



21ST CENTURY DISCIPLESHIP BOOK 3

21st Century Discipleship

B O O K 3 : M A K I N G A D I F F E R E N C E

A COURSE FOR NEW BELIEVERS

Developed by the Center for Evangelism and
Discipleship (CED),
a division of Global University

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Introduction

21st Century Discipleship is for you, the new Christian. You have become a disciple of Jesus Christ and have begun an exciting journey. A disciple is someone who learns, matures, and becomes like his or her teacher—in this case, Jesus. The word *journey* implies forward movement into new territory. You are leaving familiar ground and heading to places you have never been before.

On this journey, your love and appreciation for the Lord will develop. Your understanding of the Bible and ability to put its teaching into practice will grow. Why Christians do what they do—like pray, give, help the needy, serve, preach—will start to make sense. Old habits and bad attitudes that used to drag you down will begin to disappear. You will discover that God has gifted you in specific ways and wants to use you to advance His kingdom. You will face tough challenges in a new way—with God's help. Your relationship with other Christians will become highly valued and a source of incredible joy.

21st Century Discipleship has been prepared to help you on this journey. We cannot walk in your shoes, but we can come alongside to help you. The lessons in this course were written by pastors, missionaries, and other mature Christians who care about what happens to people just like you. Their collective experience and teaching from God's Word, the Bible, make this course invaluable.

Our basic goals for this course are to help you know Christ better; to assist you in growing spiritually; and to encourage you to become everything the Lord wants you to be. Always remember, your life is important to God and many people. God really does have wonderful things in store for you if you will be faithful. Enjoy the journey of discipleship!

How To Use This Course

ABOUT THE LESSONS

21st Century Discipleship is a series of three study guides with 13 lessons/study guide. Each lesson contains the following components:

- Title
- Introduction
- Outline
- List of objectives
- Lesson content
- Conclusion
- Suggested Bible verses to memorize
- Self-Test
- Answers to the self-test
- Information about the author of the lesson

THE SELF-TEST

The self-test is a very helpful way for you to review what you have studied in a lesson. The questions are a combination of True/False, Multiple Choice, and Fill-in the blank. Once you complete the self-test, check your responses with the answers provided. In case you respond to a question incorrectly, the answers to the self-test also indicate where to look in the lesson to find the proper response. For instance, an answer will look like this a (5.3). The letter “a” refers to the correct response to the self-test question. The number 5 refers to the number of the lesson, and the number 3 refers to the lesson objective where the answer is found. It may be helpful for you to review the entire objective if you find you answered a test question incorrectly.

WAYS TO STUDY

There are at least two ways you can study the material in this course: independently or in a group. Let us get acquainted with these two methods.

Independent Study

Helping people study independently is what Global University specializes in. We know that not everybody who studies God's Word has access to a church, pastor, and a wide variety of resource materials. Therefore, we endeavor to provide you with a complete study guide. A qualified Bible teacher has carefully planned and written each lesson so that you may experience intellectual and spiritual growth in the convenience of your home.

Since there are no prearranged class times, individual study requires high motivation and self-discipline. Please be sure to have a Bible handy as well. The Bible is your main textbook; it alone is inspired by God. *21st Century Discipleship* is simply a tool to help you get the most out of your study of God's Word. With an open Bible, the Holy Spirit, and your discipleship course, you are in the classroom of the Holy Spirit. Be diligent and expect great things to happen.

Maximizing Individual Study Time

1. Set aside quiet and regular times for study.
Concentration is easier if you turn your mind to your studies at the same time each day. Pick a time when you are most alert.
2. Pray as you begin each study session. Ask the Lord to help you understand the material and make appropriate applications to your life.
3. Do a quick read through of the lesson, observing the objectives or main points.
4. Look over the lesson objectives a second time.
5. Read the lesson again. This time look up references, follow the exercises, and take any notes

- that may be helpful. Think about what you have learned and how it can be applied to your daily life.
6. Answer the study questions at the end of each lesson. Go back to the lesson if you need to find the answer. Then use the answer key to check your work.
 7. Take your time. No bell will ring to force you to move on to new material.
 8. Make good use of reference tools, such as a concordance and an up-to-date English dictionary, to help you understand words that may be unfamiliar.

Group Study

You can also study *21st Century Discipleship* in a group. This is a very dynamic and helpful way to reinforce the lesson content. It also provides a way to build friendships with other Christians.

Guidelines for Group Study

1. Set aside regular times for study with other believers. You can meet in a home, a church, or almost any place where you will be comfortable and uninterrupted. Plan to begin on time and end at an agreed-upon time.
2. Find someone to serve as a mentor or discussion leader. Usually the pastor of the church you attend can help you find just the right person to serve in this capacity.
3. We suggest that you study a lesson a week. Each person in the study group should carefully read the lesson at home before the meeting. Follow the instructions above for Independent Study.
4. Begin your group study with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to guide your conversation and help you learn. Then, together discuss each of the objectives in the lesson. You may want to read the objective out loud and then open it up for comments and

questions. Do not be shy about expressing yourself. Your mentor may want to highlight points that he or she feels are especially important.

5. Be careful not to drift off the topic in the lesson during your meeting time. Stay focused.
6. Tactfully avoid letting one person in the group dominate the question and discussion time.
7. A good way to conclude your meeting is to pray for one another, especially for needs that pertain to the lesson topic.

If you have questions or comments, please contact us:

Phone: (800) 443-1083 (ask for the Center for Evangelism and Discipleship)

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LESSON 1

Developing Vision

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:1–3). In the beginning, God had a plan. Before God ever acted in creation, He knew what He was going to do. It is comforting to know our God plans ahead. Read His words in Isaiah 46:9–10, “Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.”

God is our example. He has taught us the principle of planning ahead. The Bible is clear—we are to have a vision of where God is leading us if we hope to achieve His best. Few people are more dangerous than those who have no idea about where they are headed or how they plan to get there. They wander aimlessly through life wasting time and non-renewable resources in a futile pursuit of it. It represents a destination they will never visit because they have not properly prepared themselves.

The great achievers of the Bible were given visions from God that propelled them through life. The visions guided their steps and helped them make important life decisions. For example, Abraham’s vision guided him toward “the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10). Where did Abraham obtain this vision? God gave it to him at a critical intersection of his life.

In this lesson, let us agree and pray that the Lord will break down any barriers that could inhibit you from achieving the victorious life God has for you. God has great plans for you. He was communicating divine truths when He said, “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD” (Isaiah 55:8). Pray now for the Lord to open your heart and mind to His ways.

LESSON OUTLINE

A Biblical View of Vision
 People of Vision in the Bible
 The Power of Prayer in Developing Vision
 The Support of Vision in Daily Life
 Practical Steps to Capture God's Vision

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Describe what vision is.*
2. *Identify biblical examples of people of vision.*
3. *Explain the relationship between vision and prayer.*
4. *Describe the benefits of having vision.*
5. *Name steps to developing vision in your life.*

A Biblical View of Vision

Objective 1:

Describe what vision is.

One of the saddest portions of Scripture is found in Lamentations 2:9, "And her prophets no longer find visions from the LORD." The result of leaders not having a vision from God is deadly, for "where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18 KJV). Leaders without direction are ineffective. At worst, they lead people to ruin.

So what is vision, and how is it defined in the Bible? How do you know if you have a vision from God or just an idea? A vision from God is rarely discovered by an appointed visioning committee or on the second day of a three-day lakeside retreat. Some people spend weeks or months or even years in prayer and fasting, seeking God

to reveal His direction for their lives or for the church. Following are some indications of a God-given vision.

- A God-given vision puts a song in your heart that is a constant reminder of God's will for your life.
- A God-given vision gives assurance that God is your true partner.
- A God-given vision is the North Star of your life. The North Star is a star that remains stationary as the earth turns on its axis. The North Star is positioned very nearly over true north, that is, the earth's north pole. People lost in the dark use the North Star for guidance.
- A God-given vision compels you to speak and act upon it. The apostle Paul exclaimed, "Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Few people are willing to pay the price for God's unique direction and vision for their lives. What is the price? The price is everything—total commitment to the Lord. And what makes a God-given vision so extraordinary? A God-given vision is distinctive; it is something that would not have surfaced by itself. A God-given vision is almost always given to one person, and that person is required by God to share it and follow it through to completion. The God-given vision belongs to no one other than God. Hence, it is sacred.

People of Vision in the Bible

Objective 2:

Identify biblical examples of people of vision.

Time after time God has raised up individuals with incredible vision at critical times in the lives of His covenant people. God loves us and will not leave us without a witness. Let us look at several people of faith to whom God gave His vision.

Isaiah's Vision

In his vision from God, Isaiah reports, "Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for'" (Isaiah 6:6–7). Writing on a wall of a church in England states: "A vision without a task is but a dream; a task without a vision is a drudgery; a vision and a task are the hope of the world." Isaiah lived in a decadent society; wickedness and sin were open for all to see. Something needed to be done. God saw the heart of Isaiah and poured into him a vision for revival of righteousness. The combination of seeing the need to reach a wicked society and receiving a powerful vision from God prompted Isaiah's response, "'Here am I. Send me!'" (Isaiah 6:8).

Many people see the need, but few acknowledge the call and commissioning from God to get the work done. A clear, powerful vision from God empowers dedicated individuals to step out of their comfort zone and into the work of God.

Jacob's Vision from God

Jacob's vision of God resulted in his name change and in his hip's dislocation. Genesis 32:31 records, "The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip." Jacob had been a manipulator. He spent much of his life trying to have the world revolve around him. But God had a better plan for him.

Jacob's life changed because of a crisis. Years earlier Jacob had cheated his brother Esau out of a critical paternal blessing. And Esau vowed to kill Jacob for what he had done. Jacob fled and did not return home for more than 20 years. Finally, the day came when Jacob had no choice but to face his brother. Jacob had not heard from him in all the intervening years and, for all he knew, Esau's anger, bitterness, and murderous intentions still smoldered. A confrontation was impending, and Jacob was gripped with fear.

In this crisis, God appeared in seeming human form and wrestled with Jacob. Jacob refused to let go of his Challenger until He blessed him. Something changed that day, and Jacob was never the same. God changed his name and gave him a vision that transformed his life. Jacob then went from being a trickster and deceiver to being a faithful follower of God. From that point on he would walk with a limp as a reminder of his encounter with God. In light of this encounter, Bob Mumford writes, "Beware of the Christian leader who does not walk with a limp."

Paul's Vision from God

Names given in biblical times had much to say about a person's character, prophetic calling, or particular circumstances at the time of his or her birth. For instance, the New Testament Saul was named after Israel's first king, a man who lived over a thousand years before the time of Christ, and who fought against Israel's enemies with great valor. Much like his namesake, the New Testament Saul was a fighter. Prior to his conversion, he fought against the church with all his might. He felt that early Christians were subversive and a danger to the Jewish religion and nation that he dearly loved.

Saul's encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus changed his life dramatically (see Acts 9). There, Saul received a vision from God that redirected his efforts and restructured his goals. He went from being a Jewish zealot to being the apostle to the Gentiles (non-Jewish people). He came to love those he once hated. Later, he penned the words, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

At some point Saul began to use his Latin name, Paul—familiar in Roman culture. This name change showed Paul's desire to identify as closely as possible with the people he longed to reach for Christ.

The Power of Prayer in Developing Vision

Objective 3:

Explain the relationship between vision and prayer.

What do you do if God has not spoken to you or given you a dramatic spiritual vision? A serious student of the Bible quickly discovers that prayer and fasting work. When a person decides to do things God's way, the first step will be prayer. Sometimes we pray for help, without even knowing the best course of action to take. For Spirit-filled believers, praying in the Spirit is our lifeline to heaven. The apostle Paul taught, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26). The Holy Spirit, who knows our heart and deepest needs, makes intercession for us. What a blessing to pray in our prayer language and touch God's throne. In those moments we tap the vast resources of heaven that await our earnest petition.

Indeed, real answers require sincere pursuit. Paul wrote of Jesus, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). God's treasures are hidden from the casual observer; therefore, they must be sought out. In our moments of prayer, God reveals our callings and the paths He has chosen for us. Most of these revelations would have been missed had we not prayed with conviction and passion.

Deep revelations from God will cost you everything. God's guidelines for obtaining divine revelation include praying and fasting. James writes, "You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:2-3). Consider the following: Nehemiah fasted and God revealed himself as Deliverer (Nehemiah 1:4). David

fasted and God protected him (Psalm 35:13). Daniel fasted and God revealed hidden treasure (Daniel 9:3). Cornelius fasted and God revealed a whole new way of life (Acts 10:30). If you seriously want to receive vision from God, praying and fasting can help to clarify God's best for you.

Though many believe that there is some kind of mysterious secret to finding a vision from God, a sincere student of God's Word will soon discover the truth that Paul writes of in Ephesians 1:17–19:

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength.

The word “enlightened” is the Greek word *photizo*, which means to shed rays, to shine or to brighten up, to illuminate, or to make to see. God wants you to see as He sees. He wants to enlighten you. Vision from God is interwoven with prayer. They are as one. As you pray and fast, the vision for your life will come.

The Support of Vision in Daily Life

Objective 4:

Describe the benefits of having vision.

“Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint” (Proverbs 29:18). Oswald Chambers (1995) writes,

When once we lose sight of God, we begin to be reckless, we cast off certain restraints, we cast off praying, we cast off the vision of God

in little things, and begin to act on our own initiative. If we are eating what we have out of our own hand, doing things on our own initiative without expecting God to come in, we are on the downward path, we have lost the vision. Is our attitude today an attitude that springs from our vision of God? Are we expecting God to do greater things than He has ever done? Is there a freshness and vigour in our spiritual outlook?

There are at least seven benefits of having a vision from God to guide your life:

1. A vision from God will keep you in the plan of God. The vision from God is a restraint, but with promise.
2. A vision from God provides direction for decision-making. When you know where you are going, you do not usually get lost. The vision quickly rules out unnecessary answers. It narrows the options and strengthens the decisions.
3. A vision from God provides handles for others to grasp. As others hear your vision, they will choose to associate with you and provide a support team. Your vision becomes their rally point. Unity of purpose is vital for the success of any organization or ministry.
4. A vision from God helps you to make needed changes to the methods you are using to accomplish goals. As has been stated so often, methods change, but the message of Christ must remain the same. When the vision is clear, leaders are free to discover creative disciplines to reach a changing populace.
5. A vision from God encourages accountability, candidness, and debate. No one person has all the answers. Indeed, the Lord often brings into our lives people with talents or skills that are superior to our own to strengthen our weaknesses. A good leader understands what God is doing and does

everything possible to fulfill his or her role in the Body.

6. A vision from God provides a strong sense of assurance and certainty. Noah had heard from God, so when the critics came, he stood firm in the vision God had placed in his heart. Today, some leaders have admitted that it was the personal call of God and a God-given vision that helped them through difficult situations.
7. A vision from God provides a measuring tool that will enable you to gauge your progress. When you see where you are headed, you more clearly see the movement you are making toward completion. Jesus knew His destination while He was on the Cross. He encouraged the repentant thief, “today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

There are many more outstanding benefits to having a clear vision from God. Begin now to pursue His revelation for your life.

Practical Steps to Capture God's Vision

Objective 5:

Name steps to developing vision in your life.

The Bible is a living document that contains examples of real people achieving impossible goals by the grace and provision of God. When you read about these great men and women, their lives seem so contrary to the civilization in which they lived. Why is that? The Bible makes it clear that “they were aliens and strangers on earth” (Hebrews 11:13). God's people will never be totally comfortable on earth. We were made for better things, for higher purposes.

Even in modern times, a Christian's life often seems out of sync with the rest of the world. For some Christians, this is disconcerting. They struggle with being accepted by their community. They want to appear normal by the world's standards but also hold on to the

spiritual truths. This leads to a compromised testimony and a defeated spiritual existence. But for the spiritually wise, God's will is desired above human comfort.

The purposes of God are to be sought after intentionally. If you desire to receive vision from God, you must put yourself in a position to receive it. How do we get into position to receive God's vision for our lives? Consider these three practical steps.

Step #1: Persistence

Jesus taught us how to find His vision for our lives: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). This Scripture speaks of persistence, which is godly determination of the highest order. You must have a passion for God beyond normal. The apostle Paul put it this way, "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14). Paul knew where he was headed, and nothing would deter him.

Step # 2: Total Commitment to God

Entrust yourself to God beyond any commitment you have ever made. He wants to pour His sacred vision into an undistracted and qualified vessel. Renew your passion for God, and be holy and sanctified for the Master's use. Paul advised young Timothy, "If a man cleanses himself . . . , he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work" (2 Timothy 2:21).

