrifice all and humbly submit to the Father's plan. To fully understand this passage, read this account of a Hebrew slave's release.

READ: Deuteronomy 15:12-17

Though the Hebrew slave had the "right" to go free in the seventh year (referred to as the LORD'S release), the dedicated slave could choose a lifetime of service to the master whom he loved. The piercing through of the ear with the awl at the doorpost of his master is a beautiful example of the open ears and obedience to the Father our Lord Jesus walked in as He gave His life to do the will of the Father. He was a lifetime bondservant.

ARE YOUR EARS OPEN?

SERVANTHOOD MEANS SONSHIP:

The story of the prodigal son gives us insights into understanding our position with the Father as we submit to His divine authority. The rebellious son leaves his father's home to live a riotous life of lust, wasting the substance he inherited from his father. He comes to his senses and experiences an attitude adjustment. The famine he experienced becomes "fertile" ground for a servant's heart. It is this servant's heart that receives a divine inheritance.

Pick a partner (or breakdown into small groups) and read the following passage:

READ: Luke 15:11-24 Answer the following questions orally with your partner and be prepared to discuss them with the group:

- 1. What might have been the rebellious son's description of living at home w/ dad?*
- 2. Why would the father have given his son a portion of his inheritance?*
- 3. What expectations do you believe the father might have had for his son?*
- 4. The word riotous in the concordance (# 811) means "dissolutely". Look this up in the dictionary. The concordance refers to # 810 as a related word. Look this up in the concordance. Refer to the dictionary definitions of "profligacy" and "prodigal". What insights do these definitions give us into the probable lifestyle of the prodigal son?*
- 5. How might the son's perspective have changed after experiencing the famine?*
- 6. How does the father's response to the son's homecoming illustrate the heart of God and the message of grace?*

READ: Romans 8:12-17 (CEB)

So then, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it isn't an obligation to ourselves to live our lives on the basis of selfishness. If you live on the basis of selfishness, you are going to die. But if you put to death the actions of the body with the Spirit, you will live. All who are led by God's Spirit are God's sons and daughters. You didn't receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as his children. With this Spirit, we cry, "Abba, Father." The same Spirit agrees with our spirit, that we are God's children. But if we are children, we are also heirs. We are God's heirs and fellow heirs with Christ, if we really suffer with him so that we can also be glorified with him.

As we submit to the Lord in this master/servant relationship, He lovingly offers us the Spirit of sonship. Though our reverence for the Lord might stir up in us a, "Yes, Sir!" response, we are reminded in this passage that this master is also our Abba, an endearing term that can be closely associated with the term, "Daddy". We become heirs, enduring suffering and loss, to inherit glory.

As we can see from Romans 8:12-17, we also, much like the repentant prodigal, need to come to the conclusion that living by the sinful nature will produce death. Chapter two talks about the unwillingness of the ten spies to surrender to God's plan and because of their unbelief and fear, they forfeited the promised land. They did not trust the character of God. Let us not be guilty of turning away such a rich inheritance. If you have been prodigal, living for yourself (wasteful and self-seeking) make a decision to turn back right now.

Summary:

This chapter is entitled: "**A DECISION TO SERVE**". Depending on the authority figures in our lives, we may have a skewed concept of what service means. He wants complete surrender, reigning over every area of our lives as a sovereign King, but this King is also our Father. He is a Father who loves us more than anyone and who will never, unlike earthly kings, abuse this authority in our lives. The foot washing ceremony in John 13 proved to be one of the greatest lessons Jesus taught His disciples on submission, humility and authority. Our sovereign King took on the lowliest of positions and humbly washed the feet of those who had served him as an example of how we should serve each other.

This is the same King who calls us into humble service.

Closing Scripture:

And Jesus called them to Him and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men hold them in subjection [tyrannizing over them]. Not so shall it be among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, And whoever desires to be first among you must be your slave-- Just as the Son of Man came not to be waited on but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many [the price paid to set them free]. - Matthew 20:25-28 (Amplified)

(WRITE THIS PASSAGE ON AN INDEX CARD AND PLACE IT WHERE YOU CAN READ IT FREQUENTLY)

It would be beneficial to memorize this passage.

LESSON 4: **PERSONAL EVALUATION**

Confession of Principle 4 - "We have taken an inventory of ourselves and our ways and have come up short in comparison to God's Standards."

Scriptural support for this principle:

Lamentations 3:40 (NIV) - *Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.*

Matthew 5:3 (NIV) - *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Romans 3:23 (NKJ) - *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;...*

CHARACTER SKETCH: ZACCHAEUS

READ: Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus held the position of collecting public taxes. In those days, tax collectors were notorious for cheating others and taking advantage of individuals for their own personal gain. Zacchaeus was:

- ◆ rich (vs.2) ◆ chief amongst his profession (vs.2) ◆ small of stature (vs.3)
- ◆ described as a "sinner" by the crowd (vs.7) ◆ described as "lost" by Jesus (vs.10)

Apparently this lost sinner had received at least a portion of his wealth from unlawful means. After his encounter with Jesus, he felt sorry for his sin. He offered to give half his goods to the poor and to restore four times the amount he had received from others under false pretenses. There is no indication that anyone taught or admonished him specifically concerning this behavior. An encounter with Jesus should have a profound effect upon our lives. In the case of Zacchaeus, he knew he came up "short."

Questions:

What efforts did Zacchaeus make to see the Master?

What effort did Jesus make to have this encounter with Zacchaeus?

Jesus is known as a friend of sinners. What do you suppose would have attracted him to Zacchaeus, singling him out of what must have been a crowd of sinners?

Whether we are taking advantage of others (like Zacchaeus) or living an extreme life as a hardened criminal, or even if we are doing something as noble as teaching Sunday school, we all have one thing in common: our sin nature. An encounter with Jesus can bring comfort to a repentant adulteress and at the same time cause the religious to writhe in anger. For those who choose Christ as Master, we find comfort in knowing that as we turn our unmanageable life over to Him, He is able to bring order, direction and peace. Religious folk struggle with these encounters because their master is the religious system they hide behind and use to control their lives and others around them.

PIOUSLY RIGHTEOUS vs. HUMBLY REPENTANT

Let us examine the contrast between the self-righteous man and the repentant sinner woman as they come into an encounter with Christ:

READ: Luke 7: 36-50

Discussion:

Who invited Christ for dinner?

Who came uninvited?

Describe the woman's encounter with Jesus.

How did the Pharisee respond to this woman's encounter with Christ?

What did Simon the Pharisee neglect to do for Christ?

Who, in Christ's estimation, loves much?

What did Jesus tell the woman in verse 50?

It should be noted that the thoughts of the Pharisee were not even vocalized (vs.39)! No matter how righteous we appear on the outside, Jesus can read our minds. Isn't it amazing that the very one who invited Christ to the supper did little to show honor to his guest? How ironic that the one who had not been invited demonstrated hospitality by bestowing lavish acts of worship on the guest of honor. The encounter with Christ caused the Pharisee to question, reason, and judge, eliciting a rebuke from Christ. The repentant sinner's encounter resulted in expressions of gratefulness to the Savior, affirmations from the Master, and the blessings of salvation and peace.

The sinner woman crashed the religious party.

Questions:

Whose heart do you relate to more, the "religious" Pharisee or the repentant sinner woman?

Careful examination of all of our lives will reveal areas that fall short of God's standards. If comparing ourselves to others whose sins seem to be obvious, we could easily fall into the same trap as the Pharisee. We might feel quite justified in our behaviors, but comparison before a holy God should always result in humility and brokenness. Isaiah cried out that he was undone in God's presence, yet God chose him as a vessel to carry His Word to the people. It was his servant's heart, not his pious, religious attitude that made him the best choice for the task.

What areas of your life do you justify, rather than changing and adapting to Christ and His principles? _____

Do you find yourself looking at the shortfalls of others rather than looking at ways you can serve and worship the Master?

YES **NO**

Do you spend more time examining the lifestyles of others and questioning Christ's response to them, or do you spend your days worshipping the Lord, grateful for his forgiveness in your life?

Examining others **Grateful worshiper**

THE "UNSURMOUNTABLE" SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Let's take a journey up the mountain where Jesus preached this famous sermon and examine a portion of this teaching for ourselves. Jesus challenges the religious thinkers through the use of hyperbole and emphatic statements concerning not just the actions of an individual professing godliness, but also the attitudes of the heart. Rather than comparing behaviors to the law, Jesus goes beyond the letter of the law to reinforce the very foundation upon which the law rests: Love for God, love for your neighbor. He starts this teaching with the greatest A.A. program ever written: Attitude Adjustment 101.

THE "BE - ATTITUDES": Matthew 5: 1-12 (NKJ)

Each blessing stated in the eight Beatitudes relates to a specific heart condition of the one receiving the blessing. Next to each blessing, write the corresponding attitude.

1 (vs. 3) - Blessed with the kingdom of heaven: _____

2 (vs. 4) - Blessed with comfort: _____

3 (vs. 5) - Blessed with inheriting the earth: _____

4 (vs. 6) - Blessed with being filled (satisfied): _____

5 (vs. 7) - Blessed with mercy: _____

6 (vs. 8) - Blessed with seeing God: _____

7 (vs. 9) - Blessed with being called "Children of God": _____

8 (vs.10)- Blessed with the kingdom of heaven: _____

As we discovered in the story of the prodigal in Chapter 3, the father rejoiced in his return and quickly bestowed blessings on the repentant son. Our heavenly Father also delights in blessing those whose hearts are set on Him. Take some time to look at the heart attitudes that Jesus stated would receive a blessing. Rate your compliance with these attitudes from 0- 10 (0 would be no compliance, 10 being the highest degree of compliance)

Circle the number that best applies to you.

1. Poor in Spirit (understanding your need of God): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Comforter of others: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Meekness (humility): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. Merciful to others: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Pure in heart: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. Peacemaker: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. Rejoice when being persecuted for righteousness: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Inward attitude problems, though they are easier to conceal from others than outward actions, can seem to be an unsurmountable obstacle in a believer's life. They hinder us from moving forward in our walk with the Lord. Many of us have grown up with an emphasis on outward conformity rather than inward purity of heart and mind. This can lead to and/or fuel addictive behaviors as we become frustrated with the inward struggles that are always just beneath the surface and constantly threatening to expose our flaws. Instead of bringing our attitudes under Christ's submission, we worry more about bringing our actions under the submission of those we are trying to please. Fighting this battle is an impossible task to win, often resulting in an attraction to various addictions that only temporarily soothe this dilemma.

CLIMBING HIGHER

Homework:

READ: Matthew 5:17 - 6:20

Some of the most difficult commands of Christ are found in the "Sermon on the Mount". As we continue our journey up this mountain, let us explore some of these teachings further. List the difficult standards of Jesus given in these verses:

vs. 5:20 _____

vs. 5:22 _____

vv. 5:23-24 _____

vv. 5:27-29 _____

vs. 5:30 _____

vs. 5:39 _____

vv. 5:43-44 _____

vs. 5:48 _____

vs. 6:3 _____

vs. 6:6 _____

vv. 6:14-15 _____

vv. 6:16-18 _____

vv.6:19-20 _____

How do you feel about trying to live up to these standards? _____

Be prepared to discuss the homework in class.

Conclusion:

Discuss homework from previous session

As our supporting Scripture in Romans 3:23 states, we have all fallen short of God's righteous standards. The good news is that instead of expecting us to climb the impossible mountain of God's expectations, the Lord is looking for us to confess our poverty before Him and acknowledge our need for Him. As we discovered in Chapter 3, our Father will never give us impossible commands or unrealistic expectations that we must attain by our own strength or power. He is not looking for us to become white knuckled servants that grin and bear it, nor is He looking to leave us in poverty of spirit, reveling over the weakened condition of His sheep. He is only seeking to give us level ground upon which all humankind can begin their journey with Him. That level ground becomes the place of consecration where the contrite believer surrenders all to Him. Only then can we trust Him to empower us to live a life that is pleasing to Him.

Closing Scripture:

*You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me;
you stoop down to make me great. - Psalm 18:35 (NIVUK)*

He didn't leave us in our frailties. This same powerful and mighty Savior stooped down to our level to bring us up to a heavenly inheritance.

Take a moment to thank God for being the victorious Savior who triumphs over all

sin.

LESSON 5: **ACCOUNTABILITY - WHERE ARE YOU?**

Confession of Principle 5 - "We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

Scriptural Support for this Principal:

Psalm 19:12-13 (NLT) - *How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults. Keep your servant from deliberate sins! Don't let them control me. Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin.*

Luke 18:13 (CEV) - *The tax collector stood off at a distance and did not think he was good enough even to look up toward heaven. He was so sorry for what he had done that he pounded his chest and prayed, "God, have pity on me! I am such a sinner."*

James 5:16 (NIV) - *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*

DEFINING ACCOUNTABILITY

True Biblical accountability is vital to bearing fruit as a disciple of Christ. In order to understand how to live out this principle, we must examine the definition of accountability. There have been many misconceptions throughout the years concerning how Biblical accountability should be lived out in the body of Christ. We have wavered between extremes in this area. Those extremes can range from complete dependence upon our authorities for our own daily existence to the flippant attitude that we really don't need to answer to anyone as we live out our faith walk. This chapter is about recognizing our need to answer to ourselves, God, and others in the church community for our spiritual well-being. It is about trusting God to place in our lives those who can provide the spiritual authority needed for our journey. Accountability should be viewed as a necessary part of our walk with Christ.