Step #3: Boldness

Proverbs 28:1 tells us that "the righteous are as bold as a lion." The vision of God is given to the bold and courageous. Paul and Barnabas were bold in the

ministry because their callings were sure. “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:2–3). The vision was clear; the church was in unity, the assignment was specific, so they could act in boldness and favor. Please do not hesitate to place yourself in position to receive all that God has for you. Your sincere efforts are worth every sacrifice.

Conclusion

What happens next becomes your personal decision. A door is opened to you, and your Savior calls. Do you want to hear from God? Do you want to seek Him with your whole heart? Is it the passion of your heart to receive a clear vision from God? He is willing and able to meet your expectations, and exceed every dream of your heart. Paul affirms that God is “able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20). Abraham stepped out; Noah built; Isaiah spoke; Daniel took a stand; and Cornelius made the necessary changes to please God. What will you do now?

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE VERSES TO MEMORIZE

Proverbs 29:18

Isaiah 55:8

Matthew 7:7–8

Romans 8:26

2 Corinthians 5:17

Ephesians 3:20

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *The principle of planning*
 - a) *originated from God.*
 - b) *is pointless, for life will simply happen.*
 - c) *has no basis in Scripture.*
2. *One main driving force for the success of great achievers in the Bible is that they*
 - a) *had natural wisdom and drive that was better than their peers.*
 - b) *knew how to build focus committees and coalitions.*
 - c) *were led by a God-given vision.*
3. *According to the lesson, the God-vision belongs to*
 - a) *the church.*
 - b) *God.*
 - c) *the recipient of the vision.*
4. *Name three elements of a vision from God.*
 - a) *A God-given vision is always divisive.*
 - b) *A God-given vision compels the recipient to act upon it.*
 - c) *The God-given vision is unclear and burdensome.*
5. *Jacob's vision of God resulted in*
 - a) *the scorching of his lips.*
 - b) *his being the apostle to the Gentiles.*
 - c) *his name change and hip dislocation.*
6. *Three people that the Bible specifically says had a vision from God are*
 - a) *Pilate, Hophni, and Nimrod.*
 - b) *Theophilus, Thomas, and Zerubbabel.*
 - c) *Paul, Isaiah, and Jacob.*
7. *The idea that "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26) suggests that the Holy Spirit*
 - a) *keeps us awake while we pray.*
 - b) *knows what we need better than we do ourselves.*
 - c) *is not interested in what we pray.*

8. *The main thing you can do as you seek a vision from God is to*
 - a) *read many books on vision.*
 - b) *earnestly fast and pray, and seek the face of God.*
 - c) *form a focus group of interested adults.*
9. *To receive God's vision for our lives, we position ourselves*
 - a) *to the east.*
 - b) *by kneeling humbly.*
 - c) *by being persistent, bold, and committed to the Lord.*
10. *One benefit of having a vision from God is that*
 - a) *it will make you wealthy.*
 - b) *you will never get out of God's will again.*
 - c) *the vision encourages accountability, candidness, and debate.*

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ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. a (1.1)
2. c (1.1)
3. b (1.1)
4. b (1.1)
5. c (1.2)
6. c (1.2)
7. b (1.3)
8. b (1.3)
9. c (1.5)
10. c (1.4)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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LESSON 2

Christ-Centered Goals

Some people love goals; others do not. No matter your feelings, goals are the road map to progress. Yet, most of us will spend more time planning a vacation trip than planning our lives. Many people leave their lives to chance and happenstance. But success is not accidental. All successful people learn how to achieve. Goal-setting is not just for performance-driven overachievers. We all need to learn how to set goals before we can ever expect to achieve those goals. This lesson is about the power of Christ-centered goal-setting.

LESSON OUTLINE

Understanding God's Will
 The Importance of Balance
 Why Set Goals?
 Goal-Setting Is Biblical
 Faulty Motives, Faulty Goals
 Goals that Honor God
 Prerequisites to Goal-Setting
 Creating SMART Goals

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1: Identify wrong assumptions about God's will.*
- 2: State the importance of balance in the life of the Christian.*
- 3: Discuss how goals impact success.*
- 4: Explain how setting goals is biblical.*
- 5: Discuss why faulty motives produce faulty goals.*
- 6: Identify keys to setting goals that honor God.*
- 7: Name vital prerequisites to goal-setting.*
- 8: Indicate the characteristics of SMART goals.*
- 9: Evaluate goals as needed.*

Understanding God's Will

Objective 1:

Identify wrong assumptions about God's will.

I had a friend, Tom, who was so heavenly-minded that he never made plans or set goals because he wanted

to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. His practice was to just pray before every decision or action. He would ask God whether he should go to work that day, brush his teeth, make a phone call, or go to the hardware store. Obviously, Tom had a hard time keeping a job.

Tom's view of God's will was narrow. His understanding was based on three wrong assumptions of the will of God:

- 1) Tom believed his intuitive feelings were the ultimate guide in knowing the Holy Spirit's leading. Yet, even Jesus knew this approach would not always work in His own life. For instance, in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus' emotions disagreed with God's will (see Matthew 26:39).
- 2) Tom assumed that the Holy Spirit leads people only in spontaneous ways and that there is no need to plan. Yet, Scripture provides evidence to the importance of planning. Paul made plans (Romans 1:13), the apostles planned (Acts 6:1–3), and even Jesus used plans (Matthew 10:5–15; 16:21; 26:17–19). Surely these great leaders were Spirit-led.
- 3) Tom subconsciously rejected the fact that we most often discover God's will through the Scriptures. The Bible is our normative guide to determining the Spirit's leading for our lives. Nothing can overrule the Word of God (Psalm 119:9–16; Matthew 4:4; 2 Timothy 3:15–17). God's will is much broader and easier than we may initially understand.

The Importance of Balance

Objective 2:

State the importance of balance in the life of the Christian.

Some Christ followers can be so rigid with their schedules and plans that any interruption in their day is bothersome. Some people plow through their plans even when they receive a caution from the Holy Spirit. Still others, like Tom, lack predetermined plans and never

quite know what they are going to do next. Somewhere between these two extremes is a place of balance.

The apostle Paul was a man of balance. Paul planned to minister the gospel in a certain region only to switch plans as the Holy Spirit redirected him (see Acts 16:6–7). Although the apostle Paul made plans, he was sensitive to the Lord changing those same plans. That is Christ-honoring balance.

The person who does not plan and the rigid person approach life from opposite perspectives. The first may be humble but does not use his or her God-given intellect to make wise decisions. This person struggles with loving God with the whole mind. The rigid planner uses his or her mind but neglects the heart. Even when his or her plans go wrong this planner stubbornly sticks with the original objectives.

The Bible speaks to these extremes. Proverbs 6:6–9 rebukes the person who does not plan. The proverb writer says we should be like the ant and prepare ahead of time if we intend to reap a harvest. James 4:13–16 instructs us to recognize our human limitations, submit all our plans to the Lord, and be willing to be flexible. James suggests that failure to do so is an act of arrogance. James is not negating the use of goals but rather endorsing our submission of such goals to the Lord's wisdom and revision.

We should balance both extremes by using our minds to set logical goals and action steps while humbly running them through the filters of prayer, godly counsel, Spirit-led guidance, and God's written Word. Setting goals is important! Be careful not to be so anxious about life that you make rigid plans that are not even humanly possible to keep. Nor should you be so lazy as to not plan at all. The balanced approach makes logical plans that are submitted to the Lord for final approval.

Why Set Goals?

Objective 3:

Discuss how goals impact success.

Goals move us beyond our past successes. Perhaps you view your best days as those high school football days, your fun college years, your first year of marriage, or when you were in your thirties. Dwelling on past success, however, can prevent you from stepping into future success. In Philippians 3:13–14, Paul writes about forgetting the past and anticipating the future. Goal-setting moves us from our fixation on the past to embracing the future.

Goals also shift our thinking off past mistakes. Haven't we all given in to depression, bitterness, and negative emotions because we looked back at our failures? Haven't we all had pity parties and dwelled on the "what ifs"? Fear will keep us stuck in the past. Goal-setting, however, moves us from a fearful fixation on past mistakes to embracing tomorrow's success.

Thus, goals give us a future to work toward. Our past successes give us the faith to do greater things for God. Our past gives us the framework for our desired future in God. Setting Christ-centered goals aligns us with God's will, God's power, and the success of God's prevailing kingdom.

Goal-Setting Is Biblical

Objective 4:

Explain how setting goals is biblical.

Some Christians shun setting goals because they believe God does not work through man-made rules. They feel our spiritual lives cannot be reduced to the performance of a formula. But goals are different from formulas. A goal is a target or desired end. Having a goal does not mean we always hit it. It does mean, however, that we are getting closer to our target than we would if we had no goal or desired end in mind.

Other believers avoid setting goals because they do not want to brag about their plans. But the Bible does not forbid setting goals. Isaiah 32:8 says, “The noble man makes noble plans.” Proverbs 16:3 promises, “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.” Setting Christ-centered goals and making plans are good as long as we remember that God has the power to veto any of our plans.

In 1 Chronicles 28:12, King David gives Solomon all the plans that the Spirit had put in his mind for building the temple. Following are other biblical indications of the significance of planning:

- “The plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations” (Psalm 33:11).
- “May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed” (Psalm 20:4).
- “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails” (Proverbs 19:21).
- “In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps” (Proverbs 16:9).
- “The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty” (Proverbs 21:5).
- “‘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’” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Goal planning is not bad in itself; it is a powerful neutral tool. Goal planning for evil and unethical purposes, however, is wrong. And God thwarts evil plans (see Job 5:12; Psalm 33:10; Isaiah 29:15, 30:1).

Faulty Motives, Faulty Goals

Objective 5:

Discuss why faulty motives produce faulty goals.

What is the true motive behind setting any particular goal? Is it selfishness or self-gratification? If our lives

are unguarded, we will be consumed with the futile search for things that confirm our self-worth. This thirst for materialism does not involve only money. It includes prestige, power, and other personal rewards we use to stroke our egos. While there is nothing wrong with having desires and goals, our appetites and desires have been distorted by sin. So rather than having eternal motives, we often can have fleshly motives driven by the desire for temporal things. Our faulty motives then produce faulty goals that momentarily fill our emptiness but, in the long run, are detrimental.

Romans 1:22–25 suggests that when we live like that we exchange God's glory for a lie, and we serve the creature rather than the Creator. Having worldly success and fulfilling God's purposes are rarely the same thing. Jesus talked about a successful man who seemed to have it all, but because of skewed motives he had not been rich toward God (see Luke 12:16–21). Jesus therefore challenges us to derive meaning and purpose from our relationship with the infinite Creator rather than from finite creations.

James 4:13–17 reveals three faulty actions that often lead to failure: 1) ignoring God (v. 13). 2) underestimating the brevity of life (v. 14). 3) disobedience (v. 17). "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." Remember that faulty motives produce faulty goals.

Goals that Honor God

Objective 6:

Identify keys to setting goals that honor God.

Judas somehow believed his plans were better than Jesus' plans (see John 13:18–30). As treasurer of Jesus' ministry he was upset at what appeared to be a waste of resources when Mary poured expensive perfume on Jesus (John 12:4–6). His anger was not because he cared for poor people but because he was a thief. Sadly, Judas later sold out Jesus for thirty pieces of silver

(see Matthew 26:14–16). Judas demonstrated that self-righteousness can cause a person to do hideous acts of harm. His goals were not in agreement with Jesus' goals.

Following are eight keys to setting goals that honor God:

Alignment

We need goals that are in agreement with the goals and mission of God. Judas disagreed with and was disappointed in Jesus. Judas probably wanted a military leader, not a martyr savior. We need to cooperate with God, and this often involves surrendering our way to do things God's way.

Aspiration

To aspire for goals that please God, we must get God's direction. Ephesians 5:17 instructs, "Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." Goals must begin with an overall vision of what we believe to be our life mission. That vision or mission then dictates all our other goals and decisions.

Aim

We must be consistent in our effort to achieve the objective and remain fixed on accomplishing it. Consider the example of Jesus, who set His face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). He was sent for the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24).

Acceptance

To honor God, we must accept God's goals and will for our lives. God's will is useful only after it is recognized and accepted.

Association

Believers should share their goals with someone who can hold them accountable. Also, it is critical to associate with faith-filled people and encouragers. A good way to do this is to plug into a healthy Bible-based church.

Attitude

Paul notes, "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13). Our attitude matters! Therefore, we must cultivate a positive attitude and believe that we can do all things through Christ.

Asking

James writes, "You do not have, because you do not ask God" (James 4:2). Ask God to be the center of your decisions and to empower you to carry out His will for your life. Seek God first and He will direct your steps. Life is the succession of small moments, each one adding up to a lifetime. Therefore, small changes applied to any life can make a big difference.

Action

Jesus said in John 13:17 that you are blessed if you do the will of God. Honoring God while we pursue our goals requires courage, the willingness to take action even though the outcome is uncertain. Such courage is attained only as we develop a lifestyle of conscious dependence on God.

Prerequisites to Goal-Setting

Objective 7:

Name vital prerequisites to goal-setting.

In setting goals, we may ask questions such as: what does God want most from me? Where do I need to grow? What have my prayers been focused on recently? Where do I begin in setting Christ-centered goals? The following are important steps to goal-setting.

Do a Reality Check

Identify your strengths and weaknesses. What are your tendencies, gifts, and experiences? As you commit to being yourself, pay attention to your weaknesses.

Keep the End in Focus

What is the end result you are after? Envision your victory and success. What do you want to accomplish? Start with the end in mind and work backwards. Imagine the benefits of reaching your goals.

Identify Your Values

What is really important to you? What matters most to God? Make a list of your values, and create your goals to be in alignment with your values. We work hardest at what we care about the most.

Pray

Spend time with Jesus every day. Prayer brings supernatural results! "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

Establish Priorities

Decide on your three most important goals. Work backwards listing three things you want to accomplish in twenty years, ten years, five years, this year, this month, this week, and today.

Make a Progress Plan

Break down your Christ-centered goals into progressive steps. Small steps can bring big changes. Take action! Take a sheet of paper and divide it in half vertically. Write "God's Part" on one side and "My Part" on the other. Under "God's Part," write the promises of God's Word that need to be appropriated to accomplish the goals. Under "My Part," write your specific action items and deadlines.

Eliminate Clutter from Your Life

Reduce the unnecessary things from your life. For example, unplug the television three nights a week; have an email-free day a week; or turn off the telephone two nights a week. Do not give in to things that distract you from your purposes.

Write

Jot it all down. Make out your top-ten list. Include goals, action steps, strategies, and deadlines.

Ask Questions and Consult Experts

Ask how you can accomplish your goals. Learn to ask questions that produce good direction and results. What can you do in cooperation with God to make it happen? Consider action steps. What are the logical steps to making that goal happen? Follow those steps.

Also, gather the skills and knowledge you will need to accomplish your goals. Seek the advice of wise people in your life. Find those who are farther in the journey, those who have been where you want to go. Solicit the encouragement and support of family and friends, and avoid the nay-sayers.

Study the Bible

As you study the Word, apply its truths to your situations and you will find success. God clarifies things to us when we read His Word. Consider each goal and discover as many Bible verses about each as possible. Identify and memorize key verses that will encourage you as you reach for the goals.

Dream

In many ways, we become what we think. So dream your future. Live it out loud and in living color. Project into your future.

Focus

Do not work on too many things at one time. Do not spread yourself too thin. Focus on what you can control and what you can change. Do not set yourself up to be overwhelmed.

Be Flexible

Our lives are unpredictable at best. Our goals are dependent on God's grace and mercy. Goals can be readjusted and changed along the way, so review your

progress often. If it is not achieving your desired end, then come up with new action steps that will. Spiritual growth can be agonizingly slow. But knowing our God-given goals keeps us focused and moving toward our destiny in Jesus Christ.

Be flexible, also, with your due dates. They may need to be adjusted along the way. Setbacks are not failures. Spread out your due dates. Do not get too discouraged. Recognize partial success. Stay on track and persevere. Adapt to the changing times and environment. Failure happens only when we stop trying. Start to apply several of these prerequisites, and you will be on your way to developing life-changing and Christ-centered goals that will produce huge dividends.

Creating SMART Goals

Objective 8:

Indicate the characteristics of SMART goals.