Read one of the dictionary definitions of accountability according to Dictionary.com:
***accountability* - noun 1. the state of being accountable, liable, or answerable**

We should all be able to relate to having to answer to others for our behavior and actions. Our behavior may have been called into question by our parents or guardians on a number of occasions, by the time we reached the toddler years. As young children we had to answer to our teachers for our classroom activity and homework assignments. Of course, as adults, we have employers that would expect us to be accountable for the time we give to the company.

How about spiritual accountability?

The following comments are negative reactions to the idea of being "answerable" to another for our faith walk. Please put a check beside the ones that describe your attitude towards spiritual

accountability, especially when you are dealing with an area/areas of your life that is/are unmanageable.

- “It’s nobody’s business what I do with my life.”
- “I can solve my problems on my own without any help.”
- “This is a personal family matter and should remain private.”
- “This is too embarrassing!”
- “I don’t have anyone that I can trust.”
- “They’re too busy to help me.”
- “My issues are too complicated for anyone to solve.”
- “I’m not sure I am ready for the Biblical solution to my personal sin issues.”

ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING

Remember the BE- ATTITUDES! We discussed our need for personal evaluation in LESSON 4. Without measuring ourselves to God’s righteous laws, we will be lacking in our ability to understand how desperately we need the Lord. David’s cry in our support Scripture, Psalm 19:12-13, was a plea to be rescued from hidden faults and deliberate sins that desired to control his life. God can be trusted with our unmanageable life. Removing our misconceptions and wrong attitudes about God’s authority was an important step for successfully completing Principle 3 of our 12- step. It is easier to admit our wrong doings to God and to ourselves when we discard the myths that have kept us from drawing closer to Him. In order to move forward with Principle 5, we need to identify and remove the fears and negative views we might have about submitting to leaders in the body of Christ.

Discussion

Please consider any positive or negative experiences you have had, including those outside of a church situation.

Negative experiences:

Have you ever been in any situations where trusting authority backfired or failed you?

Have you ever been in a setting where you had to answer to a higher authority for your actions or performance and received a harsh or unreasonable evaluation/consequence as a result?

Do any of your negative past experiences with accountability effect your ability to trust Godly leaders today?

Positive experiences:

Have you ever had a close friend/spouse steer you down the right path when you were tempted to make the wrong decision?

Have you ever been in situations where mediation helped to resolve a conflict? This can be going to a counselor for marital conflict, asking a parent to help you resolve situations with siblings,

calling upon a teacher to help you relate to another student, or confiding in your boss to understand how to work efficiently with a fellow employee.

Do any of these positive outcomes help you to see the importance today of having spiritual accountability?

Take the time to write below any comments concerning your present view of accountability:

BACKING UP FROM PRIDE:

Remember that pride is one of the tools Satan uses to blind us and deceive us into thinking we have a better way. In LESSON 1, we found out that pride can cause us to deny Biblical solutions to our unmanageable life. We must be careful not to be snared and caught with our fig leaves on! In the case of the fall of man, Eve chose to explore realms outside of the boundaries given to her by her Creator. In other words, she walked away from accountability. She chose to ignore God's warnings and to act independently of her husband. Adam also chose to act independently of God's warnings. This is a classic case of failing to allow accountability to rein us in and keep us on the right path. Let us revisit the garden and the scene of the crime.

READ: Genesis 2:15 - 3:9

Discussion:

- **Had God clearly defined Adam and Eve's boundaries?**
- **Who was God speaking to when setting the boundaries?**
- **Who did the serpent come to tempt? Why do you think Satan chose Eve?**
- **What was Eve's response to Satan's inquiry about God's boundaries?**
- **Was Adam a faithful spouse to Eve as she faced the temptations of the enemy?**
- **How did he respond to his wife's downfall?**

Let's take a moment to acknowledge the possible courses of action this couple could have taken to get a different outcome:

- **Satan was making indictments against God's character and nature. This is the enemy's ploy to manipulate man into questioning God's authority over them. His desire for mankind is that they will abandon the boundaries given to them by God for mankind's protection. What could Eve have done in response to these indictments?**

- What could Adam have done to be faithful and true to God’s command to not eat of that fruit even before it was offered to him?
- Is there any mention of them including God in this decision?
- Eve handed the fruit to Adam to take a bite. Where might they have been hanging around before the serpent even came to them?

Read: Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NIV) *Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!*

Discussion:

Compare the situation with Adam and Eve to times you have been tempted because you hung around the “forbidden” places. Where were your friends and family members during that time? If you feel comfortable, please share a personal situation illustrating failures that resulted in your own life from the the lack of accountability.

According to the Scripture in Ecclesiastes, two are better than one. In other words, the friendships around us should make us a better person. Having a good return for our work would indicate that we are more productive and fruitful as a result of that relationship. The other principle to be applied is that if we should stumble, the people we are choosing to surround ourselves with should pick us up. How could applying the principles of the above Scripture have changed the outcome of Adam and Eve’s situation? **Do your friendships mirror the principles of this Scripture or do your friendships contain elements similar to Adam and Eve’s relationship?**

MAKING THE CHOICE

It is difficult to choose accountability when we are in a condition of prideful arrogance. David chose to continue to look upon the beautiful woman (Bathsheba) while strutting around on his rooftop. That “look” resulted in a drama of great proportions that reaped horrible consequences. Backing up from pride will assist us in preparing our hearts to understand and then to make the choice to allow Godly accountability in our lives.

Homework

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Read: Luke 18: 9-14 (NKJ) *9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*

Answer the following questions:

This passage mentioned that Jesus was speaking to a specific group of people. Who did He say these people trusted in? (vs. 9) _____

How well did this group of people relate to others that were not of their group? (vs. 9)

How would this group of people have benefited from the “Beatitudes” spoken in the Sermon on the Mount? (see lesson 4, pg. 28) _____

What advantage did the tax collector have over the Pharisee? _____

How can admission of our sinfulness before God and ourselves help us in making the choice to take the next step in Principle 5 as we admit to others the nature of our wrong doings?

Be prepared to discuss your homework in class.

THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR cont.

Discuss homework from previous session

I wonder if the tax collector Jesus mentioned in this story was Zacchaeus! Surely Zacchaeus would not have admitted his wrong doings to God had he not admitted them first to himself. This is the step we must take before we come into a relationship of submission to Godly authority and accountability. Pride can keep us from admitting our sinfulness before a Holy God.

Lack of awareness of sin nature = lack of accountability before God

When we are aware of our own sin nature, it is easier to understand the importance of being accountable to others, whether they be Godly friends who can help us when we are weak, or Godly leaders to guide us with Biblical counsel, prayer and support. In the case of the repentant sinner we see a different formula.

Acknowledgment of our sinful tendencies = accountability before a Holy God.

Now we have the formula necessary to proceed with Principle Five. We admit to God and to ourselves the nature of our wrong doings. We then make the choice to admit to others who can help us in our journey. The valid question remains:

WHO DO I CHOOSE?

The answer is really simple once we understand the responsibility of spiritual leadership in the body.

READ: Matthew 28:18-20 (NKJ) *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.*

Jesus handed spiritual authority over to His disciples, who in turn entrusted God’s Truths to other reliable men.

READ: 2 Timothy 2:2 (NIV) *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*

One who disciples others should be actively involved in teaching others to observe God’s commands. Submitting to discipleship is not about blind submission or obedience to man, or allowing others to fit us into their molds. It is about allowing others in our church community to lead us to a deeper and more meaningful relationship to Christ, who, in Matthew 28:20, promised to be with us always.

Choosing spiritual accountability should include submission to a group of believers who are obeying Christ’s commands under the direction of leaders who are doing the same. If you have not already done so, ask God to guide you in a search to find a faithful body of believers. You will be surprised at how many wonderful doors of opportunity open once you make a committed decision to submit to Principle 5. One Pastor described fellowship with others as simply: “Fellows in the same ship!” Make sure you are not hanging with those who will throw you overboard when the storms of life come your way.

HANNAH: EXAMPLE OF LEADERSHIP GONE AWRY

It is important to note that placing your trust in an authority figure and others in your support system is not necessarily the key to setting a foundation for a successful and Biblical accountability relationship. Misplaced trust can lead to multiple disappointments as humans are frail and fallible. No matter how hard we try to surround ourselves with Godly leaders or friends, in our changing world, many things can happen. We may be tempted to question God's plan for accountability in the body of Christ. Our trust in Jesus, our Good Shepherd, is important as we submit to others. He leads us out of the valleys with their dark, ominous shadows.

READ: I Samuel 1: 1-20

Discussion Questions:

- **What was the dark shadow that Hannah lived under from year to year? (vv. 5-7)**

- **How did her husband expect to relieve her from this distress? (vv. 5,8)**
- **Hannah's pain brought her to the temple to weep and pray. What accusations did the priest, Eli, make concerning her condition? (vv. 13-14)**
- **How did she respond to the accusations? (vv. 15-16)**
- **What was the eventual outcome of this agonizing encounter with God and with her priestly authority? (vv. 17-20)**

If we read on in this story, Israel's leadership was drastically compromised as Eli and his sons gave way to fleshly passions and lusts, sacrificing the honor that came with their leadership position. Though Hannah was misunderstood by her husband and then Eli, God himself knew her heart, her need, and her pain like no one else. He also heard and answered her prayer and used a very incapable leader to impart this blessing to her. In a time when leadership failed her, God in His grace, walked her out of the valley. Hannah's trust was in the Lord and we, too, must ultimately put our trust in God when it comes to following the principle of accountability.

Discussion:

- **What could have been the possible outcomes had Hannah chosen another course of action besides pouring out her soul to the Lord? Include the indictments she could have made against her authority figures.**

Are you willing to let God heal your heart from pain that resulted from faulty leadership?

YES NO

LOCATION OR CONDITION?

Read: Genesis 3:8 -9 (NIV) *Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"*

These are the words that God spoke to Adam after the fall, when he hid from the presence of the Lord. There is no nook or cranny in the entire universe that the Creator didn't already know about, so we know He was well aware of Adam's whereabouts. The question means the same to us today as it did when God spoke it in the beginning. It is not a question of location, but of condition. God was giving Adam a chance to be accountable: to admit to himself, His Creator and his helpmeet, Eve, the exact nature of his wrong-doing. Adam failed to do this, and his failure to do so passed on the fig leaf of denial to the entire human race. As time went on, his son, Cain, eventually followed suit (Genesis 4:1-16). God was, once again, giving mankind the opportunity for accountability as He asked Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" Cain replies with hearty sarcasm, "Am I my brother's keeper?" His refusal to acknowledge the sin of murder against his own brother, Abel, resulted in disastrous consequences and banishment from family. I can only imagine the different outcome of the Cain and Abel story had Cain faced his own failure and then confessed to God and his brother the jealousy and anger he harbored. As

our support passage indicates in James 5:16, confession could have brought healing instead of rejection, death and banishment. God's ways are always the right course of action no matter how humbling or difficult they may seem. Has your failure to admit your wrong doings caused banishment from the ones you love the most? Have you wavered in your choice of whether or not to admit your failures to yourself, God and others?

Take this advice from James as he implores the believers in his epistle:

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. - James 4:8 (NKJ)

Don't hesitate any longer...decide today to answer truthfully as God asks the question:

“Where are you?”

LESSON 6: **EXTREME MAKEOVER - HOW DO I SIGN UP?**

Confession of Principle 6 - "We are entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

Scriptural Support for this Principal:

Isaiah 64:8 (NIV) - *Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.*

Psalms 51:10 (NIRV) - *God, create a pure heart in me. Give me a new spirit that is faithful to you.*

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (CEV) - *I will take away your stubborn heart and give you a new heart and a desire to be faithful. You will have only pure thoughts, because I will put my Spirit in you and make you eager to obey my laws and teachings.*

GOING ROUND THE MOUNTAIN:

In LESSON 2, we spoke of those who struggled to believe God's ability to bring them to "The Promise Land". God will place us in situations that require strength and ability, beyond what we are capable of, so that we may have opportunities to yield to His mighty power. These are opportunities that develop Christ-like character in us. The extreme makeovers that all of us need may take place gradually over time, but they don't begin until we get on the potter's wheel! In other words, we can go through repeated cycles, as did the children of Israel in the book of Judges, refusing the correction and discipline of the Lord that is necessary to purge out the fleshly passions. A common description of insanity is: "*Doing the same thing, but expecting a different result.*" We may all struggle, from time to time, with temporary "insanity" in different areas of our lives, being too stubborn to initiate the changes necessary to break these cycles. Until we allow God to purify our lives and shape us according to His design, we will keep going around the same mountain of defeat. It takes courage to submit to God's makeover plan.

Let's look at one man who decided to enlist in the army of God, overcoming his mindset of failure, defeat, and fear in order to faithfully lead God's people to victory.

CHARACTER SKETCH: GIDEON - GOD'S "HIDDEN" SOLDIER

Most of mankind wrestles with a poor self esteem though we may all respond to that issue in different ways. Gideon was hiding from an oppressive enemy as this story unfolds. The unveiling of God's power begins as His spotlight shines on a man who preferred to stay hidden and obscure. Gideon signed up for more than God's army. In accepting God's mission, he was signing up for an extreme makeover that produced a courage and faithfulness from within that he never knew was possible.

READ: Judges 6:1-16

Answer the following questions:

1. The children of Israel did _____ in the sight of the LORD. (vs.1)

2. What were the consequences of their evil behavior ? (vs.1)

3. Describe Israel's enemy. (vs.2-5)

4. Describe Israel's condition. (vs.2-6)

Stop and Reflect:

It is important to note that reading the accounts of Bible characters and their situations is not a mere religious exercise. God intends for us to look at these examples and find the correlations to our own life's experiences. We have the wonderful opportunity to see Biblical characters come alive to us as they mirror behaviors that are common to mankind. How does this detailed account of Israel relate to your past history of sinful behavior followed by hard consequences and difficult circumstances? Please take the time to write a brief account of how you have suffered in ways that are similar to the children of Israel's oppression under the cruel enemy of the Midianites. Include any enemies you have faced as well as consequences you have suffered.

If you are comfortable, you may share your account with the group.

Continuation of questions for Judges 6:1-16

5. What did God do in response to Israel's cry for help? (vs.7- 10)

Discussion:

God doesn't seem to outline a quick plan of deliverance for the Israelites at this point. He does, however, take them back to a place of reflection. These are places we frequently want to avoid as none of us take comfort in visiting our past history of mistakes and shortcomings. It is important, if we are to be successful in yielding to the Lord in this principle, to go back to the crossroads of our lives where we took the wrong turn/turns so that we can identify the patterns that led to the development of character defects. Imagine that you are continually bumping into curbs with your car. After repeated incidences, you notice your car veering to one side or the other and you take it in for an alignment check. Your car is grossly out of alignment, but the condition is corrected and before long you are on the road again happily going your way. The only problem is that you are still bumping into curbs and it isn't long before you are out of alignment again. We can fix the alignment, but if we don't correct the curb hopping, we will continue this cycle and rack up some unnecessary bills. Establishing poor patterns is a habit that comes naturally to our lower nature. As believers, we need to be painfully aware of this tendency to veer off God's course and the patterns of behavior that lead us to those places.

What might be some of the curbs that you keep "bumping" into that are causing you to be out of alignment with God's will for your life (ex: stubbornness and idolatry, pleasure seeking, various fears, sense of entitlement, unforgiveness, unresolved relational conflicts, unresolved grief issues etc.)? Take this time to exercise the principle of confession we learned in LESSON 5 and share with the group.

READ: Joshua 1:2-9

What are some of the phrases repeated in the commands given to Joshua?

Discuss further how Israel might have surrendered the ground to their enemies (the Midianites) considering what God had commanded in this passage versus what the prophet said they actually did in Judges 6:9-10.

Fill in the blanks: (NKJ)

**Judges 6:10b - "...fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye _____
_____."**

Homework

Go back to our reading in Judges 6:1-16.

Continue answering questions related to this passage:

6. Where was Gideon threshing the wheat? (vs.11) _____

7. Why was he threshing wheat by a winepress? (vs.11) _____

8. How was Gideon addressed by the Angel of the Lord? (vs.12) _____

9. What was Gideon's response? (vs.13,15) Include his own description of himself and his family in your answer. _____

10. God does not address Gideon's indictments against God or his dilemma and questions. Instead he stated his mission for Gideon. What was that mission? (vs.14)

11. God revealed to Gideon the "hidden" soldier within. Gideon had a choice to face this battle or continue hiding. If he believed God's Word, he would be granted victory. In order to succeed, Gideon would have to allow God to remove the character defects that would keep him from succeeding in this mission. He had the wonderful opportunity to be transformed into a brave and faithful victor. God provided the opportunity necessary to begin this process and Gideon's choice was to sign up for God's extreme makeover. What character defects do you see in Gideon?

12. Can you relate to Gideon's description of himself as "poor" and "the least in his father's house?"

YES NO

It is so easy to blame God for our mishaps or question His presence in the midst of our troubling circumstances. Have you been guilty of accusing God of abandonment? Make notes of what you learned from your homework and write down any questions you may have for group discussion.

Be prepared to discuss your homework in class.

Discuss Homework.

Read the following passage: Judges 6:14 (NIV) - "The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?""

Write out Joshua 1:9

“

”

Being entirely ready for God to remove defects is being ready to move forward in the strength He has given us through the Holy Spirit. A strict observance to God's commands is impossible to accomplish without first recognizing the "hidden" soldier he has placed within every believer who has submitted his life to Him and enlisted in the army of the Lord. Is it not clear in the above passages that God expects us to move forward only because He has promised to give us the strength to do what He has commanded and to be with us wherever we go?

YES

NO

How does fear relate to disobedience? _____

Look at the following illustrations and share times when you have lived out one or both of these scenarios:

Courage -----> obedience -----> faith + patience = promise

Fear -----> disobedience -----> doubt + frustration = cycles of defeat

SPIRITUAL MYOPIA

Israel continually forgot who they were serving as well as the promises God made to them. During these times, their courage would fade and their will to obey the Lord would quickly diminish. They didn't fix what was out of alignment in their lives, resulting in pain and suffering of great proportions as they were led down paths of moral decay that were unimaginable. God didn't just exhort Israel to be strong, courageous and obedient, in Joshua chapter one. The Lord also detailed the inheritance He had made available to them. Losing sight of the promises caused a spiritual nearsightedness. Israel didn't allow God to develop the character necessary to complete His work in them. The condition of God's people in Gideon's account comes as no surprise. When we are near-sighted, it is difficult to look beyond our own noses to the bigger picture of God's Promise Land. We tend to quit easily or cast off God's discipline, unable to see how necessary the extreme makeovers are in making us ready to

apprehend the promises of God.

Read Proverbs 29:18 in the following translations:

(Amplified Bible) - "Where there is no vision [no redemptive revelation of God], the people perish; but he who keeps the law [of God, which includes that of man]--blessed (happy, fortunate, and enviable) is he."

(NLT) - "When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild. But whoever obeys the law is joyful."

(NCV) - "Where there is no word from God, people are uncontrolled, but those who obey what they have been taught are happy."

(NKJ) - "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law."

What relationship does this Scripture passage make between receiving spiritual vision and keeping God's commands? _____

READ: II Peter 1:3-9

List the eight character qualities mentioned in this passage:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

Group activity: (20-30 minutes)

Separate into small groups of 2-3 individuals. Pick one (or more) of the nine character qualities listed and look them up in the dictionary as well as the concordance. Each individual should have an assignment (a passage to look up or definition to find). Write a definition of this quality, using your own words, after examining and discussing the deeper understanding developed according to your findings as a group. Be prepared to discuss your definition with the other groups.

Quality: _____

Definition: _____

Quality: _____

Definition: _____

Verse 9 of this passage tells us that those who lack these qualities are short-sighted. This perfectly describes Israel's condition and if we allow this truth to pierce our own heart we may see how it describes our own lives as well. Spiritual myopia results when we take our eyes off of God's promises and see only our present struggles. We lose sight of God's commands, believing that they are optional and unnecessary for achieving success. We lose the will to endure the necessary trials of life that refine our character and take us all the way to the Promise Land. Have you left God's path of learning to pursue your own course? Do you find yourself grossly deficient in the character qualities that Peter claims will keep us from being barren and unfruitful (vs.8)?

Decide today to become more aware of situations that God might be using to develop these qualities in your life.

ARE YOU READY TO SIGN UP FOR GOD'S EXTREME MAKEOVER?

Read over the support Scriptures for this Lesson. If we don't allow His mighty hands to shape us, we may find ourselves spinning needlessly on the potter's wheel. If you have resisted His hand in your life, will you trust Him for the courage to get back on the potter's wheel and submit to His design for you? He is able to purify you, taking out the stony, stubborn heart, and give you a heart to want to obey Him. He will prepare you for your journey to the Promise Land. He will cure your spiritual myopia, bring you back into alignment with His will, and give you clear vision for the future.

Closing Scripture:

The apostle Paul recognized that knowing and experiencing Christ's resurrection power would only be realized as he chose to suffer with Christ by sharing in His death. Part of that suffering begins as we choose to allow the Lord to remove our imperfections. This is not a physical death, but an agreement to pursue the way of the Master. Paul, like Gideon, identified with the "hidden" soldier within and the power and ability made available to us as believers. Maturing in Christ does not just happen automatically. Your physical bodies grew through no will of your own, but your spirit man will not be perfected until you make a conscious decision to submit to His spiritual makeover. Like Paul, we must be determined to remain faithful to the end.

Are you ready for Him to give you a faithful heart? Then make this Scripture your confession today!

I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. - Philippians 3:10-14 (NLT)

It would be beneficial to memorize this passage.

LESSON 7: ANYONE FOR HUMBLE PIE?

Confession of Principle 7: "We humbly ask Jesus to remove all our shortcomings."

Scriptural support for this principle:

1 John 1:9 (NKJ) - *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Psalm 32:5 (NKJ) - *I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.*

Proverbs 28:13 (NKJ) - *He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and *forsakes them will have mercy.*

WHAT ARE YOU SERVING UP TO GOD?

Imagine that you are invited out for dinner and a scrumptious meal is served to you on a dirty plate! It would be difficult to dive into the meal no matter how delightful it looks or smells because your eyes would be focused on the dirty plate with the old, crusty food underneath. You might wonder, "How can my host think that I could ignore this disgusting dish? Why on earth would they serve something so wonderful on something so dirty?" This must be a little of what our Lord feels when we offer up our prayers, praises and petitions without first resolving our issues of sin and wiping the slate, or should I say, plate clean!

Let's take a quick look at an exhortation from Matthew's gospel to "go clean the plate" before offering your gift to God.

So if you are about to place your gift on the altar and remember that someone is angry with you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. Make peace with that person, then come back and offer your gift to God. - Matthew 5:23-24 (CEV)

Confession before the Lord is necessary to continue on with an intimate relationship with the Creator. Broken fellowship with God is a sure way to defeat us, as we will lack the power to overcome iniquity and tend to repeat past areas of failure.

If I had *cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. -Psalm 66:18 (ESV)

Let us take a look at some of the dictionary meanings of the word, "cherish."

***cher·ish (verb) - to hold or treat as dear, to cling fondly**

How far can a relationship develop when one of the parties is not listening to the other? Many individuals grow frustrated with their lack of intimacy with the Lord and long for God to reveal more of His presence in their lives. In the last chapter, we spoke of Gideon's indictments against the Lord. He blamed the Lord for Israel's failures and defeat before their enemies, the Midianites. In essence, Gideon was crying out, "Where have you been, God?" What it really amounts to is not where God has been, but what we have been clinging to that would cause a breach between God and ourselves.

Consider the dictionary definition of **cherish**. What do you cling to and hold to as dear in your own life that has taken a place that belongs only to the Master?

List your shortcomings (things you have cherished more than a desire for and pursuit of an intimate relationship with God) below:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 6. _____ |

Now let's look at the meaning of "forsake" as it is defined in Proverbs 28:13, one of our support Scriptures for principle 7.

Strong's Concordance definition: ***forsakes - to loosen, relinquish**

A true and genuine confession to God always includes forsaking the sin we are confessing. So whatever we are clinging to, we must loosen and relinquish.

DIRTY PLATE SYNDROME...

Can you imagine if the host who served the meal on the messy plate explained to the guests that he/she really enjoyed the last meal and couldn't bear to remove it all because they had received so much pleasure from partaking of it? God wants us to make a clean break from the former things that we derived pleasure from in our sinful condition. Trying to come to God without making confession is like bringing him a meal on a dirty plate. Confessing and forsaking separates us from our sins and thereby joins us back to intimacy with God. Do you suffer from DIRTY PLATE SYNDROME? God will look past all the glamour and glitz of whatever we serve up no matter how hard we work to make it look good. He will certainly not be looking forward to the dessert.

SIMON THE SOCRER: MAN WITH THE DIRTY PLATE

READ: Acts 8:5-24

Discussion:

Let's look closer at verses 9-11 in the Amplified Version:

9 *"But there was a man named Simon, who had formerly practiced magic arts in the city to the utter amazement of the Samaritan nation, claiming that he himself was an extraordinary and distinguished person.*

10 *They all paid earnest attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is that exhibition of the power of God which is called great (intense).*

11 *And they were attentive and made much of him, because for a long time he had amazed and bewildered and dazzled them with his skill in magic arts."*

- Describe his reputation among the people.
- What degree of influence did Simon the Sorcerer have on the city of Samaria?
- Looking back into the whole text (vv. 5-24) what do you think drew Simon to Philip's preaching?
- How did Simon respond to the preaching of the gospel according to verse 13?
- What actions in verses 18-19 indicate that Simon was coming to God with a dirty plate?

Peter rebukes Simon for his abhorrent behavior as it is obvious Simon is trying to apprehend the gifts of the Holy Spirit for his own selfish benefit. He is asking for the Holy Spirit while his motives and desires are still miserably corrupt. Verses 20-24 describe Peter's encounter with this man as Peter perceives that Simon is plagued with unrepentant sin.