Goals are the roadmaps to success. Instead of setting the goal of "I'm going to eat better," a SMART goal would be "I will eat five to eight servings of fruit and vegetables each day." This goal gives a specific time frame (daily) and measuring tool (5–8 servings) and sets realistic and attainable boundaries. It is also tangible in that you can easily determine whether you accomplish your goal or not. Here are the characteristics of SMART goals:

Specific

"I want to lose weight" is not a good goal because it is not specific. A specific goal would be "At the end of six months, I will have lost thirty pounds." After six months I will know specifically if I have met my goal. Goals are personal to you. Express your goals in the positive.

Measurable

How will I know I have achieved my goals? Write them down. A measurable goal would be, "I will write and send one thank-you card per week this month." At

month's end I will be able to evaluate whether or not I met that goal. That goal was measurable because it was specific and had a time frame.

Be precise. Break down your goals into smaller steps. Set performance goals rather than outcome goals. Goals based on outcomes are extremely vulnerable to failure and are out of our control. Personal performance goals put you in control over the achievement of those goals. If you set an outcome-based goal of finishing a race within the top three, then you stand a great chance of personal defeat. If you set a performance-based goal of finishing within a certain time frame, then you stand a greater chance of achieving that personal goal.

Attainable

Our goals need to be reasonable and reachable. Most people can handle somewhere between five and ten goals. Limit the number of challenging goals you have at any given time lest you become overwhelmed and frustrated. Simpler goals are easier to handle, for we can work with more of them simultaneously. Be careful, however, not to set goals too low as challenging goals force us to grow. So strike a balance between these two extremes, and set your goals around priorities.

Time-bound

Goals should be both short-term and long-term. The short-term goals are the smaller steps that lead to the greater long-term goal. Short-term and long-term goals together create comprehensive life goals. Always have at least one short-term and one long-term (2 years or longer) goal at any given time.

The more short-term goals you have, the more tasks you are likely to have coming due soon. Short-term goals assure you that you will have frequent victories. Set reminders as often as needed. Timing can often determine the order of priority in action steps taken and setting deadlines. SMART goals really do work if you use them!

Evaluating Goals

Objective 9:

Evaluate goals as needed.

Reflect

Honestly evaluate the progress, successes, and struggles of the previous months and year. Answer questions such as: What did I accomplish this year? Where did I struggle most? What have I learned? How did I overcome my obstacles? What surprise changes happened? Were my techniques faulty? Was my goal set too high? Do I need to adjust my goal? Did it happen too easily or quickly? These reflective questions help you to build on your successes and develop new strategies for continued success.

Revise

All plans need revision along the way. Things do not always play out the way we originally think. Revision is not defeat; it is just recalibrating. The closer we get to the target the more clearly we see things. Sometimes it is just the little things that keep us from reaching the goal. Revision is simply revisiting the dream and deciding what it will take to realize that dream. Goals change as you mature. Goal-setting is your servant, not your master.

Reward Yourself

Reward yourself for your progress and the short-term goals reached. Celebrate your wins! Keep a list of the victories and give God the glory! Focus on the successes and build on these positive gains.

Renew

Life wears us down over time. Ever so often we have to step back, evaluate our progress, and renew our commitment to the causes and goals Christ has put in our hearts. We need to renew often our commitment to

live a lifestyle that honors God's purposes. Proverbs 16:3 says that if we will commit our activities to God, our plans will succeed. Whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. Evaluate often and revise your plans as needed.

Finally, Jeremiah 29:11 notes that God has a master plan for each of us. Our happiness comes from living in conjunction with our Creator's master plan. Christ-centered goals help move us along in our journey to become more like Christ. Christ-centered goals are our way of cooperating with the sovereignty and will of God for our lives.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE VERSES TO MEMORIZE

Psalms 20:4

Proverbs 16:3, 9

Proverbs 19:21

Proverbs 21:5

Philippians 3:13–14

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *We discover God's will most often through*
 - a) *Scripture.*
 - b) *friends.*
 - c) *circumstances.*
2. *The rigid person uses his or her mind but neglects his or her*
 - a) *relationships.*
 - b) *past.*
 - c) *heart.*
3. *Goals are necessary for success because*
 - a) *success will occur by chance.*
 - b) *goals help move people into the future.*
 - c) *only rich people have goals.*
4. *Which is a true statement?*
 - a) *The Bible forbids our setting goals.*
 - b) *In building the temple, Solomon was given no plans.*
 - c) *God's purpose prevails over human plans.*
5. *Faulty motives*
 - a) *produce healthy goals.*
 - b) *produce faulty goals.*
 - c) *please the Lord.*
6. *Judas' anger over the pouring of perfume on Jesus was*
 - a) *justified and righteous.*
 - b) *an example of godly stewardship.*
 - c) *motivated by Judas' greed.*
7. *One key to setting goals that honor God is*
 - a) *acceptance.*
 - b) *selfishness.*
 - c) *greed.*

8. When goal-setting, start with the _____ in mind.
 - a) beginning
 - b) middle
 - c) end
9. A false statement about SMART goals is that they
 - a) are attainable.
 - b) cannot be measured.
 - c) are specific.
10. Goal-setting is
 - a) your master.
 - b) not necessary for people of faith.
 - c) your servant.

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ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. a (2.1)
2. c (2.2)
3. b (2.3)
4. c (2.4)
5. b (2.5)
6. c (2.6)
7. a (2.6)
8. c (2.7)
9. b (2.8)
10. c (2.9)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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LESSON 3

The Mission of Evangelism

What images or mental concepts come to mind when you hear the word evangelism? Do you envision a flamboyant, outgoing person who can lead people to the Lord on the spot? Or do you fear it may mean being required to go door-to-door sharing your faith with whoever answers, and all the time silently praying that no one will come to the door? Maybe you think of what happens at the end of a church service when the speaker gives an invitation for people to come forward and receive Christ. Perhaps you even remember seeing an evangelist on television or at your local church.

If this is your understanding of the ministry of evangelism, it is a one-sided understanding at best. Evangelism is a more multifaceted ministry than that. It is not a calling limited to a few specially gifted persons. Nor is it a ministry confined to the walls of the church building. And it is certainly not something to be feared. This lesson is designed to help you understand this vital ministry and discover effective ways to engage in evangelism.

LESSON OUTLINE

Defining Evangelism
 The Biblical Mandate for Evangelism
 The Spiritual Condition of the Lost
 Sharing the Gospel
 Your Personal Testimony
 The Holy Spirit, the Bible, and Prayer in Evangelism
 Common Objections to the Gospel
 Winning Others to Christ

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Define what evangelism is.*
2. *Explain the biblical mandate for evangelism.*
3. *Describe the spiritual condition of the lost.*
4. *Develop a plan for sharing the Gospel message.*
5. *Write your personal testimony.*
6. *Explain the roles of the Holy Spirit, the Bible, and prayer in evangelism.*
7. *Summarize the common objections to the Gospel.*
8. *Devise a strategy for winning others to Christ.*

Defining Evangelism

Objective 1:

Define what evangelism is.

One of the words used most often in the New Testament to define the message of the Gospel is the Greek word, *euaggelion*, which means “good news.” We get the word evangelism from this Greek word. *Euaggelion* is also translated “gospel.”

To be engaged in evangelism then means to announce or share or bring the good news of the Gospel. An evangelist is

someone who devotes his or her life to proclaiming the gospel to the lost. In Scripture, Philip is identified as an evangelist: "Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven" (Acts 21:8). In Ephesians 4:11, evangelism is identified as one of the ministry gifts of the Spirit: "It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers."

The gift of evangelism is the special ability and desire God gives certain members of the Body to 1) share the gospel with unbelievers in such a way that they become followers of the Lord Jesus, and 2) become responsible members of the Body. Evangelism is the primary ministry gift needed to produce church growth by conversion, and not merely biological or transfer growth. The basic purpose of the gift of evangelism is to initiate and develop relationships with the lost in order to share the salvation message and lead them to repentance from sin to eternal life in Christ. Evangelism is not only an enlargement gift but also an enabling gift. The evangelist is also responsible to equip the saints for ministry (Ephesians 4:12.)

Church growth author Donald McGavran has identified several levels of evangelism needed to reach different groups of people.

1. **E-0:** Evangelism is needed to win church-goers to Christ. It produces internal growth.
2. **E-1:** Evangelism is needed to win those of our own culture to Christ. It, too, produces internal growth.
3. **E-2:** Evangelism is needed to reach those who are slightly different from us. It produces cross-cultural evangelism.
4. **E-3:** Evangelism is needed to reach those vastly different from us. It produces bridging growth.

Jesus' words to His followers in Acts 1:8 illustrate these levels of evangelism:

- Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 3): E-0 and E-1
- Samaria (Acts 8): E-2
- Ends of the earth (Acts 13): E-3

Cross-cultural evangelism (E-2 and E-3) requires the missionary gift. Missionaries are those who are called and sent out with a burden to reach people belonging to different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The purpose of this gift is to advance the Great Commission by extending the local church on a worldwide basis. In Ephesians 3:7, the apostle Paul declared that he had received this gift from God: "I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power."

The Biblical Mandate for Evangelism

Objective 2:

Explain the biblical mandate for evangelism.

God has always wanted people to know Him and enter into a relationship with Him. It was His desire that the early patriarchs and later the children of Israel be witnesses for Him. Isaiah writes, "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me" (Isaiah 43:10). "Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses" (Isaiah 44:8). David was a faithful witness for God. Through the prophet Isaiah, God said of him, "See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples" (Isaiah 55:4).

In the New Testament, the focus shifted to Jesus and His followers. At Jesus' birth, the angel said to Joseph, "'Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins'" (Matthew 1:20). Jesus on numerous occasions declared His intention to fulfill God's plan of salvation. "'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work'" (John 4:34). And in Mark 10:45, He said, "'The Son of Man did not come to be

served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'" He left that same commission with His followers. "He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation'" (Mark 16:15). Matthew 28:19–20 reads, "'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" Luke records the same commission in Acts 1:8, "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."

The apostle Paul writes, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Romans 1:16). Looking into the future John the Revelator said this of Christ's victorious witnesses,

"Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:
 'Now have come the salvation and the
 power and the kingdom of our God, and the
 authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our
 brothers, who accuses them before our God
 day and night, has been hurled down. They
 overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and
 by the word of their testimony; they did not
 love their lives so much as to shrink from
 death.'" (Revelation 12:10–11)

It has been and still is God's plan that His people, first the Israelites and then the church, take the good news of the gospel to the world. His heart of love for the lost can be seen in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." While some believers are gifted in evangelism, all of us are called to be Christ's witnesses (see Acts 1:8).

The Spiritual Condition of the Lost

Objective 3:

Describe the spiritual condition of the lost.

The Bible uses the following terms to describe the spiritual condition of the lost:

Description	Scripture Reference
Lost sheep	Isaiah 53:6; Jeremiah 50:6; Luke 15:3–10; 1 Peter 2:25
Perishing	Proverbs 24:11; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:10
Hopeless	1 Chronicles 29:15; Job 18:13; Ephesians 2:12
Slaves to sin	Romans 6:6, 16, 19, 20; Galatians 4:8; 2 Peter 2:19
Aliens, foreigners, pagans	Jeremiah 5:19; Ephesians 2:12, 19; 1 Thessalonians 4:5
In darkness	Psalms 107:10; Proverbs 4:19; John 3:19; Acts 26:18; Romans 1:21; Ephesians 4:18; Colossians 1:13
Enemies of God	Genesis 3:15; Romans 8:7; James 4:4; Hebrews 10:27
Depraved, fools	Proverbs 1:7; Jeremiah 4:22; Romans 1:21, 28; Philippians 3:19; 1 Peter 4:3
Blind	Deuteronomy 28:28; 1 Samuel 2:23; Job 11:20; Psalm 36:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4
Dead	Ephesians 2:1, 2:4; 2 Timothy 4:1; 1 John 3:14; Jude 12
Old man, nature	Galatians 5:24; Ephesians 2:3; 4:22; Colossians 3:3, 5, 9

These terms tell us that humankind was hopelessly lost, with no clue of how lost they were and no inclination or ability to do anything about it. God's salvation would be purely a work of mercy and grace. There would be no opportunity for anyone to boast or take credit for his or her spiritual rescue.

Sharing the Gospel

Objective 4:

Develop a plan for sharing the Gospel message.

Success in sharing your faith requires a plan. Any plan for sharing the message of the Gospel must include these key facts: 1) We are sinners and deserve the punishment of death; 2) God loved us and made full provision through Christ for our salvation; 3) We must believe in what Jesus Christ did on the Cross to save us; 4) We must admit our need of a Savior, repent of our sins, and ask God to save us. Numerous plans have been developed over the years that incorporate these basic elements, although not always in the same order or sequence. We will now take a brief look at three helpful plans.

Billy Graham's "Steps to Peace with God"

- **Step 1** – Describe God's Purpose: Peace and Life—God loves you and wants you to experience peace and abundant life (See Romans 5:1; John 3:16; John 10:10).
- **Step 2** – Describe Man's Biggest Problem: Our Separation from God—God created us in His own image to have an abundant life. He gave us a will and a freedom of choice. We chose to disobey God and go our own willful way. We still make this choice today. This result in separation from God (See Proverbs 14:12; Isaiah 59:2; Romans 3:23; 6:23).
- **Step 3** – Describe God's Bridge: The Cross—Jesus Christ died on the Cross and rose from the grave. He paid the penalty for our sin and bridged the gap between God and people (See Romans 5:8; 1 Timothy 5:2; 1 Peter 3:18).

- **Step 4** – Describe Our Response: Receive Christ— We must trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and receive Him by personal invitation (See John 1:12; Romans 10:9–10; Revelation 3:20).

Campus Crusade for Christ's "Four Spiritual Laws"

- **First Spiritual Law** – God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life. Why is it that most people are not experiencing the abundant life?
- **Second Spiritual Law** – Man is sinful and separated from God, who is holy. Therefore, man cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life. A great gulf separates man from God. The third law explains the only way to bridge this gulf.
- **Third Spiritual Law** – Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life. It is not enough just to know these three laws.
- **Fourth Spiritual Law** – We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives. You can receive Christ right now by faith through prayer.

The following is a suggested prayer seekers can use.

"Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of my life, and make me the person You want me to be."

The "Romans Road" based on four verses from the book of Romans

- Romans 3:23: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
- Romans 6:23: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
- Romans 5:8: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- Romans 10:9–10: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that

God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”

It is sometimes best to use only one verse of Scripture in explaining the plan of salvation to young children or persons who know nothing about the Bible. You may want to devise your own plan for sharing the message of salvation. The ideas above will assist you in including those elements that are essential to an accurate presentation of the Gospel.

Your Personal Testimony

Objective 5:

Write your personal testimony.

Jesus told the man out of whom He had cast a legion of demons, “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” (Mark 5:19). One powerful way to share the message of the Gospel is to tell the story of your own salvation experience. Your personal testimony is simply a matter of telling how Jesus changed your life. The testimony will include these three key elements:

1. “Before I met Christ, my life was...” Describe what your life was like before you became a Christian.
2. “When I met Christ, here is how my life changed...” Explain how things changed when you received Christ into your life.
3. “Since I met Christ, my life has been...” Tell what your life is like now that you are a Christian. How have things changed since you came to Christ?

You will be able to tell your story better if you take time to write it out first. Doing this will insure that you include the highlights (and low lights) of your life and will give you more confidence as you share your story. One effective way to use your written testimony is to give copies of it to unsaved friends and ask them to

critique it for you. Ask them to note any thoughts that are unclear to them and encourage them to offer suggestions that would better express your ideas. Tell them you will check with them in a few days to get their reaction to what you have written. Doing this could help you improve what you have written and open opportunities for you to respond to questions they may have about becoming a Christian.

The Holy Spirit, the Bible, and Prayer in Evangelism

Objective 6:

*Explain the roles of the Holy Spirit,
the Bible, and prayer in evangelism.*

Fortunately, leading people to Christ is not entirely dependent upon us as Christians. Certainly, we do need to open our mouths and share the Good News, but let us consider three other important aspects of soul-winning.

The Holy Spirit in Evangelism

We have already explained that there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. It is all a work of God's grace and power as the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins and brings us to the place where we recognize our need of the Savior. John writes, "When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). John 6:44 notes we cannot even come to the Lord for salvation unless the Holy Spirit draws us. It is the Holy Spirit who regenerates and renews us: "He [Christ] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).

The Holy Spirit also gives us power to continue to live for Christ. "Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). And someday the Holy Spirit will energize our bodies and enable us to live with Christ through all

eternity. Paul affirms, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you” (Romans 8:11).