Write out verse 23: _____

Apparently Simon is in a bond of iniquity, indicating that he is imprisoned by his sinful choices. Asking for the Holy Spirit for his own purposes would validate his continuing need to be lifted up in the eyes

of others as he was able to do with his magic arts. He was jealous and bitter and perhaps didn't want to share the attention he received with anyone else. The apostles were displaying marvelous signs and wonders in the same community that Simon had formerly bewitched. Simon is suffering with **DIRTY PLATE SYNDROME!** His heart is not right with God, yet he wants to operate in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and serve it up to the people!

What might be some of the “bonds” we are holding on to that keep the Holy Spirit from working in our lives? Confession of his sinful past was the solution to the dilemma that Simon faced. God is willing to clean the platter if we are willing to put the plate in the sink.

God will:

1. Cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. - Micah 7:18-19 (ESV)

2. Remove our sins as far as the east from the west.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. - Psalm 103:12 (Amplified Bible)

3. Make us white as snow

Come now, let's settle this," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool. - Isaiah 1:18 (NLT)

His work in us will always be complete and thorough. We don't need to worry about asking him for extra stain remover; His blood is the most dynamic cleansing agent available to mankind.

Homework

The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. - Psalm 34:18 (NKJ)

Confessing sin in a humble state will always beckon the heart of the Savior. For some of us, we must confess our lack of humility first. Remember that backing up from pride will keep us from going down the wrong paths. If we struggle with pride, we will struggle with confession. Simon needed someone else to point out his personal sin issues. He had too much pride to recognize the areas of confession that he had neglected to bring before the Father.

Look up the words broken and contrite using various tools (concordance, dictionary, Bible dictionary, Bible text).

Place your findings here:

Broken - _____

Contrite - _____

Rewrite Psalm 34:18 (on back of this paper) replacing the words broken and contrite with the expanded definitions you discovered. Personalize the text. (ex.: The Lord is close to me whose own strength is crushed with rebellion, whose spirit is deeply affected with grief and sorrow...etc.) The Psalms are full of exclamations about God's wonderful power to cleanse us from sin. Look up

the following passages and pick one that is especially meaningful to you.

Psalm 39

Psalm 38

Psalm 103:1-18

Psalm 32

Psalm 130

I like Psalm _____ because:

Be prepared to discuss your homework in group.

GOD'S TABLE: PARTAKING OF HIS BODY AND BLOOD.

We are about to sit at the table of the King! He has prepared nourishment for us and we should take great care to see and understand what our King has provided for us. The table He has set is divine; it is His own body and blood.

PREPARE FOR COMMUNION: Reflecting on what Christ accomplished for us on the cross encourages us to move forward with actions that will confirm our confession. The Lord's Supper is not to be taken lightly. It is a time for us, as believers, to examine our lives, confess any sin, and purpose to restore fellowship with our Savior who died for us.

His Precious Blood: I Peter 1:18-19, Ephesians 2:12-13, Hebrews 9:11-14

His Broken Body: Luke 22:19, I Corinthians 10:16b-17, John 6:48-51

His work was complete. (Isaiah 53:3-6)

The body of our Lord brings nutrition to our spirit much like good food and vitamins do for our physical body. His body nourishes us. His blood cleanses us. This is not an external matter, but a matter of the heart. A "fit" spirit, nourished and cleansed by our communion with Him, is now ready to proceed ahead with actions that accompany a repentant heart.

BLESSING OUR MEAL

READ: I Corinthians 11:23-32

Worship and Communion

Closing Scripture:

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. - Colossians 1:19-23(NIV)

How can we resist this invitation to be without blemish and free from accusation? Are you still in the red as far as your sins are concerned? Let the blood that He so painfully shed for you and I, cleanse you today.

LESSON 8: **LEFT BEHIND**

Confession of Principle 8: "Make a list of all persons we have harmed and become willing to make amends to them all."

Scriptural support for this principle:

Matthew 7:12 (NLT) - *Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.*

Luke 10:27 (NIV) - *He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

Romans 13:8 (NCV) - *Do not owe people anything, except always owe love to each other, because the person who loves others has obeyed all the law.*

LOOKING BACK TO GET AHEAD!

At the core of every human dilemma, we will find selfishness. This manifests in the inability to love ourselves or those around us in an effective and meaningful way. Mankind, in his fallen condition, is constantly beckoned to do what is contrary to the Spirit. Giving in to temptation will always result in damage, not just to the individuals committing unrighteous acts, but to those in community with them. Many who come to a salvation experience are eager to proceed ahead to a new journey in Christ. Sadly, some of them never come to realize the wake of destruction they left behind.

Thought to ponder - In your eagerness to live a Christ-like lifestyle, have you neglected to look behind at those you might have offended?

Yes No

In contrast, however, we are encouraged in the following Scriptures, to look forward to the new things that lie ahead. **Read the following passages:**

*Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, - **Philippians 3:13 (NKJ)***

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. - **2 Corinthians 5:17 (KJV)***

Craning our necks to look back can be a crime! Lot's wife turned to a pillar of salt when she looked back, didn't she (Genesis 19:26)? There is a distinct difference between looking back at our former life with longing or desire, and looking back to tend to unfinished business. The "looking back" that this principle requires should result in a greater realization of the completed work Christ has done for us. As we make a list of those we have offended and recognize the full impact that our unrighteous living had on others, we can only be ever more thankful for His great mercy. It is amazing to comprehend that the

Savior chose to embrace us in our sinful condition even before we fully realized the damage our reckless behavior had on others.

Reflection time:

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. - Romans 5:8 (NLT)

Before moving forward with this principle, take a moment to thank the Lord for His great love expressed to us when we were still in a pitiful and selfish state.

Write out your words of gratitude to the Lord for this unconditional love on the lines below:

Share your words of gratitude with the group if you are comfortable.

LUMPY CARPETS -WHAT'S UNDER THE RUG?

In our last study, we talked about dirty plates and making sure we are letting God wipe our plate (slate) clean to restore our intimacy with him. This is a vertical action between God in Heaven, and ourselves. We are now being asked to look at the horizontal relationships in our lives, between others to whom we have been in community with, and ourselves. It is easier to sweep away our past, especially when confronting it means that a little humility might be required to make things right with those around us. In our foster home, we would occasionally have a young girl who didn't feel it was worth the time to accomplish her chore duties satisfactorily. One day, I caught one of these women in the act. She was sweeping all the dirt from the kitchen underneath the family room rug! Talk about surprise. She didn't expect me to enter the room at that time and was quite embarrassed. Do you have "**Lumpy Carpet Syndrome?**" Are you guilty of sweeping the debris of your past life under the carpet. A dirty floor can be just as distasteful as a dirty plate!

The Principle of Restitution: Removing the Lumps

Our supporting passage in Matthew 7:12 indicates that the message of the law and the prophets can be summed up in the single statement: "Do to others what you would like them to do to you." Let us take a look at one of the consequences an Israelite under the law would face when not applying this simple principle to his own life.

And the Lord said to Moses, Say to the Israelites, When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit by breaking faith with the Lord, and that person is guilty, Then he shall confess the sin which he has committed, and he shall make restitution for his wrong in full, and add a fifth to it, and give it to him whom he has wronged. But if the man [wronged] has no kinsman to whom the restitution may be made, let it be given to the Lord for the priest, besides the ram of atonement with which atonement shall be made for the offender. - Numbers 5:5-8 (Amplified Bible)

Group Discussion:

- **Note the emphasis on breaking faith with the Lord as a precursor to committing sin. Can you think of a time, in your life, when breaking faith with the Lord was quickly followed by sinful actions towards others?**
- **What was the offender required to bring along with his confession?**
- **Keep in mind what we learned in Principle 7 about sincere confessions being proved by corresponding actions. Why do you think the Lord made this requirement?**
- **It is interesting to note that if there were no relatives available to make restitution to, the priest would stand in the place of the offended party. Why do you think this was important?**

We tend to sweep these examples of Scripture under the carpet right along with our debris, dismissing them as irrelevant for those living under the New Covenant. We fail to look at the vital principles God's Word is teaching us in these passages, that are included in what is referred to as the Law of Moses. The New Covenant places an emphasis on the offended parties to release the offender even before confession or restitution is made. The following passages make this point obvious: Matthew 5:43-44, Matthew 6:12,14-15, Matthew 18:21-22, Mark 11:25-26, Colossians 3:13, Ephesians 4:32. In these references, the burden of responsibility is upon the one being offended. This is a good way to remain without offense and consciously and consistently resist a bitter spirit. However, we are examining our lives under this principle as the offender rather than the one who was offended. Let's keep this in mind as we proceed ahead with Principle 8.

In order to successfully navigate through this principle, we must define offenses from a Biblical perspective. We can look at the "obvious" acts of the flesh listed in Scripture and easily identify behavior that is offensive to the Lord.

READ: Galatians 5:19-21 and list these acts of the flesh on the lines below.

(You may want to grab a dictionary and multiple Bible translations for this exercise). Have you engaged in any of these activities? Put a check by any of the ones that you have engaged in to any degree. You may want to look up the exact meanings before trying to identify those that would apply to you.

After doing this exercise, take some time to think about the impact these activities may have had on others. Most of these "works of the flesh" involve more than one person! We may need to reflect on this fact as we move toward making our list of offenses.

Now here is the hard part. There are other sins called sins of omission. Rather than a focus on what we did to others, these sins are representative of times we didn't do something to or for others. For a

deeper understanding of this principle, let's look at one of our support Scriptures a little closer:

Do not owe people anything, except always owe love to each other, because the person who loves others has obeyed all the law. - Romans 13:8 (NCV)

This is the sum total of what Christ expressed through the Sermon on the Mount as we discussed briefly in LESSON 4. Note the definition of the word "owe" expressed in this Scripture:

***owe* - This is from the Greek word, "opheileo" which denotes the idea of accruing, to be under obligation, to fail in duty, and to be guilty of indebtedness.**

Our homework will give us the opportunity to reflect on times when we missed out on investing God's love into those around us. How can we put a tangible face on love? The Bible is full of instruction on how we are to love, but we may have subconsciously dismissed these standards of loving others as too difficult or unreasonable. Before you embark on your homework assignment, give God permission to probe your heart and reveal to you any areas you may have overlooked. Let him peel back the carpet to expose the layers of debris that need to be swept clean. Hang on as we look behind to get ahead.

Search me, O God, and know my heart: Try me, and know my thoughts; And see if there be any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting. - Psalm 139:23-24 (ASV)

Homework

LOOKING AT WHAT WE LEFT BEHIND

Have you ever been on a wonderful vacation and upon returning home and unpacking your bags you became aware that you left something valuable behind that most likely cannot be retrieved? Many times we find ourselves at the end of a particular journey in life, only to unpack the bags and realize that we missed something important. Many individuals will recount their grief for not spending more time with a loved one who passed, others sense remorse for missing out on their son or daughter's childhood because they were too busy with their own affairs. Some adults feel a sense of regret when they realize that so much valuable time has slipped away and they failed to spend enough moments doing what was really important.

List the different titles you held/hold in every day life (ex: employer, father, husband, etc.):

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 7. _____ | 8. _____ |

Read the following passages before comprising your list of offenses: Ephesians 5:22-6:9, Ephesians 5:1-5, Colossians 3:1-25 - 4:1, I John 4:7-11, 4:19-21, 5:1.

It is hard to think of others when we are wallowing in self-pity or acting self-righteously. Many of us were unaware of the times that we should have loved others because we were too busy thinking about how others didn't love us. Take the time to measure your love output in the various positions

and titles you hold/held in life, using the standards listed in these Scripture passages. You may also want to refer back to LESSON 4 and take another look at the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. Be brave and proceed ahead with your list! The way to the Promise Land is paved with suffering. It will be much easier to proceed ahead without having to dodge the lumpy carpet.

Take out a clean sheet of paper and begin making your list this week. Remember to include not just those you offended by your harmful actions, but those you neglected. Encourage yourself with the following Scripture before beginning your assignment.

Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever? For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. So take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees. Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong. - Hebrews 12:9-13 (NLT)

You may not complete your list in this homework section. That's OK! We are purposing to finish our list before we move on to Principle 9.

CHARACTER SKETCH: King Saul - Man With the Lumpy Carpet

Let's take a break from examining our own personal lives and see if we can learn some life lessons from a man who walked on lumpy carpets for most of his life.

Read the following passages. As we go along, fill out the list of positions Saul held in life as well as the offenses he committed. Be mindful of his activities, actions towards others, and ability to follow the commands given to him by his earthly and heavenly authorities. Think about his love output towards those around him.

Read from Amplified or New Living versions.

I Samuel 9:1-10, I Samuel 10:1-16, I Samuel 13:1-14, I Samuel 14:24-35, I Samuel 15:1-35, I Samuel 16:13-23, I Samuel 18:1-2, 6-29, I Samuel 28:6-11, I Samuel 31:1-7

List the different titles Saul held throughout his life. Comprising this list while reading these passages will make this exercise easier:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 7. _____ | 8. _____ |

List the offenses Saul committed, keeping in mind the various positions he held. Once again, this

will be much easier if this is done while reading the passages:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Continue on back, if needed.

When scrutinizing this devious Bible character, it is easy to see how truly guilty he was of offending the Lord and others. The ramifications of his unrepentant lifestyle didn't just stop at his own family, nor did it end with the nation he miserably failed to protect. His actions also put future generations of Israel at grave risk. The villain of the book of Esther, named Haman, who contrived a wicked plot to annihilate the Jews, was thought to be descended from the Amalekites - the nation Saul failed to extinguish (Esther 3:10)!