The Bible in Evangelism

Ephesians 2:8–9 says that we are saved by faith. And Romans 10:17 teaches that “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” This message of good news is found in the Bible. Any Gospel presentation must clearly show that the truths of God’s Word are the basis for our salvation. When explaining to people how to be saved, have them read a verse or two from the Bible so they will know their experience is based on faith in the Word of God and not just on their feelings. Second Peter 3:18 encourages us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

The Role of Prayer in Evangelism

Focused prayer prepares the way for people to hear and receive the salvation message. The apostle Paul made this request of his readers, “Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should” (Ephesians 6:19–20). Believers can also pray that conviction will accompany the presentation of the Gospel.

If a repentant sinner wants to become saved, he or she must ask God to save him or her. In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost the apostle Peter said, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21). To call on the Lord means to pray to Him. No special language or tone of voice is necessary for Him to hear us. Encourage someone wanting to receive Christ to speak to God out loud, asking Him to save and forgive. If possible, try to get the person to pray in his or her own words, rather than following you in a repeat-after-me prayer. Personally praying will help the seeker know he

or she can pray to God anytime and anywhere, without mimicking someone else.

Common Objections to the Gospel

Objective 7:

Summarize the common objections to the Gospel.

Some people are not interested in receiving Christ because they have questions or objections to the Gospel message. Here are a few examples.

- Some people think they will get to heaven because of their good works. They believe that if they have done enough good things in their lifetime, these will cancel out any bad things they have done. However, Ephesians 2:8–9 says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” When talking with those who believe this way, you may ask the following questions: How good would you have to be for a perfect, holy God to let you into heaven? Is it possible for you to be that good? Explain that if we could enter heaven by any other means God would never have sacrificed His Son, Jesus Christ.
- Some people believe that a loving God would never send anyone to hell and that everyone will be saved and go to heaven. Jesus himself said this regarding those who think this way, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18). Ask such people if they really believe that unrepentant murderers, child molesters, or dictators like Adolph Hitler will be saved. If they say, “no,” point out that they really do not believe everyone will be saved. If they say, “yes,” ask if they would want to spend eternity with these kinds of people.

- Some believe it is not possible to know if we will make it to heaven. Here is what the Bible says about those who think this way: “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Romans 8:17). “Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God” (1 Peter 1:21).
- Some people believe it is not necessary to be saved since they do not believe in life after death. Regarding this the Bible says, “Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). To not believe in eternity does not make it cease to exist any more than not believing in the power of electricity makes it any less potent if you come in contact with an exposed wire.

Winning Others to Christ

Objective 8:

Devise a strategy for winning others to Christ.

Here are several things to keep in mind as you consider how to lead people to the Lord:

Relationships

The majority of people who come to Christ do so as a result of the encouragement and influence of a friend or family member. Those you want to reach with the Gospel will be more responsive if they already know and trust you as a friend. So look for ways to establish and strengthen your relationship with those you want to lead to Christ.

Common Interests

When Jesus spoke with the woman at the well in John 4, He began with something she was interested in—water. From there, He led her to knowledge of

himself as God's Messiah. The same will be true of your efforts to bring people to Christ. Those with whom you already share a common interest will be more likely to listen to you talk about the Lord than those with whom you have little in common. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you find those points of interest from which you can lead into a conversation about the Lord.

Change and Crisis

People are sometimes most receptive to the Gospel when they are going through transitions, such as moving to a new community, changing jobs, getting married, beginning a family, and so on. Another time of receptivity is when they are experiencing a crisis or have a special need, such as an unexpected death, illness or injury, loss of a job, divorce, or financial need. While you do not want to take unfair advantage of them during this crisis, it is a good time to offer spiritual help and comfort, which may lead to an opportunity to share Christ with them.

The Setting

Think of the setting in which you will be with the people you want to win to Christ. What topics of conversation are likely to come up? What common interests could you begin with? What needs are they experiencing? Ask the Lord to keep you alert to opportunities to share the Gospel and also to prepare the soil to receive the seed of the message of salvation.

Discipleship

The best time to begin discipling new believers is immediately after they have received Christ into their lives. You can begin this process by helping them:

- 1) Understand their need to pray on a daily basis.
- 2) Begin reading the Bible. Suggest they start with one of the Gospels, maybe Mark's.
- 3) Tell someone what has happened to them. If possible arrange for them to talk with someone who will be excited and supportive about their new-found faith, before they have to tell someone who may not be as understanding.

Teamwork and Process

Evangelism is a process and not just the effort or responsibility of a single person. In 1 Corinthians 3:6–7, Paul writes of this progression: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.” It is not your job, nor within your ability, to get anyone saved. Only God can do that. So do not get discouraged if everything does not happen as outlined in this lesson.

Compile a List of People You Want to Reach with the Gospel

You are more likely to be successful if you concentrate your evangelism efforts on a list of specific people. Besides, there are probably some people you are especially desirous to see come to Christ, such as members of your family and close friends. So start your list with these special people. You may also include some people you work with or do business with, neighbors, casual acquaintances, and classmates. As you compile your list, note the common interests you have with each. Begin praying earnestly for each person on your list, asking God to open his or her heart to the truth of the Gospel and to give you wisdom and courage in sharing Christ.

Conclusion

As you actively share your faith, you will experience deep joy. Sure, you will face rejection from time to time as some people may insult you. Remember, they are not so much rejecting you as they are the Gospel. However, as you are diligent, God will give you success and someone will eventually give his or her heart to Christ. This will make all your sacrifice and efforts well worth it! Feel free to let your pastor, spiritual mentor, and even your friends at Global University know when a person you have witnessed to receives Christ. We will rejoice with you!

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE VERSES TO MEMORIZE

Isaiah 59:2

John 3:16

John 10:10

Romans 3:23

Romans 6:23

Romans 10:9–10

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. Unless indicated otherwise, there is only one correct response for each question.

1. *In its simplest definition, an evangelist is someone who*
 - a) *travels from church to church holding special services.*
 - b) *devotes his or her life to proclaiming the gospel to the lost.*
 - c) *goes from door-to-door sharing the faith.*
2. *While some believers are gifted in evangelism, according to Acts 1:8, all of us are called to be Christ's*
 - a) *witnesses.*
 - b) *defenders.*
 - c) *friends.*
3. *Which term is not used to describe the spiritual condition of the lost?*
 - a) *Lost sheep*
 - b) *Slaves to sin*
 - c) *Alive in Christ*
4. *Any plan for sharing the message of the Gospel must include the fact that*
 - a) *God loves us and made full provision through Christ for our salvation.*
 - b) *we can get to heaven by being good.*
 - c) *everyone will eventually be saved.*
5. *The purpose of writing your personal testimony is to*
 - a) *show off your writing ability.*
 - b) *tell your story better.*
 - c) *detail your life of sin and remember those good old days.*
6. *Identify two roles the Holy Spirit plays in evangelism.*
 - a) *The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin.*
 - b) *He regenerates and renews us.*
 - c) *He gives understanding of the final judgment of sinners.*

7. *A good way to respond to people who question the Gospel message is to*
 - a) *teach them lovingly the message of Christ.*
 - b) *argue with them about the philosophies of life.*
 - c) *not even get into conversation with them in the first place.*
8. *Most people who come to Christ do so as a result of*
 - a) *evangelistic crusades.*
 - b) *the encouragement and influence of a friend or family member.*
 - c) *reading a Gospel tract.*
9. *The best time to begin discipling new believers is*
 - a) *immediately after they have received Christ into their lives.*
 - b) *after they have been a Christian for several months.*
 - c) *when they fully understand what it means to be a Christian.*
10. *You are more likely to be successful in leading someone to Christ if you*
 - a) *force the message of Christ on everyone you know.*
 - b) *wait for the perfect setting—when the person is grieving or in trouble.*
 - c) *concentrate your efforts on a list of specific people.*

When used for HBMM SERVUS FIDELIS training:

Printout and mail a copy of your self test pages to the regional HBMM National Leadership Team member for your region. Their contact information is located on the "Contact Leadership Team" page on our website: <http://HBMM-National.org>

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. *b* (3.1)
2. *a* (3.2)
3. *c* (3.3)
4. *a* (3.4)
5. *b* (3.5)
6. *b* (3.6)
7. *a* (3.7)
8. *b* (3.8)
9. *a* (3.8)
10. *c* (3.8)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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LESSON 4

A Teachable Attitude

The Great Commission that Jesus gave the church in Matthew 28:18–20 was not only to win souls but also to make disciples. To be a disciple is to be a student. Therefore, as a follower of Jesus Christ, you are to be a life-long student of the master teacher himself. Obviously, a vital prerequisite to being taught is having a teachable attitude.

You may have observed that not everybody is teachable. In fact, some individuals resist instruction and correction. On one occasion Jesus healed a man who was born blind. This act of compassion infuriated a number of the Pharisees who opposed the Lord. They asked the man who had been healed how he received his sight. When he explained how it happened, they would not believe him. So they continued to interrogate him until the man finally exclaimed, “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing” (John 9:33). The Pharisees angrily answered, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” (John 9:34). What a derogatory response! It demonstrated their refusal to learn or accept facts outside their frame of reference.

As Christians, we must remain open to receiving instruction throughout our lives. It does not matter how many degrees we have earned, how much experience and wisdom we think we have, or how much respect others show us. Each of us has much to learn.

LESSON OUTLINE

The “School of the Master”
 Instruction through the Word and the Holy Spirit
 A Teachable Attitude Leads to transformation
 Daily Life Lessons
 The Importance of Humility
 Doing the Word

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Describe what it means to be enrolled in the “School of the Master.”*
2. *Explain how Jesus teaches through the Word and the Holy Spirit.*
3. *Discuss how being teachable leads to transformation.*
4. *Describe the growth that occurs as we learn daily life lessons.*
5. *State why humility is crucial to having a teachable attitude.*
6. *Explain the importance of practicing what you have learned.*

The “School of the Master”

Objective 1:

Describe what it means to be enrolled in the “School of the Master.”

Imagine what it would have been like to be one of the disciples who followed Jesus as He journeyed through the towns of Israel, preaching and teaching. These disciples were enrolled in what I call the “School of the Master.” They were with Him twenty-four hours

a day, seven days a week. This was a common method of the Jewish rabbis and their followers during the first century. What an awesome learning model! Can you imagine the lessons they learned?

Jesus was often called “Rabbi.” The word *Rabbi* is of Hebrew origin and means “My Master.” In common usage, the word Rabbi was equated with the word “teacher” (Matthew 23:8). Jesus is undoubtedly the greatest teacher that has ever lived. Even non-Christians admit to His greatness as a teacher, marveling at His message and methodology. His followers were enrolled in an incredible discipleship training school. Jesus did not necessarily choose the best and the brightest pupils, however, as other rabbis of that time did. He picked out an assortment of men—fisherman, a zealot, a tax collector, and others—who had to be willing to learn and apply the lessons.

Today, all Christians automatically are enrolled in the “School of the Master” when they experience spiritual new birth. It is not optional. Remember this—Jesus is always willing to be your Teacher. But you must be teachable: willing to listen, willing to learn, willing to follow instructions, and willing to obey commands. To trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior means to come under His divine Lordship and rule. Therefore, confessing Jesus as your Lord and Savior must include readiness to turn away from anything that displeases Him and eagerness to follow Him wholeheartedly. This leads to personal transformation and fruitful service. What an awesome journey we are on!

Instruction through the Word and the Holy Spirit

Objective 2:

*Explain how Jesus teaches
through the Word and the Holy Spirit.*

When Jesus walked on this earth, He saw people with many needs. Mark records that one day when Jesus saw a great multitude “he had compassion on them, because

they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things" (Mark 6:34). Obviously, we do not see Jesus with our physical eyes. So how does He teach us? There are two principal ways.

Jesus Teaches through the Scripture

Jesus himself taught from the Old Testament Scriptures and shared other truths which were later recorded in what we now call the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. His words were authoritative. To hear His words was to listen to God. He would often say, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Jesus warned of catastrophe for rejecting His words: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash" (Matthew 7:26–27). The apostles and their close associates taught the early church based on the Old Testament and Jesus' words, and their words are recorded in the rest of the New Testament.

Today we have the whole Bible, God's complete written revelation for humankind. It is clear, authoritative, and self-interpreting. You do not need to be a seminary-trained theologian to understand the Bible. It contains the writings of the Old Testament prophets, the sayings and teachings of Jesus Christ, and the writings of the apostles. The Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit and is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). As a disciple you must read, study, and respond to what is written in the Bible.

Jesus spoke of the life-giving power of the Word of God when He said, "'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). In other words, the Word of God provides spiritual nourishment. God is always speaking through His Word, revealing His will, thoughts, promises and plans for us.

Sadly, many Christians, after an initial period of great enthusiasm and hunger for truth in the Bible, slack off in

their daily Bible reading. Instead of scouring God's Word for truth, help, guidance, and principles for living, they fall back on their own worldly wisdom and experience. In essence, they demonstrate an unteachable attitude. Such self-reliance is no different than turning their backs on Jesus if He were physically present.

Having a teachable attitude means having a hunger to know God better through His Word. Every day you should pray over the Word of God and ask the Lord to speak to you as you spend time in the Word. He will indeed teach you many things, but you must put into practice what you learn.

Jesus Teaches through the Spirit

Not only does the Lord teach through His Word, He also teaches you through the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised this in John 14:25–26, when He told the disciples, “All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

The Holy Spirit teaches God's people in many ways. The Holy Spirit can teach you by speaking to your heart through the Word of God. To say the Holy Spirit speaks through the Bible means that He can cause a passage of Scripture to enlighten you suddenly. The Spirit speaks to your personal needs and situations as He brings the Word of God to life.

The Holy Spirit can also speak to you through the quiet nudging of His presence within you, as He urges you to do something. Perhaps He would urge you to visit a particular friend. When you get there you discover that your friend is facing a need, and you are able to minister to that need. In the book of Acts, the Spirit told Philip to go up to a chariot that was traveling on the road. There he met the owner of the chariot and was able to lead him to Christ (see Acts 8:26–39). This is a wonderful biblical example of the Holy Spirit's activity in a believer.

When you receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit and continue in the Spirit-filled life, you will have increased sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. It is important to remain teachable and open, so that the Holy Spirit can guide you. The Holy Spirit may prompt you to pray for someone who needs physical healing. He may prompt you to give a word of prophecy or tongues and interpretation in church. He may also give you a word of knowledge or word of wisdom to share in a time of need.

A Teachable Attitude Leads to Transformation

Objective 3:

Discuss how being teachable leads to transformation.

Jesus' goal for His disciples was for them to become Christlike. Jesus presented this goal in Luke 6:40, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." The Lord does not just wish to impart knowledge to us, but to transform us until we resemble Him.

Our Role in the Transformation

Some people mistakenly think that to become a Christian is to become a mindless religious zombie who carries out the bizarre wishes of some invisible guiding influence. Nothing could be farther from reality. The truth is that God wants to transform us, but He does not do so against our will! One of God's highest priorities in creating human beings is that they would be able to exercise significant choice or free will. From the beginning of human history, God has desired for people to know and love Him. However, true love cannot be forced but must be offered freely. God graciously gave humans intelligence, consciousness, the right of self-determination, and choice. Often we have used this free will to turn away from our Creator, but the option is always there for us to choose to love and submit to God's plans and purposes.

God will work in transforming power in our lives only as we participate in becoming Christlike. We face daily choices

as to whether we will allow the life of Christ to be expressed through us or whether the self-life will be manifested. The self-life includes our natural tendency toward selfishness, greed, pride, anger, and other sins. We must decide daily to grow and involve Christ in all areas of our lives. As we respond willingly to the instruction of Jesus through the Word of God and the guidance of His Holy Spirit, we are transformed, becoming more like our Teacher.

Jesus' Role in Our Transformation

The part that Jesus plays in our transformation is indispensable. He comes to live His life in us! No matter how hard we try, we cannot become Christlike on our own. Only as we rely on the life of Christ is He able to live through us. Regarding his dependence on the life of Christ, note what Paul says in Philippians 4:13: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." "I can do everything"—that is our part. But it can only be done through Christ who gives strength—that is His greater part.

Jesus' power and energy are released in your life as you daily submit to Him. The longer you humbly walk with Christ, the more you discover His involvement and empowerment in every area of your life. This includes your prayers, knowledge and wisdom, commitment, skills, gifts, sanctification, witness, and service to others. Paul expresses this great secret of the Christian life: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

A Common Error

Some believers have focused almost completely on using their gifts and talents for the Lord, but they have neglected dealing with serious flaws in their character. Such individuals may be busy "serving the Lord" and may even have acquired a reputation of importance, but they tolerate sins such as greed, poor stewardship, lying, unforgiveness, immoral sexual activity, unkindness, pride, or selfishness. However, to glorify God and be a positive influence to others—both in and outside the family of God—we must be transformed. A key passage to learn

is Romans 8:28–29, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

Daily Life Lessons

Objective 4:

Describe the growth that occurs as we learn daily life lessons.

The disciples of Jesus learned many life lessons as they followed the Master each day. Jesus used the daily events of life as teaching points and object lessons. As we understand this, all of life becomes our classroom in the “School of the Master.”

A Child and a Servant

To illustrate, when the disciples were arguing among themselves about who was the greatest—thus revealing their spiritual immaturity—Jesus brought a child and placed him before the disciples. Jesus then taught, “‘Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest’” (Luke 9:48).

Jesus taught another powerful lesson when He washed the feet of the disciples after the Last Supper. After He had washed their feet, Jesus asked, “Do you understand what I have done for you? . . . You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:12–15). Through this act, Christ demonstrated true servanthood.

Eagerness to Learn

Jesus taught many life lessons to the disciples, and He is still doing that today with us. He uses the

situations we encounter in our daily routine as well as new experiences to teach us how to represent the kingdom of God. For instance, you may encounter a young woman who is difficult to love. Perhaps she is argumentative, offensive, and angry. But, as you learn more about her, you discover that pain and hurt have colored her outlook on life. Eventually she confesses that she was abused as a child or experienced the tragic loss of a loved one. Suddenly, this insight helps you to be compassionate with her and with others. This is a most valuable and practical lesson to learn in God's kingdom.

Jesus reached out to people that the Pharisees despised. If you are teachable, the Holy Spirit will show you the real needs of people, and He will open doors for you to minister to them. Daily, ask the Lord what He is trying to teach you through your situations. Then respond to what the Lord is showing you. You and I have opportunities to grow every day.

Learning from Mistakes

We fail at times, just as the disciples of Jesus did. If you stumble, it is important to get back on your feet and move closer to Christ! He is very willing to forgive and restore you. Yes, you can learn from your mistakes. That is part of being a teachable disciple. However, it is even better to learn from the Scriptures and avoid the pitfalls and traps that others have fallen into.

The Importance of Humility

Objective 5:

*State why humility is crucial
to having a teachable attitude.*

God knows much more than you or I do. While this may be obvious, it leads us to consider a very important quality that we must have in order to be teachable: humility. Humility leads you to acknowledge that God truly does know much more than you do, and that you are dependent on Him for divine guidance, wisdom,

and instruction. Rather than being a limitation, humility opens you up to the vast wisdom of God.

Psalms 25:9 says of the Lord, “He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.” As you walk humbly with God, He will teach and guide you, no matter what the situation. Proverbs 3:5–6 also gives us this assurance: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” In every situation God has a living lesson to teach you; humility acknowledges God’s authority to guide you in the right path. God can guide you through His Word, through the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, through circumstances, and through the counsel of godly people. But you must remain teachable.

Humility in Regard to People

You can always learn from people, even people who are difficult to love, or who are very different from you. A great attitude to have when you encounter difficult people is “Lord, what would you have me learn from this?” God gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).

Moses was the meekest man on the earth in his lifetime (Numbers 12:3) and because of his meekness, God gave him much grace as he faced the challenges of leading God’s people. Moses knew his need of God’s help: that is undoubtedly one reason he spent so much time in prayer and communion with God. As you rely on the Lord and remain teachable, He will give you wisdom and grace daily.

Doing the Word

Objective 6:

Explain the importance of practicing what you have learned.

Jesus gave assignments to His disciples and expected them to do what He asked of them. Someone who is truly teachable will respond to the Word of God by putting it into effect. This will lead to transformation through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Responding to the Word of God often includes believing a divine promise and doing something tangible. For example, Mark 16:17–18 says, “These signs will accompany those who believe: . . . they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.” Putting this text into practice means that you lay hands on the sick (provided they are willing, of course) and pray the prayer of faith, believing that they shall be healed. As you put this Scripture into action, God will work.

The same principle of obedience is applied to other areas of our lives, including our giving. Malachi 3:10 states, “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.” A teachable disciple will bring his or her tithe to the local church, trusting that God will open the windows of heaven and pour out His blessing.

The instruction to “do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12) simply suggests that we treat others as we would want to be treated. Jesus said, “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). In the matter of good works, the Lord gives assignments to each of His people. He has prepared good works ahead of time, for us to walk in. Jesus gave assignments to His disciples so that they would learn by doing, and He is still doing that today!

When Jesus said “go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15), He was counting on His teachable disciples to put this Great Commission into action. But He also promised the baptism and anointing of the Holy Spirit, to empower them to spread the Good News. The disciples would not be going alone!

Discipling Others

God teaches us through His Word, but He also teaches us through people who disciple us. The command to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19) means to teach people to obey and follow the Word of the Lord.

Disciples are meant to reproduce. This process of reproduction is brought out in 2 Timothy 2:2, "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." As you are teachable, the Lord will strengthen and establish you in His Word. Then He asks you to help disciple others also. The teachable disciple who puts God's Word into effect becomes a good example to teach others also. This is reproduction: disciples teaching faithful people, who can then disciple others.

Making disciples includes many aspects of ministry: Sunday School teachers teaching a class; small group leaders leading a Bible study, one-on-one discipleship programs, sharing Christ with your neighbors, and preaching and teaching the Word of God in various settings. Each of these is a precious opportunity to make disciples.

Teaching and making disciples also includes parents teaching their children, by bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Parents have a precious opportunity to teach their children by their words and example. Discipleship begins in the home, and parents play a crucial role in discipling their children.

As you become like Christ, you will experience more compassion for the lost. Jesus stated His mission: "The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). As Jesus looked out on the crowds, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. "So He began teaching them many things" (Mark 6:34). This great motivation of love and compassion will move you to go and disciple others also.

Having a teachable attitude is vital if you are to become fruitful as a disciple of Jesus Christ. God's goal for you is nothing less than transformation. And this wonderful change will last throughout eternity!

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE VERSES TO MEMORIZE

Psalm 25:9

Matthew 4:4

Matthew 28:18–20

Mark 6:34

Luke 6:40

John 14:25–26

Romans 8:28–29

Philippians 4:13

2 Timothy 2:2

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. Enrollment in the "School of the Master" is for
 - a) those who are going into the ministry.
 - b) those who want further training.
 - c) every believer.
2. The goal of Jesus' discipleship training is to
 - a) train believers in the art of getting along with other people.
 - b) transform believers until they resemble Jesus Christ.
 - c) help believers become skillful debaters.
3. The apostles' teaching to the early church was based on
 - a) ancient philosophy.
 - b) the Old Testament and Jesus' words.
 - c) their wisdom gained through daily experience.
4. Responding to the Word of God includes two important dimensions:
 - a) thinking and walking.
 - b) trying and waiting.
 - c) believing and doing.
5. The Christlike character is
 - a) only for a few people.
 - b) foundational for every believer.
 - c) impossible to attain.
6. Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet
 - a) showed His servanthood.
 - b) encouraged the disciples to be lazy.
 - c) set a bad example for other leaders.
7. Humility is important in our being teachable because humility
 - a) makes us smarter than other people.
 - b) is the queen of the virtues.
 - c) makes us dependent on God.

8. *The word Rabbi commonly means*
 - a) *teacher.*
 - b) *healer.*
 - c) *disciple.*
9. *According to Luke 6:40, which is true of the relationship between the student and the teacher?*
 - a) *The student will never become like the teacher.*
 - b) *The student is not above the teacher.*
 - c) *The student has no need of the teacher.*
10. *Jesus taught that to become great in the kingdom of God, you must*
 - a) *grow up and be a responsible adult.*
 - b) *have wealth and power.*
 - c) *be a servant.*

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ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. c (4.1)
2. b (4.3)
3. b (4.2)
4. c (4.6)
5. b (4.3)
6. a (4.4)
7. c (4.5)
8. a (4.1)
9. b (4.3)
10. c (4.4)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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LESSON 5

Servanthood in the Local Church and Beyond

Sincere followers of Jesus experience a growing urgency to work for God. This urgency calls for a study of biblical servanthood. Scripture instructs us in the nature and work of biblical servants. Understanding and practicing servanthood is important for many functions of the local church. Practicing biblical servanthood also helps to make us effective witnesses to nonbelievers.

Servanthood is one of the most rewarding experiences for a believer. Loving servants of God develop a growing understanding of the many ways they can help others. This growing awareness of human need leads to a commitment to Christian action. We see the needs of others and move quickly toward these opportunities for ministry.

Compassionate servants can change the world around them. Christians often think that miracles or great healings are the only things that can move others toward God. It is true that miracles can arouse the curiosity of many people, and people often find Jesus as their Savior after witnessing powerful manifestations of God. However, multiplied acts of kindness can also break down a strong wall of resistance. Devoted Christian service is an important part in healing a hurting and broken world.

Compassionate servants cannot be stopped. Those who learn and practice the principles of servanthood advance the kingdom of God. Eventually, compassionate servanthood becomes a natural expression of the Christian life. Spontaneously serving others makes the church a powerful force in the world.

LESSON OUTLINE

Biblical Foundations for Servanthood

Jesus As God's Servant

Regarding the Servant

The Holy Spirit and Servanthood

The Mature Servant

The Wrong Attitude

Witnessing through Servanthood

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Provide biblical foundations for servanthood.*
2. *Explain how Isaiah 61:1–2 relates to the life of Jesus as God's servant.*
3. *Identify the attitudes, actions, and motivations of a servant.*
4. *Describe the role of the Holy Spirit in servanthood.*
5. *Discuss how servanthood expresses spiritual growth and maturity.*
6. *Identify problematic attitudes that suppress personal servanthood.*
7. *Explain how servanthood is a means of reaching the unsaved.*

Biblical Foundations for Servanthood

Objective 1:

Provide biblical foundations for servanthood.

The call to servanthood is a clear teaching of Scripture. The Hebrew word for servant was first applied to slaves. Over time the word was used for trusted

servants who did important things for their masters. The Hebrew word was also applied to those who served rulers. Kings and prophets were also called servants of the Lord (2 Samuel 3:18; Isaiah 20:3; Ezekiel 34:23–24). Later, the word was applied to anyone serving God.

The book of Isaiah contains excellent teachings concerning servanthood. Isaiah recognized that the nation of Israel was a servant to God (Isaiah 44:1–5). Isaiah also said God would raise up a Servant, put His Spirit within Him, and use Him to minister to the nations He loved (Isaiah 42:1). This Servant is the subject of four other important passages in Isaiah. These passages, called “Servant Songs,” were prophecies about the coming Messiah (Isaiah 49:1–7; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12; 61:1–3).

The Old Testament has many excellent examples of godly servanthood. For example, Joseph had the opportunity to punish family members that previously tried to harm him. Instead, he forgave them. This allowed him to serve his family and save them from starvation. Moses unselfishly led his people to freedom. Samuel was a true servant in times of national trouble. He faithfully served God’s people as a prophet and priest. He served with wisdom and provided excellent leadership when others failed. Other great servants like Esther, Daniel, and David inspire us to discover our place of servanthood.

Jesus As God’s Servant

Objective 2:

Explain how Isaiah 61:1–2 relates to the life of Jesus as God’s servant.

Isaiah spoke of the ministry of the Great Servant that would bring hope into broken lives. He spoke of Jesus when he said, “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoner, to proclaim the year of

the Lord's favor (Isaiah 61:1–2). Jesus later read Isaiah's words in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:18–19). He wanted others to understand that He was the Great Servant spoken of by Isaiah (Isaiah 52:13–53:12). Jesus also wanted others to know His message brought hope and deliverance to suffering people.

We follow in Jesus' footsteps by sharing a message that promises freedom from spiritual slavery and inward darkness. Like the Great Servant, we continually share the message of God's love local church ministries and personal interactions. As servants of God, we bring a witness of hope and freedom to our communities. There is great joy when individuals believe the good news and experience God's transforming power.

Jesus knew servanthood is the mark of a true disciple. When His disciples argued about greatness in the kingdom of God, Jesus quickly responded, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35). What Jesus said to the disciples was very clear. He wisely used the word servant to describe greatness in God's kingdom. Like Jesus' disciples, we must see serving as a way of life for all Christians. Serving in the local church should come naturally.

Regarding the Servant

Objective 3:

Identify attitudes, actions, and motivations of a servant.

Our attitudes are foundational to who we are. While good attitudes can open ministry doors we never thought possible, wrong attitudes greatly hinder effective service to God. For example, an attitude of pride can lead to failure and discouragement in our work for God. The Bible strongly warns about the harmful nature of pride. Disgrace and destruction follow the prideful. Now would be a good time to read Proverbs 11:2 and 16:5.

Pride must be replaced by humble dependence upon the Lord. Sincere humility is necessary for Christian service. Jesus taught that humility will lift us up in the eyes of others (see Luke 14:11; 18:14). According to Peter, humility helps us submit to one another and imparts God's grace for effective service (see 1 Peter 5:5–7).

Servants also develop attitudes of submission, obedience, and sacrifice. Jesus is again our great example. God required Jesus to come to earth as a servant. As a servant to God and humans, He submitted to God's will and then served humankind. Submission and obedience led to His sacrificial death for our sins. He died sacrificially so we may live sacrificially for others. Therefore, Jesus' example of obedience is our model. The success of our servanthood hinges on deep humility, sincere obedience, and unconditional submission to whatever labor of love is required.

Motivations of a Servant

Motivations are the feelings and beliefs that make us act in a certain manner. Love and compassion for others motivate true servants of God. When our motivations are good, acts of love and kindness are easily accomplished. Properly motivated servants of God are always helping others.

Tragically, if our motivations are not constantly examined, we can easily want the wrong things. Here is an example. On one occasion the disciples of Jesus argued about who would be greatest in the kingdom of God. Some of them wanted a high position next to Jesus. But Jesus was disappointed with their motivations. They were motivated by pride and power. Jesus quickly responded to their poor motivations. He pointed out that humility and a servant's attitude were the keys to greatness in His kingdom (see Matthew 18:1–4; Luke 9:48).

Humility and a servant attitude help assure pure motivations that lead to servant ministry. For example, we know that the motivation to please God leads to

serving others through an effective prayer life. According to John, people with pure hearts will be very confident before God. Confident servants can receive from God anything they ask, because they obey His command and do what pleases Him (1 John 3:21–22).

Christian servanthood is also motivated by love. Loving God is the highest priority for servants. Loving God is more important than noble acts of servanthood. Naturally, we also love everyone around us, including our enemies (Matthew 5:43–44; Matthew 22:37–40). Loving God is expressed through unconditional servanthood. Consider this: A pastor was chided by his fellow pastors when he accepted a struggling church filled with problems. “Why would you take such a church?” they asked. The pastor explained that his love for God and others led him to pastor a church filled with pain. He felt deep pleasure in obeying the Lord. Many servants of the Lord feel this deep pleasure when love motivates them to accept difficult tasks.

Loving God naturally leads to loving and serving others. James said that loving our neighbors as ourselves is “the royal law found in Scripture” (James 2:8). Love recognizes that every person is made in God’s image and has great value (James 3:9). Our love for those around us encourages our servanthood to them. Our love for God also creates a merciful attitude towards others. Motivated by compassion and love, servants walk toward the pain of others and not away from it. The Lord wants us to look for people needing help with their problems. Love seeks for opportunities that require multiplied acts of kindness.

The Holy Spirit and Servanthood

Objective 4:

Describe the role of the Holy Spirit in servanthood.

Our ability to serve God and others requires the help of the Holy Spirit. Human nature has a tendency toward

selfishness. Even after we become Christians, we may still have self-serving attitudes. The Holy Spirit enables us to overcome selfish thoughts and attitudes that impede servanthood.

Think about the Holy Spirit's influence on the early disciples. Before ascending to heaven, Jesus told His followers to return to Jerusalem. There they would receive a special gift from the Father (Luke 24:45–49). The disciples may not have known what all of this meant, but they obeyed. This is a good lesson for us. We may not always know what God desires to accomplish in our lives, but this should not discourage us. Our responsibility is to obey what God has spoken to us. Obedience then leads to marvelous opportunities for service.

The disciples obediently returned to Jerusalem. As they waited and prayed, the power of the Holy Spirit was given to them. Great joy came to them when the Holy Spirit filled their lives. Their exciting story is recorded in Acts 2. The heavenly Father's gracious gift was confirmed through startling miracles. First, the presence of God sounded like a powerful wind blowing through their prayer room. Then what appeared to be tongues of fire rested on each of them. Amazingly, they all began speaking in languages they did not know (Acts 2:1–13).