Let's reflect back on our homework assignment. Were you able to scrutinize your own life as thoroughly as you examined King Saul's tainted past? Knowing the impact that our unresolved sin issues can have on future generations, there should be a renewed sense of vigor in our efforts to sweep away the debris!

Stop now and review your list of offenses. Ask yourself the following questions:

- **Are there any other titles or positions you occupied that you need to add to the list?**
- **Have you made an extensive list of people who may have suffered due to your neglect to follow the Biblical mandate to love?**
- **Have you considered any offensive actions you may have committed in response to those who first offended you?**
- **Does your list include all parties you have offended even those who are no longer alive?**
- **Have you considered the ramifications of your poor choices and how the consequences of your actions may have harmed not only those you offended but those close to them? (ex: Saul's jealousy and injurious treatment of David affected Saul's son, Jonathan, as well.**

Although Jonathan and David were very close, he lied for David and kept in touch with him secretly for fear of his father's retribution.)

Read support Scripture Luke 10:27. Can you see a relationship between loving God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and loving others? Can we say we really love God when we fail to treat others according to His law of love? Saul's issues with others were a direct result of his failure to love and obey God.

Take time before the next lesson to complete your list.

SWEEPING AWAY THE CRUMBS

Week of unleavened bread: The Lord commanded a feast for His people that began with their Exodus from Egyptian bondage. It would be marked on the Hebrew calendar as the beginning of months and the first month of the year (Exodus 12:2). During this week, commonly known as Passover Week, the Hebrews were instructed to refrain from all food items containing leaven or yeast products (read Exodus 13). As time went on, Jews would celebrate this particular feast with great care, making sure they removed all trace of leaven from their home on the eve of Passover. They would take a feather and sweep every fine crumb into a dust pan, being careful to look in the deepest corners of their home. Though we might look at that custom as an exaggerated and unnecessary tradition, it would be good for us to adhere to that type of caution and scrutinizing for our spiritual sweeping. Are you willing to look at every nook and corner of your heart and allow God to sweep any leaven out? The Lord was emphasizing a sweeping away at the very beginning of their new life of freedom. Many of us have missed that step. We, too, have been delivered from the bondage of this world, and like the Israelites, it would be good to rid our lives from the crumbs of our sinful past as we press on to the Promise Land.

Wherefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. - 1 Corinthians 5:8 (ASV)

Special Note:

Your list is a personal and private inventory between you and the Lord. It is, however, beneficial in some cases, to get the input of a close friend, relative or trusted mentor or counselor. If you need help, don't hesitate to find someone who will respect your need for confidentiality. You will never be asked to discuss your list in class.

LESSON 9: **RED AS SCARLET - WHITE AS SNOW**

Confession of Principle 9: "Make direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."

Scriptural support for this principle:

Isaiah 1:18 (NLT) - *Come now, let's settle this," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool.*

Luke 3:8a (Amplified Bible) - *Bear fruits that are deserving and consistent with [your] repentance [that is, conduct worthy of a heart changed, a heart abhorring sin]...*

Matthew 5:23-24 (Amplified Bible) - *So if when you are offering your gift at the altar you there remember that your brother has any [grievance] against you, Leave your gift at the altar and go. First make peace with your brother, and then come back and present your gift.*

MAKING A LIST, CHECKING IT TWICE

Our last lesson focused on looking for the leaven and then culminated in a type of Passover Week for those of us who left some crumbs behind. We now need to examine our list a little closer and separate it into offenses that are possible to amend versus offenses that would not be appropriate to make at this time or are impossible to rectify. Looking closer at the leaven of our lives and purposing to make amends can sometimes leave us exhausted or in despair. These are common feelings and you will be encouraged to know that they just mean you are probably doing the necessary cleanup to get your house in order. We get physically tired when we do spring cleaning and can sometimes become emotionally and spiritually exhausted as we wade through the house cleaning of our temples. (Isn't it interesting to note that Passover Week was the beginning of the Spring feasts, a type of spiritual Spring cleaning!) Spring cleaning usually entails going deep into the closets where no one sees. You may be tempted to stuff everything back in to avoid embarrassment, but a cluttered "closet" makes for a chaotic mind that struggles to find peace with God and others.

Before we continue with this principle, let us be encouraged as we look closer at our first support Scripture.

READ: Isaiah 1:18

Group Discussion:

- **What picture comes to mind as you hear this Scripture read?**

- **Why do you think the author chose the words "scarlet" and "red" when referring to our sins?**

It is interesting to note that these colors were the firmest of dyes used in those times and not easily washed out! Is this the way you feel about your past offenses? Before you linger in the land of regret, let us take the time to read this interesting excerpt from page 73, "Biblical Basis for Modern Science," 1985, Baker Book House, by Henry Morris:

"When the female of the scarlet worm species was ready to give birth to her young, she would attach her body to the trunk of a tree, fixing herself so firmly and permanently that she would never leave again. The eggs deposited beneath her body were thus protected until the larvae were hatched and able to enter their own life cycle. As the mother died, the crimson fluid stained her body and the surrounding wood. From the dead bodies of such female scarlet worms, the commercial scarlet dyes of antiquity were extracted. What a picture this gives of Christ, dying on the tree, shedding his precious blood that he might "bring many sons unto glory" (Heb 2:10)! He died for us, that we might live through him! Psalm 22:6 describes such a worm and gives us this picture of Christ."

Our Lord attached himself to the cross of Calvary unwilling to come down until His blood flowed and every inch of life and breath were taken from Him. Our new life emerged at the same place where His ended (Ephesians 5:2, Titus 2:14). What a sobering thought.

Let's take the time to thank our precious Lord for forgiving us so freely and completely and for making His death the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. Please write your words of gratitude below:

You may share the above words with your group if you desire.

Talk about thorough spring cleaning! No maid service could equal that cleanup job. Receiving God's complete and thorough forgiveness in our own lives is an important part of making amends. We have the examples of David in Psalm 51 and Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10 to encourage us to move forward with this principle. Zacchaeus sought out the Savior before making amends with those he offended; David acknowledged that it was against God that he sinned. We must reinforce at this time that when we are making amends with others it is because we have offended God's laws. This keeps our heart in the right place as we seek to repair the damage of broken relationships. Pleasing the Lord and being right with him should be our greatest desire as we make amends.

BLAME SHIFTER OR BLAME CARRIER?

Your list of offenses may have been a little overwhelming for you. Your list may be a bit longer than you expected. Though we have covered this in previous sessions, some of us have adapted to coping skills that transfer blame to others and about this time, you may be tempted to pick up that old survival

tactic as you move through this principle of making amends. Please avoid the temptation to excuse sinful actions because of what has been done to you. We may not be responsible for what others have done to us, but we are always responsible for how we respond to what has been done to us. Whether the actions listed were responses to offensive actions committed against us or our own blatant acts of unkindness fueled by selfishness, we must take full responsibility.

Are you tempted at this time to excuse your actions as you move forward with this principle?

Yes No

On the other hand, we may be tempted to take on guilt that is misplaced. In other words, if we have taken on a scapegoat role in our family of origin or with a current or former spouse, we may have become expert at taking blame that is shifted to us by those not wanting to carry their own load. We can look like spiritual jugglers easing the burdens of the blame shifters by picking up their heavy loads and all the while attempting to juggle our own. To the blame carrier, life may feel like a three-ring circus with him or her in the middle of all three rings trying to please the crowds!

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN, INTO THE FIRE

The term scapegoat goes way back to a mandate given by God under the Old Covenant. The High Priest responsible to officiate in the obligations of this covenant would enter into the Holy of Holies only once annually on the Day of Atonement.

READ: Leviticus 16:21-22 *"And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness."*

The literal meaning is "escape goat". There were actually two goats chosen on this day and the other one was sacrificed by the High Priest. The scapegoat would bear all the iniquities and then be sent off to die in the wilderness. It is said that the community would sometimes need to shoo the goat away, wanting it to quickly depart from their presence since it was carrying their sins. I am not sure which goat had it worse, but if we have taken on the role of scapegoat, chances are we are wandering around in a dry and thirsty land with the weight of the world on our shoulders.

As you attempt to seek forgiveness, are any of the offenses listed a result of misplaced guilt?

Yes No

Allowing a trusted friend and mentor to help as you move through this list may be a key in helping to balance those who teeter between the extremes mentioned above.

THE RABIES FACTOR

As we continue to check our list, we may be able to gain insights that reflect the condition of our own hearts. Hurt people - hurt people! You may be wrestling with some festering wounds of your own. This may affect your ability to graciously ask forgiveness from those whom you have offended. In the movie, "OLD YELLER", a stray dog befriends a lonely boy and they become inseparable companions.

In one intense scene in the movie, the dog defends the boy from an attacking wolf. He triumphs over the vicious animal, but not without a price. The dog is penned up as soon as they find out that the wolf was infected with rabies and an anxious waiting game ensued. Sure enough this precious, loyal dog becomes as vicious as the wolf that bit him, furiously jumping against the chain link fence to get at the boy when he comes near. They euthanize the dog and the boy is grieved to lose what was once a very faithful protector. If we have been bitten and not taken the remedy of forgiveness, we may have allowed that poison to change us into someone who bites at those we should be protecting. There are many good resources for moving through the hurts of our past and it is recommended that you speak to your facilitator or a trusted counselor to work through these festering issues of the heart.

ROUTINE OIL CHECK

Routine oil checks, though they can be ignored, enable your vehicle's engine to run more efficiently and prevent unnecessary engine wear and burn out. We can ignore our 3,000 mile oil changes and eventually our car will suffer the consequences from the lack of proper maintenance. Many individuals in the body of Christ suffer a type of engine burn out! We find ourselves lacking the motivation we once had to serve God faithfully. We may even be doing our devotions and reading the Word on a regular basis, but we find that our delight in the Lord and His presence is not what it used to be. We may be long overdue for some maintenance. As we consider this principle of making amends, it is important to note that the success of God's faith community depends on each individual member contributing to the whole. This interdependence in the body of Christ enables each part to work effectively for the ultimate good of all the members. Just like oil is needed to lubricate the engine parts, we need the oil of His Spirit to flow in community. Let us take a quick stop to learn about the importance of oil in the healing of our wounds and the wounds of others. It just might be the inspiration we need to get our "vehicle" in for some maintenance.

Read the following passages and then answer the questions.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." PSALM 133:1-3 (KJV)

"Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised and shown contempt and provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger, they have become utterly estranged (alienated). Why should you be stricken and punished any more [since it brings no correction]? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint (feeble, sick, and nauseated). From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness or health in [the nation's body]--but wounds and bruises and fresh and bleeding stripes; they have not been pressed out and closed up or bound up or softened with oil. [No one has troubled to seek a remedy.]" ISAIAH 1:4-6 (Amplified Bible)

Group Discussion:

What is the contrasting picture you get with these passages?

Look up "ointment" in the Bible Concordance as used in Psalm 133:2.

Write the definition stated for the Hebrew word:

Strong's Lexicon includes the word unguent to describe the ointment mentioned in Psalm 133:2. This word is defined as a soothing or healing salve. The absence of oil in the second passage meant the absence of the healing balm that would soothe the wounds of the one who was afflicted.

No oil = no remedy

If our goal in this session is to make amends, we must recognize that a divine oil check is needed for our success in this mission. We may need to take some time to allow the Good Shepherd to pour some oil on our own wounds.

Homework

Study the use of oil in the treatment and/or prevention of wounds and bring your findings to class as we continue our discussion time.

What I learned about oil: _____

Share your homework assignment with others in the group.

JESUS: THE DIVINE "MECHANIC"

"You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings." Psalm 23:5b (NLT)

He anoints my head with oil!

You may want to say that phrase quietly to yourself several times, especially at moments of your life when you sense that you are vulnerable to offenses. As you may have found out in your homework assignment, oil is a preventative as well as a medicinal treatment. Shepherds would use oil upon the heads of their flocks to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, relieve the sheep of aggravation from annoying insect pests, and soothe the intensity of the battles that would erupt during mating season. Perhaps the greatest and most significant aspect of the use of oil is its symbolic representation of the Holy Spirit in anointing us for service.

READ: Luke 4:18-19 and Isaiah 61:1-2

Jesus himself was anointed of the Holy Spirit to do the work of the ministry. List the six aspects of ministry that are listed in this passage that Jesus was anointed to do:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Group Discussion:

Which ministry of the Holy Spirit is most meaningful to you at this time? Share with the group.

It is important to note that as believers, we have been anointed to do this work in our community. There is no better place to start than with those we have offended. Many people who are in positions of leadership or serving in the church have subjected the people they have offended to even more wounds by not making amends to them first before taking on ministry endeavors. This can leave a bitter taste in the mouths of those we have hurt and enable them to conclude that the church is full of hypocrites. This can also be the reason that leaders and ministry assistants suffer the burn out we spoke about as we started this lesson. They are carrying the guilt of past offenses and lack the oil they need to operate more efficiently. In the case of the offender, they lack the guidance and strength needed from the Holy Spirit. They are in need of the oil that would enable them to flow in unity with the body of Christ. In the case of the offended, when we inflict injury on others through hurtful words or actions, we leave them vulnerable to open wounds that need to be healed. Making amends towards others can be like pouring oil in the wounds of those we have offended.