This excitement drew a large crowd of people. What Peter said to this crowd still encourages us today: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy" (Acts 2:17–18).

Joel's words promised the Holy Spirit's power to a special group of individuals. In the Old Testament, the power of the Spirit was generally given to great leaders like the prophets. Kings and other important leaders were also given the Spirit in order to serve God and others effectively. But Peter preached that the Holy Spirit would now come to everyone, including humble

servants. These Spirit-filled servants would carry God's message to their villages and cities all over the world.

We still need the Holy Spirit's power for the tasks of servanthood. You will face personal struggles that threaten your servanthood. Faithfully seek the Holy Spirit's presence during these difficult times. He will give you added strength and courage to continue your service to God and others within and outside of the church.

Here are other important ways the Holy Spirit will help you become a better servant. Take time to read the biblical examples given below.

- The Holy Spirit will give you power to speak freely with others who need to know more about God. After the disciples received the power of the Spirit, they spoke God's powerful message of hope to others (Acts 4:23–31).
- He will give you power to pray more effectively for others. The early disciples prayed for many kinds of needs. People were amazed when godly servants prayed and great miracles occurred (Acts 3:1–10; 6:8).
- He will lead you to people who need help from a godly servant. Remember, if God leads you to help someone, He will empower you for the task (Acts 8:26–40).
- He can give you wisdom in difficult situations that require good judgment (Acts 6:1–7).
- He will give you the power to live a holy life that is an example to others (Acts 4:8–22).

The Mature Servant

Objective 5:

Discuss how servanthood expresses spiritual growth and maturity.

Christians discover that spiritual growth and maturity come in many different ways. Christians everywhere recognize that consistent prayer and faithful Bible study

are important to personal spiritual growth. We also know that fasting and prayer are a powerful combination for spiritual growth.

Servanthood is another means for our maturing in the Christian walk. Paul's writings connect important ideas regarding servant ministry and Christian maturity. In Ephesians 4:11–13, Paul writes, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Let us reflect on these ideas:

- God provides certain leaders to minister to those who follow Jesus (v. 11).
- Leaders have the responsibility of training people to be servants (v. 12).
- Servants live and minister in such a way so that others are built up (v. 12).
- When mature servants encourage and help others, those served understand more about Jesus. This encourages others to live like Jesus (vv. 13–16).

Mature, dedicated servants teach and serve new disciples. According to Paul, the goal of biblical leadership is to build healthy servants of God. At some point, the new disciple begins to serve others. Serving becomes a way of living, not just a way of thinking about Christian responsibility. The growing servant sees new ways of serving God and helping others.

Paul helps us understand that developing biblical servants takes time and effort. Paul's key word is translated "built up" (v. 12). This was a term used for building a house. One does not build a house by first building a roof. No, the foundation comes first, then walls are added, and the roof crowns the new house. A house is built in a very systematic way over a period

of time. God-called leaders develop servants through encouragement and instruction over a period of time.

The Wrong Attitude

Objective 6:

*Identify problematic attitudes
that suppress personal servanthood.*

Thinking about servanthood as a personal battle may seem strange at first. Considering this powerful truth about godly servants is helpful: good servants are also good soldiers who protect their call to servanthood (2 Timothy 2:1–4). You must remember that Satan wishes to compromise or destroy every important thing in your life. Since servanthood is important to the church, certain enemies seek to destroy your desire to serve God and His church. Never doubt Satan's determination to destroy good servants and their work. Someone once said that if Christianity can be stopped for only one generation, then it will become extinct. There is a great truth in this statement. Christianity can be stopped when good servants no longer hear and obey God's voice. So, as a good servant, guard yourself against the following enemies:

1. **Pride:** Pride can bring disgrace and the ultimate destruction of a servant of God. Pride can turn a healthy servant into a selfish individual (Proverbs 11:2; 16:5; 29:23).
2. **Laziness:** Laziness keeps the servant inactive. The desire to help others is lost (Proverbs 10:4; 19:15).
3. **Indifference:** Indifference means the servant has lost the desire to serve others. Other things have become more important than serving God's people.
4. **Doubt:** If the servant of God begins to doubt the call to servanthood, this could lead to worrying about God's material provision for his or her life.

A servant of the Lord has many outward enemies also. For example, individuals who hate Christianity

often persecute God's servants. The persecution of God's servants happens in all parts of the world. Naturally, persecution can bring deep discouragement. God has, however, promised His strength to persecuted saints who seek Him. Consider these verses when persecution, hardship, or criticism becomes a part of your life: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). Paul offers more encouraging words to those under great hardship: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" Paul answered his own question by saying, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:35, 37). Prayer brings fellowship with Jesus and added strength for your battle. Remaining in close fellowship with Jesus assures your victory.

Witnessing through Servanthood

Objective 7:

*Explain how servanthood
is a means of reaching the unsaved.*

While preaching the gospel is a primary method for sharing God's plan for salvation, there are many ways to share Jesus with others. We share Jesus through our words and our actions. Sometimes our actions are more powerful than our words. This is particularly true when people resist God's message of salvation. When individuals resist, our words need to connect with servant actions.

Serving the unsaved in creative ways can help break down walls of resistance. For example, Christians can go door-to-door in their community and offer to serve people in a variety of ways. You might be surprised how often people will allow someone to help them in times of great need. Christians can paint houses, mow lawns, repair a car, or help with a chore or errand. Compassionate acts

of kindness often represent Jesus more effectively than hundreds of words in a sermon.

Sometimes servanthood and preaching work together. Our words help people understand God's plan for their lives. Servanthood then reflects our sincere love for them. When we help people in meaningful ways, they listen to our words more carefully.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit would give us power to witness (Acts 1:8). This power is often expressed through our words. Jesus was also teaching that the Holy Spirit helps in all witnessing, including our servanthood to others. Thousands accepted the message of Jesus because early Christians did more than preach. Their faith was expressed through loving servanthood. They quickly solved problems that threatened their ability to minister to others (see Acts 2–6).

Jesus helped His disciples understand that serving others is true greatness. He taught, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26–28). Like Jesus and His disciples, we must be willing to give our lives in service for others.

Other Ministry Opportunities

Many business leaders teach the principles of servanthood to their employees because servanthood works well in the business world for the same reason it works well in the church. The principles of biblical servanthood give value to the person served. When we serve others in the name of the Lord, we communicate to them that they are important to us and to God.

Jesus taught us that all people—regardless of race or social status—have value to God. Therefore, no one should be neglected by the church. Servanthood is a wonderful way to demonstrate God's deep love to the hurting. Servants offer encouragement and hope for the future.

Conclusion

Serving others also opens doors of opportunity for faithful servants. Never fear that you will lack new opportunities to serve God. Jesus taught us that the world has too few servants (see Matthew 9:35–38). A shortage of Christian workers guarantees new challenges and new responsibilities for faithful servants. When you faithfully do God's will today, tomorrow will offer many wonderful and unexpected opportunities.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE VERSES TO MEMORIZE

Luke 4:18–19

Luke 9:48

Acts 1:8

Acts 2:17–18

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. How does the Old Testament view servanthood?
 - a) Servanthood did not seem important in the Old Testament.
 - b) Servanthood was applied only to special people in the Old Testament.
 - c) Servanthood was a very important topic in the Old Testament.
2. In what way did Jesus teach the importance of servanthood?
 - a) He taught that servanthood was the mark of a true disciple.
 - b) He spoke about servanthood very little.
 - c) He said servanthood is only for leadership in the church.
3. How do good attitudes help us become better servants?
 - a) Having a good attitude is not that important for a servant.
 - b) Having a good attitude keeps a servant out of trouble.
 - c) Good attitudes like humility and submission are at the center of serving others.
4. Why is the motivation of love for others so important for a servant?
 - a) A loving servant can make more mistakes with fewer consequences.
 - b) Servants motivated by love are willing to serve others at any cost.
 - c) Serving others with love gives others a higher opinion of us.
5. Why is the Holy Spirit necessary for biblical servants?
 - a) The Holy Spirit does not help the servant that much.
 - b) The Holy Spirit empowers servants so they can effectively help others.
 - c) The Holy Spirit makes us feel better about ourselves.

6. According to the apostle Paul, the goal of biblical leadership is to
 - a) take care of the church business.
 - b) receive tithes and offerings.
 - c) build healthy servants of God.
7. According to the lesson, one danger that threatens servanthood is
 - a) not memorizing enough Scripture about servanthood.
 - b) disappointment that no one is complementing you about your servanthood.
 - c) pride that leads to selfish living.
8. One of the most effective ways to share Jesus with an unbeliever is to
 - a) serve the nonbeliever in a Christlike and compassionate manner.
 - b) preach to the nonbeliever every chance you get.
 - c) give the nonbeliever a lot of Christian literature.
9. What did Jesus say was the path to true greatness in the kingdom of God?
 - a) Studying the Bible for many hours a day
 - b) Telling others that you are a great servant of God
 - c) Serving others humbly
10. When we serve others in the name of the Lord, we
 - a) spoil them and teach them bad principles.
 - b) communicate their importance to us and to God.
 - c) do not help them to become better people.

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ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. c (5.1)
2. a (5.2)
3. c (5.3)
4. b (5.3)
5. b (5.4)
6. c (5.5)
7. c (5.6)
8. a (5.7)
9. c (5.7)
10. b (5.7)

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LESSON 6

Making the Most of Your Time

Wouldn't it be nice if we had 36 hours in a day? Would 12 hours more a day be enough? I suppose we would never have enough hours in a day, no matter how many we had. We would surely just fill up the extra hours with things that would cause us to still come up short. People are constantly tired. Where does this apparent universal fatigue come from? It seems to come from the compulsive drive of modern life.

Furthermore, we live in the age of immediacy. Everything is designed to help fill our need for instant gratification. Sadly, much of what we spend our time doing will not really matter when we get to heaven. So we should assess what is important in light of eternity.

Time is a primary resource that cannot be recouped if wasted. Ecclesiastes 8:6 says, "There is a proper time and procedure for every matter." The problem is not enough time but how we use that time. According to Paul good time management is a mark of wisdom (Ephesians 5:15–16) and an act of good stewardship (2 Corinthians 4:2). Moses, also, teaches us in Psalm 90:12 that better management of time can be learned.

I believe that prayer is the most important time management tool we have at our disposal. Beginning each day with prayer can help us to use our time wisely. We simply need to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us through our day. In addition, skills and habits can be developed that will make us better stewards of time. So let us journey together in this chapter and make some changes in our lives regarding the precious commodity of time.

LESSON OUTLINE

The Value of Time
 Time Management
 Understanding Time
 Regaining Lost Time?

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1: *Discuss the brevity and value of time.*
- 2: *Discuss ways to manage time better.*
- 3: *Identify three principles that influence our understanding of time.*
- 4: *Show ways to catch up on lost time.*

The Value of Time

Objective 1:

Discuss the brevity and value of time.

God expects us to be good stewards of time. While some people have mistakenly interpreted this to mean that God demands perpetual busyness, God encourages us to be wise in our use of time. Colossians 4:5 tells us to redeem our time from unprofitable activities. In Ephesians 5:15, Paul advises us to look carefully at how we walk and to make the most of our time.

The apostle Paul sometimes followed a routine, such as visiting the synagogue on the first day of each week (Acts 17:2). At other times he was flexible. For instance, in Paul's traveling times we see sudden changes in plans depending on external conditions, personal anxiety, reception to his ministry, and even God's direction. Paul chose not to do certain things if he recognized that he did not have the emotional energy to cope with the

challenge (2 Corinthians 2:12–13). Thus, at times, he bypassed fields of ministry (Acts 16:6–9).

This does not mean that Paul was lazy and did not work hard for the Kingdom (Acts 20:31; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8). Do not read into these passages that Paul is telling us to fill our lives with busyness. Remember that in such passages, Paul is counterbalancing those who are doing too little for God.

In his later years, Moses wrote that the years of a person's life pass quickly (Psalm 90:10). For forty years the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness with no specific destination in sight. Many of us experience the same time dilemma, wandering in our routines and overbooked schedules. But life on this planet is shorter than we think. Therefore, Moses urges us to number our days so that we may gain wisdom (Psalm 90:12). Understanding the brevity of life here on earth compels us to place value on the limited time we do have. God wants to teach us how to be prudent about our use of time.

Everything that means anything has its correct season and timing (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8). We simply cannot do all that we desire to do. We must choose. We must make the most of our short time here on earth. Time here on earth is given to us to prepare for eternity. This life and this earth can never satisfy our deepest longings, because God has set eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We are conditioned to long for more than this world has to offer.

Paul encourages us to live worthy of the calling we have received and to be imitators of God (Ephesians 4–5). Each day is a microcosm of our life, and there are things that happen beyond our control. How will we respond to the unexpected, the urgent? Time is priceless. You cannot get it back once it is used.

King David accomplished a lot in his lifetime. His secret is revealed in Psalm 39:4–5: “Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. . . . the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath.” David understood the brevity of life and the importance of the use of time.

God moves with purpose in directing humanity toward His ultimate will. He expects His followers to live with the same intentionality, properly managing the time given to us. We cannot be content to simply survive when there are so many important opportunities to serve God's purposes.

Time Management

Objective 2:

Discuss ways to manage time better.

Much of life consists of routines and values. Routines provide order and consistency. Our routines are often in alignment with our values and priorities. Routines should work to help us meet our goals. And to meet goals we need a timeline.

Time management problems occur when our routines do not match our values. The friction begins as we add to our lives things that God does not want us to be doing. Hebrews 12:1 teaches us to throw off everything that hinders or entangles us in the race God has marked out for us. Therefore, do not be afraid to cut less important things from your life. Start with the goal and outline the steps needed to accomplish that goal. Use a checklist. Break your timeline down into the individual actions needed. And schedule your day so that you have the allotted time needed for each specific project.

Managing time is like managing money. You have to keep track of time, budget time, and invest time so that it brings a return. Time can be spent, saved, invested, or wasted. You would be wise to identify areas where you are wasting it (examples: too much time watching television, too many hours on the internet, sleeping when you should be active, too much time chatting on the phone, etc.) Then reinvest your time in areas of greater priority. Remember, lost time can never be recuperated.

Finding More Time

Here are three easy steps to finding more disposable time:

Take Inventory

The apostle Paul advises the church in Ephesus to pay close attention to how they live (Ephesians 5:15). We all have 168 hours in our week. How are you spending your time? What are the time robbers in your life? Be aware that although many things we do are not necessarily wrong, they also may not be constructive. We must eliminate those time wasters.

Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." One way to add time to your life is get up 30 minutes earlier or stay up 30 minutes later than usual. That will add 7.5 days to your year!

Live in the Present

Make the most of every opportunity. Take advantage of today, for tomorrow is not promised to anyone. Be alert to the daily possibilities. Use your prime time to do your priority items with no interruptions. Use your medium effective time to multi-task with lower priority things. Use your lower effective times to unwind, rest, and get away. Try to unclutter your life. Physical clutter occupies your vision in a negative way. Mental clutter distracts your mind. Emotional clutter drains your spirit. Make each day count for eternity, and live each day to the full.

Prioritize

Find out what God's will is and then do it. Priorities help us in achieving our number one goal: pleasing God. We always have enough time to do God's will. It is when we get overextended in other things that we feel the time squeeze. So, what are your primary priorities? Ask yourself, "What would happen if this were not done at all? Which of my activities could be done by someone else? What seems to be a waste of my time?" The conclusions to these questions may mean stopping some activities or delegating activities to others. Cut back the unproductive demands on your time and move that newly found discretionary time in alignment with God's greater priorities for your life.

This does not mean every waking moment needs to be filled with intensive activity. We need time to rest, relax, and play. The pressures of this world clamor for our attention and starve our souls, and we lose sight of the things that matter most. Our focus shifts to those things that pass away, and our value system becomes compromised. What matters is not how long we live but how we live.

What order of things do you use to prioritize your activities? Here is a priority list I recommend: 1) your ongoing relationship with God and your spiritual growth; 2) your relationship with spouse and family; 3) personal ministry; 4) vocation/work; 5) health/fitness/recreation; 6) friendships. God does not want us to be governed by external pressures. He wants us to align with His priorities. Life makes sense when we streamline and order ourselves around God's priorities for our personal lives. Perhaps you sense the need to re-order your priorities.

If you do not seem to have enough time to get everything done, it means one of the following: 1) You are doing something God never intended, 2) You are not doing what God intended, or 3) You are doing the right thing but in the wrong way. The fact is that you do have enough time to do God's will for your life. After all, God would not have a will for your life and then not give you the time to get it done. If Satan can trick us into making bad use of our time, he will minimize our effectiveness for God.

Once you have determined your priorities, you can develop a master weekly schedule based on those priorities. Then all new activities can be analyzed against that master calendar. God's priorities result in daily patterns.

Understanding Time

Objective 3:

Identify three principles that influence our understanding of time.

Even committed followers of Christ can feel overwhelmed and overextended. The root cause of our

being overextended is either flight from others, God, or ourselves, or our trying to impress God or others. Our busyness is either idolatrous self-absorption or an exercise in self-justification. We are trying to prove our existence is justified. But if we depend on our work to give us self-worth, what happens when we lose our job? Time management cannot save us from the tyranny of time. Consider the following basic principles about time.

The Importance of Becoming

As Christians, the most important thing is not about doing or even being but about becoming who God wants us to become. Our difficulties will not be dissolved simply by adding one set of actions in place of another. In becoming, we develop the gifts and character qualities that best fit us for God's purposes. This transformation process calls for commitment to live a less hurried and more purpose-driven life.

The Need for Clarity

Many of our time problems are due to a lack of clarity about our roles. We must become crystal clear about the path that God has mapped out for us. One of our greatest problems is in misunderstanding what God's will is for us. In so doing we add extra responsibilities to our time. We must learn to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you" (Matthew 6:33). God will grant us the clarity we need to accomplish His will.

Internal Rhythm

We each have natural internal rhythm. Some of us are morning people, some are evening people, and others work best in smaller time segments. We should evaluate ourselves to see what our individual rhythm is and adjust our expectations of what we can achieve during particular times of the day. No matter our rhythm, however, we all need to balance between having personal quiet time and strenuous people time. Like Jesus, we must retreat privately sometimes.

Regaining Lost Time?

Objective 4:

Show ways to catch up on lost time.

All of us discipline ourselves to do what we have to do or what we value most. We are probably better at time management than we give ourselves credit for. So how can we make our best even better? Time management is each individual's personal responsibility. Time is life, a gift from God and a gift to God. We cannot put time aside and use it later. But we can save time in order to gain the best use of time.

Set Priorities

Identify where and how you are losing or wasting time. What are you doing or not doing that keeps you from being most productive? Common time thieves include lack of planning, over commitment, paper shuffling, indecision, and hyper-independence. These usually occur in combination with one another. So start your adjustments. Plan first. Your objectives should help you reach your goals and priorities. Do not let the urgent overrule the most important.

Also, use the wastebasket. Act on the paper, file the paper, or throw away the paper. Organize your work area. Stack for function and file for retrieval. Do not procrastinate. In so doing, you can eliminate your time wasters.

Activate Your Priorities

Many people live by the Christopher Columbus system. When he left home, he did not know where he was going. When he got there, he did not know where he was. And when he returned home, he did not know where he had been. Use your priorities to chart your course. God will never be first in your life until He is first in your day. Plan, organize, and prioritize for each day. Use a daily "to-do-list." Planning your day will multiply your results. At the end of your day, update your plan for the next day. Move uncompleted tasks to the next

day, and list according to importance. Use a “this week” plan in which you list projects to be completed. Keep a calendar for the month and year. Plan out in detail each task you intend to accomplish that day. Focus on purposeful, fruitful living.

Value Your Uniqueness

As much as you can, make your schedule fit your unique personal strengths. Do the difficult and demanding task first, or when you are at your prime time. Focus on the essentials; reduce redundancies, eliminate unnecessary activities, and avoid demands that stretch you thin. Learn how to say no kindly.

If you are unable to master a major conflict in your life, leave it and move on. You are not superhuman. You cannot master everything. Even Jesus was hindered in what He could do and had to move on at times (see Matthew 13:58). Surely, you are not greater than Jesus! So move on without taking on feelings of guilt or failure. Be more flexible; flexibility reduces the likelihood of frustration.

Execute your game plan. Being effective means doing the right things and doing things right. Time management principles must still be applied in the context of our unique qualities, background, personality, and schedule. Make the decision where and how you need to improve. Slow down if necessary. Hurriedness is a human characteristic caused by inadequate planning and poor time management. Hurrying only increases the wear and tear on us. Develop a plan through prayer, and fine tune your plan along the way. Learn from your successes and failures. Even though you may have fallen behind, you can still catch up.

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *According to this lesson, the most important time management tool is*
 - a) *the calendar.*
 - b) *prayer.*
 - c) *the clock.*
2. *We are given time here on earth to*
 - a) *live fully and carelessly.*
 - b) *prepare for eternity.*
 - c) *condemn ourselves to more sin.*
3. *Which is a true statement about time?*
 - a) *Time cannot be retrieved once it is used.*
 - b) *Time has no value.*
 - c) *It is impossible to manage our time.*
4. *Priorities help us to achieve our primary goal, which is to*
 - a) *satisfy ourselves only.*
 - b) *please God.*
 - c) *please other people and ignore our own needs.*
5. *Our routines need to be in alignment with our values and*
 - a) *priorities.*
 - b) *people skills.*
 - c) *purses.*
6. *Time can be spent, saved, invested, or*
 - a) *heightened.*
 - b) *enjoyed.*
 - c) *wasted.*
7. *To say that each of us has an internal rhythm suggests*
 - a) *we all like the same type of music.*
 - b) *we are all morning people.*
 - c) *each of us functions best at a particular time and in a particular way.*

8. *Who is responsible for managing our time?*
 - a) *It is God's job to manage our time because He made us.*
 - b) *Our family is responsible for our time management.*
 - c) *We are responsible for our management of time.*
9. *Which of the following is not a common thief of time?*
 - a) *Planned moments devoted to prayer*
 - b) *Lack of planning*
 - c) *Indecision*
10. *Hurriedness is caused by*
 - a) *adequate planning.*
 - b) *poor time management.*
 - c) *new technology.*

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Printout and mail a copy of your self test pages to the regional HBMM National Leadership Team member for your region.

Their contact information is located on the "Contact Leadership Team" page on our website: <http://HBMM-National.org>

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. b (6.1)
2. b (6.1)
3. a (6.1)
4. b (6.2)
5. a (6.2)
6. c (6.2)
7. c (6.3)
8. c (6.4)
9. a (6.4)
10. b (6.4)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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LESSON 7

Your Abilities and Talents

In the ancient Jewish culture, parents had a responsibility to help their children discover their gifts, talents, and skills so they could succeed. The Hebrew Talmud supports this responsibility of the parent: "He who does not teach his son a trade is as if he teaches him robbery" (Tosefta Qiddushin 1:11).

Today, there may be fewer instances of parents imparting skills to their children. More common is the idea that people possess natural gifts that are obvious and that lead to a fulfilling career. For example, a young man or woman who understands mathematics and finances may choose a profession in banking or accounting. Others work well with their hands and go into building trades. Some with a knack for understanding the details of past events become historians. A fascination with science and analysis could lead a person into the medical field.

However, many individuals are unsure about their gifts and how to apply them. What are your best talents and skills? Are you currently working in an area of your strength? Or, do you feel frustrated because your abilities go unused or unrewarded? Do you have a plan to discover your best gifts? Where do you go from here? One of the greatest tragedies is wasted talent.

In his book, *Beggar to King*, Walter Duckat researches the primary trades of biblical characters. Under the trades beginning with the letter "C", Duckat lists the following: calker, camel driver, candy-maker, captain, caravan chief, carpenter, carpet-maker, cattleman, census taker, charioteer, cheese maker, choirmaster, chorister, circumciser, clothier, cook, coppersmith, counselor, counterfeiter, cupbearer, custodian and customs clerk" (Duckat 1968, 35). It seems there was something for everyone to do. What about you?

Do you know what God wants you to do? Have you made a clear assessment of your talents, gifts, and skills? You need to find out what gifts God has given you and use them to glorify Him. This assignment may not be easy. But be encouraged! God is your help and sustainer (Psalm 54:4).

By looking into the Scriptures and events of life, we will assist you in making personal discoveries that will strengthen you. Here is a noteworthy observation—while the Lord often uses our strengths, we should not limit ourselves to think that God uses only our strengths. God may use whatever ability we have. Our weaknesses may be the tools He uses for His glory. Therefore, be aware of all your talents and abilities, even the ones you are not very excited about. God's grace is sufficient, and His power is perfected in our weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9).

LESSON OUTLINE

Biblical Teaching on Human Gifts and Abilities
 Jesus' Teaching on Human Gifts and Abilities
 Practical Differences in Human Abilities
 Biblical Purpose of Gifts and Abilities
 Identifying Your Personal Gifts and Abilities

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Identify fundamental truths about God-given gifts and abilities.*
2. *Examine the Parable of the Talents.*
3. *Describe the difference between God-given or inherited skills and the talents we develop through personal improvement.*
4. *Explain what the ultimate purpose is for our talents and gifts.*
5. *Indicate the talents and gifts God has given you.*

Biblical Teaching on Human Gifts and Abilities

Objective 1:

*Identify fundamental truths
about God-given gifts and abilities.*

God is a giver. He gives us life and breath and provides for our physical and spiritual needs. Certainly, the greatest gift God ever gave to humankind was His Son, Jesus Christ. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus opened the door for us to be saved and enjoy eternal life. Even if we never receive anything else from God besides salvation, that would be enough. But the fact is that God has given us even more gifts beyond salvation. Let us review a number of key biblical truths about the gifts and abilities that God has given to us.

God is the Source

James wrote, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). James actually speaks twice of God's giving to make a clear point to his readers. The first time refers to the act of giving; the second instance refers to what is given. The NRSV Bible conveys this idea well: "Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." God is the source of any ability we possess.

God Creates Opportunities to Use Your Talents

Generally speaking, people who have something good to offer find doors opening to them. "Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men" (Proverbs 22:29). Whatever gifts and abilities the Lord has given you can provide ever-increasing opportunities for you to use them. God's gifts will be recognized and honored both inside and outside of the church. This advances His kingdom.

God Omits No One

The apostle Paul reminds us that “each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that” (1 Corinthians 7:7). God has not omitted any member of His family. Now, this verse refers specifically to gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is evident that God wants all believers to operate in the gifts of the Spirit. More detailed information on this topic is found in lesson 20 of this course. However, it is safe to say that every believer also has abilities and talents that are God-given.

Talents and skills we may have already discovered before knowing Christ take on new meaning and purpose after we are saved. As we realize what we can do for God with our talents, we rejoice in the completeness we feel in Christ. In fact, the assets of God are at your disposal. If you are lacking anything, God can provide it through Christ “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). The psalmist wrote, “Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing” (Psalm 34:10).

Humility

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (James 4:10). Humility is a prerequisite before God can use us to our greatest extent. We should not be inappropriately proud and forget God, who is the giver of gifts, talents, and abilities.

Purity

God uses clean vessels, and conversion is where it all starts. Our sins are forgiven as we trust in Christ. Then, as we mature in the knowledge of God, we develop a passion for purity and holiness. This is not to say that unsaved people do not have gifts, talents, and skills. Indeed, many do, but unbelievers cannot achieve their fullest potential because they are disconnected from God. Though the world may acclaim them, they will not taste of God's best. They receive their rewards here. None await them after death. Notice carefully what Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves

break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'" (Matthew 6:19–21). As a child of God, be self-disciplined. Live a life worthy of God. Be holy.

Accountability

Christians are not only God's children but also God's servants. The resources God gives are intended to serve specific purposes that will advance the kingdom of God. Our gifts are not to be forgotten, hidden away, or misused. Believers are required to use God's gifts properly and responsibly. In the next section, we will study the Parable of the Talents and learn more about our accountability to God.

Jesus' Teaching on Human Gifts and Abilities

Objective 2:

Examine the Parable of the Talents.

Read the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14–30. Jesus taught many truths about the kingdom of God through parables, which were short stories that compare something familiar to something not so familiar. In this parable, a wealthy man prepares to go on a journey. Before departing, he entrusts his wealth in varying amounts to the care of three servants. A talent represented an enormous amount of money in biblical times.

In the same way, the Lord has entrusted to each of us certain gifts and abilities. Just like in the parable, the Lord expects us to put these things to work for Him until He returns. Have you ever taken time to do a thorough inventory of the many wonderful things God has given to you? You might be surprised if you will be honest, think hard, and list all the ones that come to mind.

We have some giftings and abilities that come to us due to genetics—musical or artistic ability, intelligence, appearance, aptitudes, etc. Other things come through

God's favor and His guiding of our lives coupled with our diligence—skills, wealth, and position. Other things entrusted to us are of a more spiritual nature such as a special gifting, call, or enabling. You may want to consider spiritual gifts in this case. All these things mentioned are part of what God entrusts to us.

Since all of us are different and God knows what is best for us and His kingdom, it is most logical to assume that God gives to people in a way that best suits their personality, location, opportunities, tastes, and temperament. While we may balk or complain that God is unfair in giving more to some than to others, we must trust that God knows what He is doing. Perhaps before we make the claim that God is unfair, it might be good for us to see whether we are fully using the talents, giftings, and abilities He has already entrusted to us. In the parable Jesus states that the man going on a journey gave to His servants "each according to his ability" (Matthew 25:15). So, never complain because of your uniqueness and giftings. Remain humble and useful for the Master.

We should also bear in mind the sober reality that one day all true Christians will have to give an account of their lives. We will have to explain how we have used the "talents" entrusted to us. It is clear that the Lord is looking for a return on His investment, and you can be sure that God keeps good records. There will be generous rewards for the diligent beyond anything we can remotely imagine. Our Lord will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness" (Matthew 25:21).

Finally, this parable teaches us that God will not only reward faithfulness and diligence in using what He entrusts to us, but it also reveals He will judge those who do nothing with their talents, gifts, and abilities. The servant who did nothing with his master's goods showed poor judgment. His excuse was that he feared his master, knowing him to be a hard man. In other words, the servant figured he would be better off to

return the talent intact than invest it and potentially suffer loss. Whatever the reason, the servant was wrong to not do something for his master and wound up banned from his master's presence. There is an old expression that says: "Use it or lose it." Here is an example of that. So, make your life count. Use every talent, gift, and ability for God's glory and the advancement of His kingdom. You will never regret it.

Practical Differences in Human Abilities

Objective 3:

*Describe the difference
between God-given or inherited skills and
the talents we develop through personal improvement.*

Most people would agree that there are at least four needs basic to human growth: the need to be loved and to love; the need for security and trust; the need for acceptance and forgiveness; and the need to achieve and to serve. To understand the difference between God-given talents and developed abilities, the following illustration comes to mind: Place a goose in a pond. Even if it was raised in a controlled environment where no ponds were available and has no "pond" experience, the goose will quickly be at home in its new environment. In a matter of minutes it will happily be doing what geese do to make life suitable for them. That is because geese are designed for the pond environment they inhabit. God has given them the abilities and understanding necessary for their existence.

Unlike geese and others of the animal kingdom, humans are created by God to be uniquely individual. We are even considerably different from the other people around us, not only in personality, temperament and interests but also in our God-given or inherited talents. For instance, two people can grow up in the same home with the same parents, yet be clearly different in gifts, talents, and skills. Each of us has already been provided a God-ordained combination of personal attributes. No one else has the combination of qualities we possess.

Here is how the psalmist David explained it:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! (Psalm 139:13–17)

Each person has natural inclinations and abilities to do particular things. Many people can even do things that no one has ever taught them to do. These natural gifts are blessings from our Supreme Maker. But simply having talent is not enough. We must enhance these God-given abilities for His glory. Solomon wrote, "Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth" (Proverbs 10:4). As the apostle Paul entreated believers to be diligent in their lifestyles, he cautioned, "We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised" (Hebrews 6:12). In other words, Christians should not just wait for things to happen for them; they need to use their God-given abilities to advance the Kingdom.

Humans have also been given intelligence and aptitude to develop their abilities. It has been said that there are three areas a Christian needs to develop to be successful: character, communication, and competence. Each of these facets needs continual attention.

1. To develop godly character, we need the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit daily. If you have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit, with the initial physical evidence of speaking in tongues, you are missing a key ingredient in building and sustaining a Christlike character.

2. Communication strength is based on one's knowledge of a subject and one's inclusion of others in the subject. Communication is the exchange of information, ideas, and feelings. This can be oral, written, and sensed. Most people have to work hard at communicating effectively.
3. Competence suggests mastering God-given abilities, even to the point of excellence. Education, practice, and experience help to develop God-given gifts to their optimum. Sometimes, naturally talented individuals become content with their gifts. However, the Lord may require more from them. Most people can tell the difference between naturally talented singers and trained vocalists. Those who wish to excel in their gifts submit to the rigors of discipline.