Group Discussion:

Take a few moments to read the following. Choose one of the categories and write your response on the lines below.

Category 1: Offender experience

Take time now to think about any past experience you may have had relating to a time when you offended someone and didn't repair the damage. Describe how your relationship with that person was affected and how they viewed you through this experience. Describe the thoughts, reasonings and struggles you had until you made things right. Share the relief you experienced when you followed God's mandate to ask for forgiveness and how that impacted the offended party/parties.

Category 2: Offended experience

Can you think of a time when someone offended you and refused to acknowledge or validate the pain they inflicted upon you? How was your view of that person affected by the offense? What were your thoughts during this period of time. If the offender apologized, explain what your response was to the offender or to the situation (ex: continued anger or hurt, relief, confusion, etc.).

If you are comfortable, share one of the above experiences with the group.

TAPPING INTO THE OIL WELL

Which of the situations above did you find easier to relate to - the offender or the offended? Whether we need the oil for our own wounds or to pour on others, we can take comfort in knowing that God has a never-ending oil well for us to draw from. Our Good Shepherd is there to anoint his sheep with oil whenever a need arises. We humans are not terribly different from sheep.

"Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." II Corinthians 1:21-22 (NKJ)

We have found that the purpose of the oil of God's Spirit in our lives can have multiple meanings and uses. We can be thankful that just as Jesus himself was anointed of the Father, we, too, are equipped to do the work necessary to make our community and our own lives healthier. As Jesus was sent out by the Father, so we, too, are sent (John 17:18, John 14:12-18). We are not sent bleeding and dying. We are not sent destitute and stricken.

Read Psalm 23:5b again in the New Living Translation.

"You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings."

We are sent in honor. We are sent overflowing.

God's anointing in our lives fills us with blessings untold. We are not deserving of those blessings. Lest we believe that the people we have offended do not deserve our apology, let us keep in mind the price that our dear Lord paid for us. Let us remember that nothing we did deserves this type of honor and blessing.

We learned in LESSON 8 that we owe it to others to love them. Let us wrap up this lesson by examining the definition of love according to **I Corinthians 13:4 - 8 (NAS):**

"4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes

all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails."

FILL IN THE BLANKS:

Love is _____, love is _____ and is _____; love _____ and _____, does not act _____; it does not _____, is not _____, does not take into account a _____, does not _____ in _____, but _____ with the _____; _____ things, _____ all things, _____ all things, _____ all things. Love _____.

Let us review some important points we have learned and gain a better picture of a successful way to move forward in order to complete this lesson.

1. Bring your offenses before a Holy God. If your seeking to amend with others is no more than a check list to rid you of guilt or a mere compliance to a principle, ask God to pierce your heart with conviction. Be open as He shows you how your sin grieves His heart.

2. Let God pour the oil of His Spirit into any wounds you may be aware of that have not been treated in your own life. Maybe others have refused to acknowledge their offenses towards you. Remember - that does not stop us from forgiving (see Lesson 8). Let the pain of unresolved offenses in your life encourage you to move forward with making amends towards others you have offended.

3. Bring before God any offenses that are impossible to rectify at this time. There may be offended parties who would refuse reconciliation. Pray for God's oil to reach their hardened and bruised hearts. If the offended party is deceased, consider going to a close relative of the deceased, especially one who was well aware of the offense or might have even suffered because of it. This could open up tremendous opportunity to bring healing into the lives of the offended individual's loved one/ones.

4. Go to any offended parties that you are able to at this time, as a faithful witness and ambassador for Christ. Have you ever seen a sign that tells you not to do a certain activity (ex: smoke, use your cell phone, etc.)? Typically these signs show the activity with a buster sign over them. Some of us need to put a buster sign over any offensive actions that failed to faithfully represent the character of Christ. Humbly ask the offended party for forgiveness.

5. It may be that you are unable to physically see an offended party. They may be sick or in prison or too far away for you to reasonably arrange a meeting. In this case, ask the Lord for guidance. A letter or phone call might be the only means you have to resolve an issue in this case.

Our acts of love will never fail. You may feel like a failure especially if those you go to are unwilling to make amends or if they don't respond quite like you had hoped that they would, but remember that love never fails. The investment you make into the lives of others will prove to be worthy.

Seeking the Lord's guidance is imperative as you take this very important step. Stay close by the faithful Shepherd who will anoint and instruct you.

Let us close with this encouraging passage:

"I [the Lord] will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you." Psalm 32:8 (Amplified Bible)

Suggestions:

A good resource for this Principle is Phillip Keller's book entitled, "A SHEPERD LOOKS AT PSALM 23". Chapter 10 in this book gives wonderful insights to a shepherd's use of oil in caring for his flock.

"Making Peace With Your Past" published by Lifeway Press is an excellent workbook that can be an effective tool in resolving wounds incurred as a child or young adult.

LESSON 10: **EVEN HEROES FALL**

Confession of Principle 10: "Continue to take personal inventory and when we are wrong, promptly admit it."

Scriptural support for this principle:

1 Corinthians 10:12 (CEV) - *Even if you think you can stand up to temptation, be careful not to fall.*

1 Corinthians 13:11 (NIV) - *When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.*

Romans 12:3 (NLT) - *Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.*

IF I HAD A HAMMER...

In Lesson 8, we spoke about the need to look back at our former life in order to see any damage we might have left behind. There may be other good reasons to look back in reflection. Have you ever been around someone who quit smoking after many years? They suddenly become completely intolerant of others still succumbing to the habit. It might do us some good to remember the pain of our former addictions so that we can humbly direct others to freedom instead of chiding them with harsh words of condemnation. This might be another good time for reflecting back. If we are not careful, we can become self-appointed judges hammering down the gavel in a hasty and undiscerning fashion to pass the sentence of guilty upon those still enslaved to life-dominating habits. Those who have gained victory in a particular area can become overwhelmingly oppressive towards others who are still struggling with sin issues. Though we are not advocating that you make it a project of compassion to help lead others to freedom while you are still in a very vulnerable condition, we would also encourage you to be cautious not to harshly judge others who have been unsuccessful in breaking their own addictions. Later in this lesson we will have an opportunity to see how our view towards others still wrestling with addictions can be a tell-tale sign of our own need for self evaluation and a good opportunity for an attitude check. The sweet taste of victory can quickly turn sour when we forget who the real Victor is in our battles.

CHARACTER SKETCH: Gideon - Mighty Man of Valor Fallen!

In LESSON 6 we encouraged you with the story of Gideon who defeated a vast army with just a few hundred men, an impossible feat without following God's plan. In this lesson we will pick up where we left off, only this time we will leave you with a warning of what can happen when we experience success if we are not careful to give God the glory for our triumphs. Gideon struggled to understand why God would use him to deliver the children of Israel. God gave him a series of signs and wonders

in response to Gideon's request to really know that God was speaking to him. One sign came in the form of a coincidence that many of us term a God- incidence. Our mighty man of valor was graciously given the opportunity to be a secret audience to a dialogue between enemy soldiers in the Midianite camp. The dream confirmed that Gideon would defeat them. The telling of this dream is recorded in Judges 7:13-14. **Read this account and then answer the following questions.**

Group Discussion:

What did the soldiers interpret this dream to indicate?

Who did they indicate would be responsible for this defeat?

Fill in the blanks :

"Into his hand _____ Midian and the whole camp." - vs. 14b (NKJ)

Even the enemy himself was giving honor to God for this impending victory! This must have been a tremendous encouragement to a man who just one chapter prior to this was whining about the horrible conditions of his people and declaring his own weakened status amongst his family members. Gideon goes on to defeat the Midianites just as the dream indicated.

Fill in the blanks:

"...And the country was _____ for _____ years in the days of Gideon." - Judges 8:28b

Apparently, this defeat had long term benefits for Israel. As the cycles continued in the book of Judges however, God's people were quick to take their eyes off of the true Victor - the Lord of Heaven's Armies! They were eager to build an earthly throne to establish a visible hero for the nation.

Read Judges 8:22-27

Fill in the blank:

"...for _____ have delivered us from the hand of Midian." (vs. 22b)

Who were they addressing in this passage?

What were the people quick to forget about the victory over the Midianites?

What is Gideon's initial response to the people's desire to have a visible ruler over them?

Why do you think it was important to the people that they have an earthly ruler whom they could see, rather than a God who ruled from heaven?

Gideon's answer in verse 23 sounds so honorable but is quickly followed by a solution that seems

completely contrary to his intention to keep the Lord as the focal point of Israel's worship. What does he do to compromise with their request to have Gideon rule over them?

What were the results of the action Gideon took in response to the people's request?

BACKING UP FROM PRIDE

Does this phrase sound familiar? In LESSON 5 we discussed the need to back up from pride in order to discover the crossroad where deception was first welcomed and how it led us down a path that grieved the heart of God (ex. man's fall in the garden through the serpent's deception). Let us rewind the story of Gideon's journey to success. I think we might be able to see where a tiny crack might have opened up just enough to allow pride to come in, leading to the subsequent fall of the nation of Israel into idolatry and slavery.

READ: Judges 7:15-18

Pride in our accomplishments can creep in unaware. Gideon's immediate response after hearing the dream that confirmed his future defeat of the Midianites is to worship the Lord, but his next response does not seem so noble.

What subtle phrasing indicates that Gideon wanted to share the glory of this victory with the Lord who designed the battle, called Gideon to battle, and gave him the courage to follow this plan? _____

The fall of the man (Judges 8:24-27) resulted in the fall of the nation back into idolatry. Basking in our successes, rather than the One who rescued us, can lead to pride and pride will always lead to a fall. Sadly, we will always take others down with us.

Can you think of a time when someone around you fell back or relapsed into a lifestyle of defeat? How did this impact your life and your faith in the Lord? How did it impact others around them. Write your answer below:

Read our supporting Scripture, I Corinthians 10:12 again. Are you aware of how pride can keep you from taking caution with former areas of vulnerability in your life?

Do you become overly sensitive when someone reminds you to be cautious in these areas?

Yes No

You may share your answer with the group.

Homework

THE LORD, OUR EVALUATOR

READ: Revelation 1:9 - 3:22

The Lord is relating, through the Apostle John, information that He wants conveyed to seven different churches concerning their condition. The messages are rather detailed and painstakingly clear. Though scholars will dispute about who or what these churches actually represented, we can all agree that the messages leave us with a solemn conviction and a sober warning that we can all heed. List the seven churches below with a brief description of their condition:

1. *The Church in* _____ *. Description:* _____

2. *The Church in* _____ *. Description:* _____

3. *The Church in* _____ *. Description:* _____

4. *The Church in* _____ *. Description:* _____

5. *The Church in* _____ *. Description:* _____

Be prepared to discuss your homework in class.

Discuss the homework from previous session.

Group Discussion:

- **If you are comfortable, share your letter with your group.**
- **Share what you learned as you gleaned from the letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation.**
- **What was your view of God as you read the letters He wrote to His people? Describe how you view his character after reading them.**
- **There are many varying views in the psychological, business and social realms concerning how we present evaluations to others in order to reinforce positives rather than negatives. Would God's communication with the churches have fallen into the acceptable guidelines and theories that most "professionals" would adhere to today?**
- **Do you see the sober warnings given in Revelation as a motivation to follow Principle 10 closely (in particular the use of evaluation as encouraged by our supporting Scripture, Romans 12:3, in maintaining our freedom)?**

Summary of the "THE LORD, OUR EVALUATOR" - Before closing our discussion about these letters, let us take note of how our view of God can seriously hamper our ability to effectively examine our own lives as Principle 10 instructs us to do. Our impression of God's character can affect how we hear from Him. If he is a harsh and unloving taskmaster in our eyes, we may avoid hearing His voice much like a child would cower from the discipline of a strict, unloving parent. If we believe God is One who turns His eyes away from sin, picking and choosing His battles with us and ignoring some of our unholy behavior, we may not take His sober warnings seriously. In LESSON 3 we examined our heartfelt view of God and authority figures. It would be good to restate the following message from that lesson at this time:

"A loving father/authority figure would never give his child hoops to jump through without teaching him how to jump. A loving father is there to protect, defend, discipline, serve and bring honor to his child."

If you are struggling with this, it might be beneficial to go back to LESSON 3 and establish, once again, the need to be confident in God as the ultimate, loving and perfect parent.

Let us close this portion of the lesson by reading **Hebrews 12:5-6 (NIV)**

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.'

Take a moment to pause and thank Him for being a loving and faithful parent.

EXAMINING OTHER FALLEN HEROES: Joshua, Aaron and David

Group Activity:

Separate into small groups. Pick one of the following Scripture passages for each group. Read them aloud in your group and then answer the discussion questions.

Group #1: Joshua (Joshua 8:30-35 - Joshua 9) **Group #2: Aaron** (Exodus 32:1-8, 21-26)

Group #3: David (II Samuel 6:1-10, I Chronicles 13:1-12, I Chronicles 15:1, 11-15)

Discussion Questions:

What specific failure was committed by the leaders/individuals in this passage?

Read over I Corinthians 13:11, one of our supporting Scriptures. Do you see any evidence that these individuals were exhibiting "childish ways" that led to their downfall?

Are there any instances of pride evidenced by the leader or others around him?

Did you notice any of the leaders or individuals admitting failure after the downfall?

If any of these leaders were following Principle 10 closely, they would not have been vulnerable to temptation. We can quickly become confident in ourselves when the sweet taste of victory is still in our mouths. All of these men experienced the Lord's amazing victories prior to their fall. Read our support Scripture, Romans 12:3 again. Let us remind ourselves that although we are constantly growing and maturing, we are never too old or too experienced in the things of God to become independent of the Master's guidance.

EVALUATING OTHERS

Take an honest look at the following phrases that identify how we may view others stuck in addiction.

Place check marks beside the phrases that most closely resemble your view.

- I despise others around me who are still walking in bondage. They deserve to be punished severely for their crimes.**
- I am glad that I am free now and would rather not be around others who still struggle. I find them annoying and petty.**
- I fear falling back into the trap of my former lifestyle. I keep busy and out of trouble.**
- I feel sorry for others who still struggle with addictions. I don't want to do or say**

anything that might make them feel badly and sometimes choose to ignore their sinful actions. After all, I was an addict, too.

- The sting of my own past reminds me to press forward with Christ in complete obedience to His directives for my life. My focus now is to keep the beam out of my own eye. At some time in the future, I look forward to helping others recover.**
- I am thankful to tell others of God's deliverance in my life. Walking free is a joy I want others to experience.**

As we stated in the beginning of this lesson, our treatment and evaluation of others stuck in addiction cycles can reveal some things about our own heart condition. When we step into the evaluator's shoes it can assist us in finding out how effective we can be in evaluating our own lives. Are we consistent to judge others in the same way we judge ourselves? Do we tend to overlook the beam in our own eye and search for the speck in others? Do we tend to justify or rationalize the sins of others for fear that confronting them might mean we must take a more honest look at ourselves?

Group Discussion:

If you would like, share with the group the views you checked off. Discuss them as a group and find Scriptures to support your view/views or to guard against them.

READ: Proverbs 16:18, I Peter 5:6 and James 4:10

Keeping in mind the principle we are now working on, as well as individuals we have examined in this lesson, state in your own words the Truths you believe God is revealing through these passages: _____

GROWING UP: The way to freedom

The Greek word for "**putting away**" used in I Corinthians 13:11 means "**to render inoperative, inactive.**" It indicates freedom from something that has formerly kept us bound. Hopefully, we have discovered some of the roots of our addictive behaviors and have ceased from merely whacking furiously at the weeds on the surface. We can all probably identify with some of the childish behaviors that fueled our addictions (activities that exhibited temper tantrum-like behavior, stubbornness, pride, and self-centeredness). As we seek to put these behaviors out of our lives, no longer being dominated by their control, we are taking steps to secure our freedom in Christ. Growing out of childish behavior is a necessary process that can be aided when we take the necessary time out in our devotions to evaluate our lives. However, we must keep in mind that a natural child grows into a healthy independence. In contrast, growing up in the kingdom of God, we never grow away from our complete and utter dependence upon our Creator God.

Living out Principle 10 is more than simply knowing about how humility relates to our success in this principle. If we are to live out a life of humility, willing to allow the Spirit of God to evaluate our thoughts, deeds, and motives, we must make a purposeful choice to abide in Him. Abiding in Him is making a choice to grow up! It is only the committed heart that will be willing to receive the correction

and adjustments that need to be made as we submit to the Holy Spirit's scrutiny.

Let's wrap up this lesson with three practical steps we can take as we embrace a life of humility:

- 1. Commit to being a living sacrifice to God (no will of your own) - Romans 12:1**
Our lives should be consecrated and set apart for His service.
- 2. Commit to a daily time of renewing your mind in the Word of God - Romans 12:2.**
Letting God's Word transform us is an essential part of living out His will.
- 3. Commit to an honest evaluation of yourself according to God's measure of faith - Romans 12:3.**
This will keep the believer from the extremes of being puffed up or beaten down.

Understanding how much we need Christ on a daily basis is an important step towards this life of humility. Let us remember that our Father, the "gardener," is well able to weed, water and prune our garden! As we commit to His service, He commits to giving us the vital nourishment we need to continue in Him, bearing fruit for His glory and not our own. Gideon would have done well to understand the importance of this daily commitment.

Closing Scripture:

John 15:1-5 (CEV) *Jesus said to his disciples: I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts away every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit. But he trims clean every branch that does produce fruit, so that it will produce even more fruit. You are already clean because of what I have said to you. Stay joined to me, and I will stay joined to you. Just as a branch cannot produce fruit unless it stays joined to the vine, you cannot produce fruit unless you stay joined to me. I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you stay joined to me, and I stay joined to you, then you will produce lots of fruit. But you cannot do anything without me.*

As we commit to a life of dedication, the Lord will speak to us just as He did in the letters to the churches in the Book of Revelation. Do we have ears to hear? Will we take heed to God's warnings and the Holy Spirit's promptings when they come to us? Are we willing to let the Lord "cut away" the decaying branches of our lives? Our success in this Principle depends on it!

LESSON 11: GETTING TO KNOW HIM

Confession of Principle 11: "I will work through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with God and my understanding of Him, praying only for the knowledge of His will for me and the power to work it out."

Scriptural support for this principle:

Proverbs 4:20-22 (NASB) - *My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your sight; Keep them in the midst of your heart. For they are life to those who find them And health to all their body.*

2 Timothy 2:15 (Amplified Bible) - *Study and be eager and do your utmost to present yourself to God approved (tested by trial), a workman who has no cause to be ashamed, correctly analyzing and accurately dividing [rightly handling and skillfully teaching] the Word of Truth.*

Ephesians 6:10-11 (NASB) - *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.*

CHARACTER SKETCH: Paul

Paul, the apostle of the Lord who penned most of the epistles in the New Testament, made knowing Christ his highest aim. As a matter of fact, he considered all else rather worthless compared to the pursuit of gaining Christ and having a closer relationship with Him. Before Christ apprehended him, he was a religious zealot persecuting Christians and believing he was doing God a service! The Lord removed the blinders and he went on to be a valuable missionary whose goal was to teach others about the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus.

READ: Philippians 3:1-14

Group Discussion:

Where did Paul place his confidence before coming to Christ? Where did it lead him?

Where did you place your confidence before coming to Christ? Where did it lead you?

Paul talks about the fellowship of sufferings in verse 10. What do you think he was referring to in this passage?

What are some of the sufferings you have endured for Christ since you made the choice to pursue righteousness?

Write out verse 14 as it reads in your Bible: _____

UPWARD CALL

Paul mentions in verse 13 that he is forgetting what is behind and reaching at what is ahead so that he can achieve this goal. In previous sessions, we have purposed to look behind only to resolve past sin issues within ourselves and with others. It is the only way that we can run this race that Paul talks about without extra baggage weighing us down. We have done our homework to get to this place and we should now be ready to look ahead and leave our past behind!

Are you willing to commit to pursuing the "high calling" (upward call) of which Paul is referring to in verse 14?

yes **no**

DON'T BE A JUNK FOOD JUNKY

Running a race successfully requires great attention to the health of the body. We can all relate to times when we fed various lusts in our lives only to have our appetite for those things increase insatiably! Those appetites had a way of dominating our lives and robbing us of a hunger for what is good and right. Some of us are filling up with carnal, vain, and empty activities that have no bearing on eternal pursuits. These activities fill us up, make us sluggish about the things of God, and rob our appetite for heavenly things. When we are hungry again, we tend to reach for more of the "junk food" we have been feeding ourselves and the cycle of missed opportunities for the Lord continues. Pursuing the high calling that Paul talks about will require some purposeful prayer and meditation time in order to stay in the race. Junk food junkies don't make good marathon runners.

Homework

READ: Psalm 1:1-2 in the NIV

1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Look up the following words in the dictionary or concordance. Write down their meaning.

wicked -

sinners -

mockers -

Take note of any activities or relationships you are involved in that may be in violation of this passage.

- **Are you listening to advice from those whose lives are not centered around Biblical precepts (Proverbs 13:20, I Timothy 6:20-21, II Timothy 4:3-4)?**
- **Do those you associate with have no fear of God and doubt the soon coming of the Lord, living as if there is no second coming (Psalm 119:63, II Peter 3:3, Jude 17-19)?**
- **Are the messages to which you are listening uplifting and edifying your spirit (Philippians 4:8)?**
- **Do you have reading material that makes light of sinful activities (II Tim.2:19-21, I Thess. 5:22, I Cor. 15:33)?**

GIGO (Garbage in - garbage out)

Can you confess to being a spiritual junk food junky? Are there any areas in your life that you believe may be keeping you from delighting in the Lord and meditating upon Him? These are the activities that will make us full and leave little time or appetite for the pursuit of knowing Him.

List them below:

Keep in mind that when we have a full stomach we tend to get sleepy. If we have filled our bellies with the world and its ways we will become negligent about the things of God. You will find yourself slowly disengaging or becoming tired at the reading of the Word and less enthusiastic about the things of God. Wake up sleepy head! Let the light of Christ keep you alert.

Ephesians 5:8-14 (NIV) *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'*

Remember that we are making a conscious effort in this principle to improve our communication with God. It will not be an easy step to maintain but as our support Scripture in Proverbs 4 reminds us, giving attention to Him means life and health to our whole being.

Purpose to be around those activities and people that will build you up and fill you up with more of Him!

Be prepared to discuss your homework in class.

Discuss homework from previous session.

HIM AND ME TIME!

There is a huge emphasis these days on "me time". Jesus himself departed frequently to get alone and away from the crowds that constantly pressed in on Him. However, getting alone and away from the desperation of those who needed Him was not at all a selfish decision. He desired to connect with His Father. Investing in ourselves does not have to be a selfish concept. Have you ever felt a little uncomfortable when the stewardess on the airplane explained, before the flight, that in the event oxygen was needed, everyone should make sure that they placed the mask on themselves first, before placing it on younger passengers? It seems contrary to a caregiver's heart to help ourselves first, but in the event that oxygen is really needed, how much help can we be to a young child if we are passed out on the floor? Improving our conscious contact with God is never just about us! As we move on to Principle 12, we will understand more about why it is important to understand the knowledge of God's will for our own personal lives. For now, put your "oxygen mask" on as we explore this concept further!

Read our support Scripture, II Timothy 2:15 again.

Group Discussion:

- **What word does it use to describe the man who studies God's Word?**
- **Why do you suppose that the man who follows the advice given will not experience shame?**

Are you willing to be a workman for God?

Yes **No**

Our former lifestyle of addictive or destructive behaviors probably caused a measure of shame. We searched for approval from others rather than from God and came up miserably wanting. Studying God's Word and being eager to present ourselves to Him rather than others will restore dignity and honor to our lives. We can then be effective in ministry, only after our time with Him has made us ready.

Are you ready to make "Him and Me" time a priority in your life?

Yes **No**

GOD'S ARMOR: OUR PROTECTION

READ: Ephesians 6:10-18

Growing up and out of shame can put us right in the middle of a war zone. Our adversary would prefer for us to remain stagnant. God is aware of our need to prepare for battle in this effort to grow in Him and has given us everything necessary for the struggles we will face. We will note the use of similes so that we might see with our mind's eye the tools he gives us as we face an adversary that is invisible, yet

very real. This passage contains a list of the parts of God's armor we have been given to equip us for waging war against the strategies of our adversary, Satan.

On the lines next to each entry, write what you believe these pieces of God's armor represent to the believer in Christ.

THE WHOLE ARMOUR

1. Girded waist - _____

2. Breast plate - _____

3. Shod feet - _____

4. Shield - _____

5. Helmet - _____

6. Sword - _____

Putting on God's armor is a necessary part of the daily routine of the believer who wants to remain in connection with the Lord. We must acknowledge that we cannot stand faithful without His protection. As we make the decision to invest in our own lives as workmen who need not be ashamed, we will face temptations and must arm ourselves as soldiers prepared for war.

READ: II Timothy 2:1-4 (NKJ)

1 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 3 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

- **What simile does this passage use to describe Timothy's position (vs. 3)?**
- **What are some of the "affairs of this life" you believe Paul is referring to when urging Timothy to live as a soldier?**
- **Why would this counsel be important to Timothy's success?**

The battle to stay free from the bondages that once enslaved us may be very difficult at times. We may need to spend more concentrated time in the Word and fellowship with God and others to endure these times of testing.

Can you see the importance of preparing yourself for this battle?

Yes No

GET READY!

READ: II Peter 3

As we read this passage in II Peter, we find urgent warnings and reminders. According to verses 1, and 15b -16a, we can see that the information communicated has been repeated by other apostles and

written about in other epistles. Peter himself states in verse one that he is reminding them here of something he already told them. **Let us look closer at the information conveyed to the reader and find out why it was worthy of repeating.**

Group Discussion

- **According to vv. 1-2, what is the purpose of this epistle?**

What are some of the things listed in this chapter that Peter wanted the reader to understand:

Write down verse 18 as it reads in your own translation below:

- **Principle 11 teaches us to make a conscious effort to invest into our lives spiritually. How can practicing this principle become more of a priority in our lives as we consider the urgent message presented to us in II Peter 3?**

Are you willing to grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord as Peter advises us in this verse?

Yes **No**

KNOWING AND GROWING

We have discovered that two apostles, Peter and Paul, placed knowing and growing in Christ as an important aim for the believer. They constantly reminded their followers to pay attention to what they had spoken and proclaimed among the believers. As any good teacher would do, these men worked hard to get their students to listen and learn. Looking at our first support Scripture we see another reminder to give attention. In the King James Bible give attention is translated as attend to. The Hebrew word actually means: *to prick up the ears*. In order to know and grow we must get ready to listen and receive from our Master. As I ponder this definition my mind pictures a loyal dog waiting for his master to return home from work. The first thing that dog will do is prick up his ears when he detects any sign that his beloved owner is near. He then runs in the direction of the sound that he delights in: His Master's voice. Wow! Can we say that we are doing the same thing as we get ready for our Master to return? Running the race successfully depends on your ability to stay alert and connected to His voice. He promises to sustain us. He promises to strengthen us. As in any race that we run, times of refreshing are a must. Let us close with the promise of refreshment for all who heed the call to know and grow in Him.

Closing Scripture:

"Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth." Hosea 6:3 (ESV)

LESSON 12: KNOWING CHRIST AND MAKING HIM KNOWN

Confession of Principle 12: "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we will carry this message to others, and practice these principles in all our affairs."

Scriptural support for this principle:

Acts 1:8 (NIV) - *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

John 8:31 - (Amplified Bible) *So Jesus said to those Jews who had believed in Him, If you abide in My word [hold fast to My teachings and live in accordance with them], you are truly My disciples.*

John 15:8 - (CEV) *When you become fruitful disciples of mine, my Father will be honored.*

LET'S GO FISHING

We have reached our final destination in this series. Our journey is coming to a close as we approach the final principle in this workbook. This last session may well be the most important turning point of your walk with Christ. We found out how much our Lord loves us and desires to walk by our side. He comforts, convicts and encourages us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is time now for us to be dependable and trustworthy servants. The same Spirit that bid us closer to the heart of God and challenged us through this series to give Him all the excess baggage of our lives, beckons us to share with others the life-changing gospel message. He has entrusted us with a most honorable position. In *The Great Commission* (Matthew 28:16-20) Jesus invites us to be faithful ambassadors of His Kingdom, holding fast to His Truths, while sharing with others the message that set us free. I can almost hear the Lord saying to us as He did with his early disciples, "***Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.***" Get the fishing poles out and get ready to cast out your line!

CHARACTER SKETCH: Peter

READ: Matthew 4:18-20

Peter, or Simon, as he was sometimes called, was among the first to be called to follow Jesus. He was fishing with his brother, Andrew, when the Lord extended the invitation and the two brothers immediately left their nets to follow Him. Peter's zeal for Christ was evident from the very start. There is no doubt that this man was an ardent and enthusiastic follower!

Is zeal for Christ enough to keep us from falling?

Let's look further at the example of Peter in the Scriptures.

PETER'S REVELATION

READ: Matthew 16:15-17

Peter was commended by Christ himself for this proclamation of Truth. He followed Christ closely and spent time in His presence. LESSON 11 exhorted us to be a faithful student of God's Word and to spend devoted time with Him. There is no doubt that we, too, will receive tremendous revelation when we take the time to abide in Him.

Is a divine revelation enough to keep us from falling?

No amount of yesterday's revelation can carry us through, if we fail to respond to the promptings of the Spirit when He calls us today. Let's take a look at Peter's life a little further on in his walk with the Master. It is important for us to explore the vulnerability of a great leader and apostle of the faith.

PETER: Disciple or Devil?

READ: Matthew 16:21-23

Just a few verses down from the account of Peter's great revelation of the Christ, we see something rather ironic in our character sketch of Peter. Though he emphatically declared Jesus as the Christ, he quickly turns and rebukes the Lord's teaching on how He (the Lord) Himself would suffer and be killed.

Discussion:

- **Why do you think Peter rebuked the Lord for what He said?**
- **How could Peter have responded differently to this difficult message from Christ?**
- **Are there any teachings of Christ that you struggle to embrace?**
- **How can you become more sensitive to the whole counsel of God's Word?**

Read our second supporting Scripture (John 8:31). True disciples abide in Christ, holding fast to His teachings, and showing themselves to be true followers. In this passage, it seems Peter was doing more protesting than following. Have you been guilty of listening to the doctrines of devils rather than the teachings of our Lord, Jesus Christ? Take a moment now to ask the Lord's forgiveness for any areas of His Word that you have rejected or denied.

PETER'S DENIAL

READ: Luke 22:54-62, Mark 14:69-71

The man who received the revelation of who Christ was, and followed Him closely for the duration of His earthly ministry, turns his back on Him when the heat gets turned up. Like Peter, there may have been times in our own lives when our strength was not matched by the enthusiasm we had to carry out what we wanted most to do. Carrying the message of Christ to others can be a scary proposition. We can all attest to times when we failed to stand up under trial. We lost our courage to witness to the Truth and missed our opportunity to live up to our belief system. Examining the actions of Peter leading up to his denial of the Lord will help us to see how we can faithfully live out Principle 12 and learn from the weaknesses of this influential man. Before we cast a stone at Peter, let us back up to the place where he took a wrong turn.

PETER'S SLUMBER

READ: Luke 22:31- 46

The Lord is a Shepherd who goes before His people to prepare us for the trials we are about to face. He doesn't want His people to fail and does all He can to warn us of the traps that our adversary, Satan, sets for the believer in Christ. As we move along in our character sketch of Peter we observe some difficult times that came upon the followers of Christ. It was one thing to follow Him while he did miracles, healing the sick and multiplying the fishes and the loaves to feed thousands, but it was another thing to follow him to the garden where Jesus sweat great drops of blood before His betrayal and death. Remember, when the Lord tried to prepare the disciples for this moment, Peter was busy rebuking Christ. The story of the slumber in the garden has a slightly different twist in the book of Mark. We are able to see the Lord's specific address to Peter.

Let us look at this passage and see how important it is to heed the warnings of God promptly.

READ: Mark 14:37-38

The following is the definition for the word, "**watch**" in the on-line *Bible Greek Lexicon*.

"Watch": #1127 to watch, metaphor, give strict attention to, be cautious, active, to take heed lest through remission and indolence (laziness) some destructive calamity suddenly overtake one

As we examine these accounts of the garden experience in Luke and Mark, let us see how we can relate them to our own need to prepare for life's future trials.

Group Discussion:

- **What was Jesus encouraging the disciples to do in Mark 14:34?**
- **What do you think that meant in light of the concordance definition?**
- **He specifically warned Peter in Mark 14:37-38. What did he tell him?**
- **According to Luke 22:31-34, do you think Peter realized his vulnerability?**
- **Can you describe a recent time in your own life when your spirit was willing but your**

flesh was weak?

Write out Mark 14:38: _____

The Lord emphasized *watching and praying*. Some of us are unaware of our places of vulnerability and so we become indifferent to prayer. Peter's slumber was due to his lack of watchfulness for the hour that was upon him. This amazing disciple, full of zeal, who had received direct revelation from God, was undiscerning about the time of suffering that was to come upon the disciples of Christ, even though Jesus had warned them several times about his impending death. Sometimes we only want to hear the good news.

Homework: THE ENEMY'S SIEVE

READ: Luke 22:31 (Amplified Version)

"Simon, Simon (Peter), listen! Satan has asked excessively that [all of] you be given up to him [out of the power and keeping of God], that he might sift [all of] you like grain,"

So many of the meanings of Biblical passages are lost to our present culture. When was the last time you saw someone sifting grain? Search out the meaning of this passage by finding out what this sifting process entails. Share your findings with the group on the lines below and be prepared to discuss the relevance of this passage to your own life.

Can you describe a time in your life when you felt sifted by Satan?

What can you do to be more prepared for the sifting that might take place in your own life?

How can watching and praying help us to fulfill Principle 12?

Be prepared to discuss your homework in class.

Discuss homework from previous session.

PETER'S RESTORATION

There is a wonderful ending to this miserable failure. It is one we can learn from as it speaks of the grace of our Lord and His power to restore and redeem. The interesting thing is that in the same passage that the Lord warns Peter of the enemy's sifting and declares that Peter will deny Him, he also has a message of hope.

READ: Luke 22:32 (CEV)

"But Simon, I have prayed that your faith will be strong. And when you have come back to me, help the others."

It is amazing to think that God had already planned a way for Peter to recover from his failure even before he failed! Let's read about Peter's recovery. After the resurrection of the Lord, the disciples who had scattered after the crucifixion gathered in various settings where Jesus would appear to them. In one such encounter, the Lord, in His mercy, gives Peter an opportunity to confirm his love for the Lord 3x - the same amount of times that Peter had denied Him. God's mercy endures forever.

READ: John 21:15-17

Keep your finger on this passage and turn to Luke 22:57-60. Let's take the time to write out Peter's statements of denial alongside of his statements of affirmation:

Denial:

Statement #1 (Luke 22:57)

Statement #2 (Luke 22:58)

Statement #3 (Luke 22:60)

Affirmation:

Statement #1 (John 21:15)

Statement #2 (John 21:16)

Statement #3 (John 21:17)

Can you see times in your own life that God gave you opportunities to succeed at something that previously brought failure?

Yes

No

If you feel comfortable, share this story with the group.

READ: Luke 24:49, Acts 1

There are times, throughout the gospel narratives, that we see individuals departing from following the Lord. With all the multitudes that were reached by the teachings and miracles of Christ it is interesting to note that only about 120 were reported to be in the upper room according to Acts 1:15. Thankfully, Peter is now part of this group of obedient followers and will be given an opportunity to match his actions with his belief system. His restoration continues as he begins his address to his brethren.

Group Discussion:

- **What instruction did Jesus give his disciples in Luke 24:49?**
- **How are the apostles and the disciples of Jesus promptly obeying this instruction (Acts 1:12-14)?**
- **How does obedience to this instruction relate to the "watching and praying" Jesus asked the disciples to do in the garden?**
- **How do we see the prophecy given to Peter by Christ in Luke 22:32 come to pass in Acts 1:15-26?**

PETER'S AWAKENING

The storyline gets better! Peter casts his net out again, only this time he gathers a great multitude of souls on the day of Pentecost. His restoration leads to a great awakening and Peter's enthusiasm is now matched with the ability to carry out his desire to stand for Christ no matter the cost. His obedience, as well as the obedience of the others that had scattered at the crucifixion, brings forth fruit: a mighty harvest of souls that become the foundation for the early church.

READ: Acts 2:1-41

Before this event, these cowardly apostles all scattered before the people. They are now all together, with the exception of Judas. Standing with Peter as he is testifying of Christ's resurrection, they now become a witness before the very people that they feared before (vs.23). Peter's testimony brings 3,000 people to Christ. His awakening is the catalyst for the first evangelical revival in the Church's history.

Write out Luke 24:49. _____

Group Discussion:

- **What converted Peter from coward to hero?**
- **Comparing Luke 24:49 with Acts 1:8, what is the promise Jesus is referring to?**

- **Who is this promise for according to Acts 2:38-39?**
- **How can this promise encourage us as we press on to obey Principle 12?**

Peter and the disciples obey God's instructions to tarry in Jerusalem. They wait for the empowerment promised by God. This lengthy character sketch culminates in a most amazing victory.

Let's briefly review what we learned in the following illustration:

Ignored promptings -----> Spiritual slumber -----> Fallen condition (denial)

Obedience to promptings -----> Spiritual awakening -----> Faith and Action (revival)

READ: John 15:8 (our third supporting Scripture). As we follow Christ in our walk of obedience, we bear fruit for Him. This fruit honors our Father. What a precious privilege we have to now become honorable vessels for His glory. Peter, once ashamed of Christ, now gives Him great pleasure and honor on the day of Pentecost.

Are you experiencing a lack of fruit in your life? Are you attempting to be a witness without the power spoken of in our first supporting Scripture Acts 1:8? You might be surprised to know what God had in mind when He said that we would be witnesses for Him. The greek word for *witness* is "*martus*" and relates to our English word, *martyr*. The Lord knew that His disciples would suffer for His namesake. He paved the way of suffering for us and sent the Holy Spirit to empower us in the same way that a mother delivering a baby is able to bear the pain of childbirth. As these lessons come to a close, you might be closer to experiencing the real joy of fruit bearing.

Beloved, we have been through a long journey together. As we close up Principle 12, we also close up many weeks of study and self examination. Peter's story can be ours. His victory stands as a testimony for every person who has failed to deliver on their promises and vows to God. His example of failure and denial is one we can all understand, but we must press in and relate to his triumph! Let us end our journey with a promise to God. A promise to surrender to this gift of the Holy Spirit that we, too, will be empowered.

Lord, I thank You for always being faithful to prepare me for life's trials. Please help me to respond to Your promptings. Forgive me for the times I have denied You before those I have feared. Forgive me for denying You when it was more comfortable to yield to other voices urging me to disobey. I have been naked and ashamed, but I long to be clothed with Your Holy Spirit. I desire to yield to the gift of the Holy Spirit and to trust Your power and not my own. May I bring You honor as I hold fast to Your teachings and obey Your Word. I desire to be a witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. May I testify of my risen Savior through my words and actions in every place where You bid me to go. In Jesus Name. Amen

Closing Scripture:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." Matthew 28:19-20

What an amazing promise! What an amazing God!

Let us go forth knowing Christ and making Him known!