Furthermore, even though you may not be naturally gifted in certain area, often you can develop great proficiency and even expertise in areas with determination and desire. Has the Lord put this need on your heart? Step out and try it! Do your best for Jesus. Let us not be satisfied with a little. God wants to do much through us.

Biblical Purpose of Gifts and Abilities

Objective 4:

Explain what the ultimate purpose is for our talents and gifts.

Why has God invested so much in us? What did God have in mind when He gave us those unique talents, gifts, and skills? The Bible is clear that humans were created to glorify God. The author of Hebrews wrote this powerful truth: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Hebrews 13:20–21).

God created humans to live in relationship with Him. In the Ten Commandments, God gave specific instructions for establishing and maintaining this relationship (see Exodus 20:1–17). Take some time right now to read the Ten Commandments. As you read through them, keep in mind that you have been created to worship God. The gifts, talents, and skills you possess have a definite purpose: God's priorities. If God says something is important, you stop your activities and focus on His priorities. This is an important way to serve God.

A servant in the New Testament was "a male or female person who is under obligation to render obedience to a master" (Eerdmans 1987, 927). The most common Greek word for a slave is *doulos*. The slave owned nothing. Everything, including his or her talents and skills, belonged to the master. This dynamic between slave or servant and master is in some ways indicative of the believer's relationship with God.

Many of the great Bible characters were called servants or slaves for God. Moses is often called the "servant of God" (1 Chronicles 6:49; Nehemiah 10:29; Daniel 9:11), and his life was a testimony for the Lord. The apostle Paul also was "a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness" (Titus 1:1). James started his epistle with the words, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1).

All we have is for God's honor and glory. Paul wrote, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). We are not all alike, but we are all called to the same purpose. "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:4–7). Whatever

your gifts, give them to God. Make His priorities your priorities.

Identifying Your Personal Gifts and Abilities

Objective 5:

Indicate the talents and gifts God has given you.

In this section, we will help you identify the specific gifts, talents, and skills that God has given to you. Some of these gifts are inherited or God-given at birth. Others may be acquired with maturity, in spiritual experiences, or by dedicated personal development. The gifts of the Spirit, as discussed in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, are given to Spirit-filled believers who sincerely seek for them. Paul wrote, "Eagerly desire the greater gifts" (1 Corinthians 12:31). Take time to study the Word, and pray with intensity that the Lord will bless you with these precious gifts of the Spirit. Below are a few of the gifts for you to consider prayerfully:

Gifts	Scripture Reference
Gifts of the Spirit	1 Corinthians 12 and 14
Various gifts	Romans 12:3–8
Various gifts	Ephesians 4:11–16
Administration	1 Corinthians 12:28
Artistry	Exodus 31:1–11
Witnessing	Acts 2:36–40
Giving	2 Corinthians 9:6–15
Hospitality	Luke 10:38
Music	Psalms 96:1–9; 1 Samuel 16:14–23
Service	Philippians 2:19–23
Skilled craftsmanship	Exodus 30:1–6

So how can you discover your own personal gifts? Here is a suggested plan to follow:

- Begin by spending time in prayer and fasting before the Lord in order to acquire the mind of the Lord in your deliberations (Isaiah 58:6–8; Daniel 10:3; Matthew 6:16–18).
- Study the above list of biblical gifts (read the biblical references), and identify the gifts that best describe your present interests and skills.
- Prayerfully prioritize them in a manner where the most obvious gifts are listed as number one and then on down the priority scale.
- Show your findings to your spouse, close Christian friend, or pastor. Let them pray, comment, and add their observations.

Also, there are professional personality tests available through Christian counselors that may help you discover your talents, gifts, and skills. Never discount the fact that our all-powerful Lord can use anybody and anything to teach us. James affirms, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). Our mission is to pursue the good and perfect gifts God has for us. Are you willing to dedicate all to Jesus? Are you committed to place all you possess in the hands of the Father? If so, you can expect the blessing of God.

Suggested Scripture Verses to Memorize

Psalms 139:14

Matthew 6:21

Matthew 25:21

2 Corinthians 12:9

Colossians 2:3

James 1:7

James 4:10

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. Does God use our strengths or our weaknesses?
 - a) God primarily uses our strengths because He cannot tolerate our weaknesses.
 - b) God uses our weaknesses only.
 - c) God uses both our strengths and weaknesses.
2. The believer's gifts are intended to
 - a) advance God's kingdom.
 - b) make them rich.
 - c) be hidden.
3. The greatest gift God has given humanity is
 - a) the ability to read.
 - b) His only Son Jesus Christ.
 - c) the beauty of the earth.
4. Does everyone have a gift from God?
 - a) God has given everyone some gift to glorify Him.
 - b) Only preferred people have gifts from God.
 - c) We will never know for sure.
5. One truth the Parable of the Talents teaches is that
 - a) we are our own bosses.
 - b) God expects us to use what He has given us.
 - c) God understands our fear and will excuse us.
6. Jesus taught by using parables, which are
 - a) short stories.
 - b) miracles.
 - c) long, dreary sermons.
7. Which is not a basic necessity for human development?
 - a) The need for acceptance
 - b) The need to love and be loved
 - c) The need to eat three meals per day

8. In Scripture, who is not referred to as a "servant of God"?
 - a) Moses
 - b) Judas Iscariot
 - c) James
9. The Bible indicates that
 - a) all people are basically the same in talents and disposition.
 - b) humans and animals have similar gifts and skills.
 - c) each person is unique and matchless in creation.
10. The first step towards discovering your God-given talent is to
 - a) attend a Gifts seminar at a local church or university.
 - b) pray and fast for God's desire in this area of your life.
 - c) visit a local psychologist and complete a series of personality tests.

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ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. *c* (7.1)
2. *a* (7.1)
3. *b* (7.1)
4. *a* (7.1)
5. *b* (7.2)
6. *a* (7.2)
7. *c* (7.3)
8. *b* (7.4)
9. *c* (7.4)
10. *b* (7.5)

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LESSON 8

Developing Leadership Ability

God develops people. Those three words sum up the biblical perspective of leadership development. As a Christian matures spiritually, God can increase the influence that person has on others. God has a definite plan for your life, and it includes helping others and serving as a leader in the body of Christ.

To serve as a leader does not mean you have to be a pastor of a church or a missionary living overseas. The Lord has many ways that He can use you in leadership. This lesson will help you learn skills and practices of leadership that will result in a healthy life and fruitful ministry. We will consider the life of Jesus Christ as the foundation for a life of leadership.

LESSON OUTLINE

The Leader Defined
 Character of a Leader
 The Biblical Principle of Servant Leadership
 Snapshots of Biblical Leaders
 Identifying and Developing Leadership Gifts

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Describe the qualities of a leader.*
2. *Assess key aspects of your character.*
3. *Summarize the biblical principle of servant leadership.*
4. *Identify good and bad leaders portrayed in the Bible.*
5. *Discuss ways to develop your leadership gifts.*

The Leader Defined

Objective 1:

Describe the qualities of a leader.

What is a leader? What does a leader do? The most common understanding of leadership is influence. In that sense, everyone has the potential for influence and for leading. Effective leaders, however, live in connection or community with others, pouring themselves out for others.

This is in contrast to the traditional or hierarchical forms of leadership. A hierarchical leader asks: Who is following me? How can I show my superiority? Who will support me? Connective leaders ask: Where is our common ground? How can we help one another?

Where do our hopes and dreams intersect? How can we make more room around the table? How can we bridge the gap that has separated us? Connective leaders focus on what people have in common, not on what separates and divides them. Christ calls individuals to be influencers of those around them. Thus, He calls you to leadership.

Character of a Leader

Objective 2:

Assess key aspects of your character.

Excellent character is key to good leadership. Character is who you are when no one is looking. Character is not the same as reputation. Reputation is what others think of you, character is what God knows you are. Character is not the same as success or achievement. It is not what you have done, but who you are. Jesus Christ will develop His character in you as you follow Him. While all Christians should grow in character, those in leadership must exhibit exceptional character. Skills can be learned but character is what you are in your heart. A leader's character is what prevents him or her from grabbing for power, prestige, publicity, or other perks. These temptations, left unchecked, can bring about a leader's downfall.

The teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5, commonly known as the Beatitudes, outlines seven characteristics that distinguish a leader.

- Great leaders display an attitude of humility (v. 3). If you are humble as a leader, others will observe that you are teachable. You will be submissive enough to consult others in the organization when you may not have all the answers. Furthermore, you will not center attention on your own accomplishments.

- Leaders demonstrate a genuine concern for others (v. 4). Those who guide an organization value all people in the group by showing interest in each individual's personal or family issues. The leader is genuinely interested in each individual and shows care and concern for others by encouraging them.
- An effective leader has power under control (v. 5). Rather than condemning and crucifying others in a fit of rage, a charitable leader curbs his or her anger. This leader's behavior is controlled, consistent and predictable. He or she looks for solutions to problems rather than blames others.
- Leaders seek not only their good but also what is right and good for the organization (v. 6). Such leaders work towards the organization's benefit, not just their own. This does not mean a leader cannot accept recognition for his or her efforts. It does mean the leader should always turn the focus back on the entire group and other team members.
- A skillful leader shows mercy (v. 7) to all people. When your team members fail, support and additional training should be offered to help them become productive once again.
- Able leaders concentrate on the purpose of the organization (v. 8). Are you determined to do what is best for the team? Are you passing on Christlike values and commitments to followers? Do team members willingly sacrifice time and energy to accomplish the mission of the organization?
- Positive leaders create an environment of peace (v. 9). Peace is not the absence of conflict but the successful resolution of conflict. When a team is characterized by battles, competition, jealousy, rivalries, dissension, and factions, the energy of

team members is wasted. People are not able to focus on accomplishing the mission.

The Biblical Principle of Servant Leadership

Objective 3:

Summarize the biblical principle of servant leadership.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we pursue a style of leadership different from that of the world—we seek to be servant leaders. Great leaders are servants first. Christ said that if anyone would be great, he must serve. Read what He told His disciples in Mark 10:42–45,

“You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

From a biblical perspective, greatness does not come through the exercise of power, position, or prestige. Instead, it comes through service to God and people. Servant leaders put people ahead of systems, goals, and objectives. They follow the example of Christ. Though the terms *servant* and *leadership* appear contradictory together, humility and sacrifice are the way to greatness in God’s kingdom. Leading from the position of service is true spiritual leadership.

Servant leadership is not weak, easy, or natural. Servant leaders possess the inner strength of character, marked by integrity and humility. They are confident as they rely on God’s guidance and power. They walk in faith. Because they care about the members of the team they lead, they seek input

from them and share decision-making power with them. They courageously and lovingly hold team members accountable. They inspire, motivate, and persuade members to accomplish the mission of the organization through commitment, dedication, discipline, and excellence.

Profile of a Servant Leader

Servant leaders are communicators and listeners. They allow for two-way communication—listening more than telling (James 1:19). They are also prepared to give a gentle and respectful answer to anyone who asks a question (1 Peter 3:15). Not fearful or lacking in courage, they are willing to share their experiences.

Servant leaders are learners. They are devoted to discovering truth from Scripture through prayer (Acts 2:42). Feeding continually on the Word of God, such leaders are not afraid to admit that without Christ they can do nothing. They turn to God, being confident that He will supply the help they need.

Servant leaders are coaches. Servant leaders use positive reinforcement—encouragement, appreciation, and rewards. They are good coaches who do all they can to motivate others to develop their skills.

A servant leader is self-sacrificing. The servant leader is willing to lose his or her life for the cause of Christ. Successful leaders plant their lives in the lives of others. For example, the apostle Paul counted all things in his life as loss for the privilege of following Christ. So although the price seems too great, anything done for Christ is simply a privilege.

A servant leader accepts responsibility. Someone once told me that the way he identified potential leaders was to watch for those individuals who picked up the small piece of litter from the floor. A leader feels a strong sense of obligation to do what ordinary people would not do.

A servant leader is accountable. He or she gives others the right to respectfully question what he or she does. Moreover, there is consistency between what this leader says and what he or she does. The servant leader willingly admits his or her error.

A servant leader accepts the cost of loneliness. Often servant leaders face loneliness, isolation, and criticism as not everyone agrees with or supports them. Take Moses for instance. Moses stood alone as he led the Hebrews across the Red Sea. They praised him one day and blamed him the next.

It is easy to give your best when everyone is watching and cheering you on. It is hard to keep going when words of appreciation or encouragement are lacking. But remember this. God is with you and He is watching. The rewards of leadership are not always in this life.

Snapshots of Biblical Leaders

Objective 4:

Identify good and bad leaders portrayed in the Bible.

Good Examples of Leadership

- Abraham cared about people. He showed hospitality to strangers (Genesis 18). He pleaded with God to spare the evil city of Sodom. He found the courage to live a godly lifestyle different from the people (nations) around him (Genesis 12:8; 13:18). Leaders must summon the boldness to challenge tradition and do things differently if old ways are not effective.
- Joseph did not seek revenge for past injustices; he overlooked hurts from long ago (Genesis 50:19–21). An admirable leader is not concerned with retaliation over personal slights. He or she is more concerned with what is best for the church as a whole.

- Moses' strong sense of justice was matched by his humility. He was willing to intervene in the conflict of others (Exodus 2:11). When male shepherds drove away Jethro's daughters, Moses stood up for Jethro's daughters. He had no problem sharing power. He took the suggestion of his father-in-law Jethro by setting up a panel of seventy judges to share the responsibility of representing the people before God (Exodus 18). Moses was so secure in his position that he was not jealous of the seventy elders. A secure leader should have no fear of sharing power. He or she gives team members the authority they need to do their jobs and is not envious of their success.
- The actions of Boaz expressed his compassionate leadership. When he learned that Ruth, a poor Moabite foreigner, was gathering the leftover grain from his fields, he ordered his workers to purposely drop some grain so her needs would be met (Ruth 2:16). This act of compassion led to a marriage between Boaz and Ruth. And from their lineage eventually came Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:16). The kind deeds of a leader will bring immeasurable benefits to the organization.

Poor Examples of Leadership

- The Pharaoh in Exodus illustrates the need for leaders to be flexible. Apart from his paganism and his despising of the Hebrew slaves in his land, Pharaoh's major weakness as a leader was his unwillingness to change. Contrary to the advice of his advisors, it took ten destructive plagues to humble Pharaoh to the extent that he would finally allow the Hebrew slaves to leave Egypt (see Exodus 8–11). The lesson learned here is that an effective leader must be willing to modify his or her plan. Leaders cannot be

so stubborn and inflexible that they are not inclined to try new methods and approaches.

- The son of King Solomon, Rehoboam, was asked to give tax relief to the people (1 Kings 12). His older counselors advised him to take a gentle approach, reminding Rehoboam that the role of a leader is to serve the followers. However, his young friends suggested that he take a tough stance. Rehoboam followed the recommendation of his young friends and treated the people harshly. This resulted in civil unrest and the dividing of the kingdom of Israel into two nations. The leadership lesson to be learned from this story is obvious. Leaders should listen to wise counsel and avoid unnecessary harshness.

Identifying and Developing Leadership Gifts

Objective 5:

Discuss ways to develop your leadership gifts.

Everybody Has At Least One Gift

God has given us gifts and callings with which to serve Him and the body of Christ. Leaders should understand the purpose of their gifts. God's equipping is not given so you can achieve worldly success but rather so God can accomplish great things through you. Each of us has received at least one gift from God. Peter writes, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms (1 Peter 4:10). Remember, you did not earn or deserve your gifts and talents but have received them according to God's purpose and grace.

Determining Your God-given Gifts

How do you discover what gifts, call, and special capabilities have been given to you? Here are some recommendations:

- **First**, ask yourself what your likes and dislikes are. What are some things you enjoy doing and do well? What tasks are very hard or unpleasant for you? Many of God's giftings will be recognized initially as capabilities that you enjoy and excel in.
- **Second**, be willing to try new things. Do not limit how God can use you by placing conditions on where and how you will serve.
- **Third**, ask other mature Christians how they see God working in your life. Your pastor, Bible class leader, or friend may be able to see strengths and abilities in you when you cannot.
- **Fourth**, what are you passionate about? What occupies your thoughts most of the time? What do you love to talk about when it comes to serving God? When God gives you a gift, He also puts within you a strong inner drive to use it. For example, if you have the gift of teaching you probably want to teach. Presenting information and knowledge to others will give you great satisfaction. God has no desire to make you miserable in His service. He wants you to enjoy what you do for Him! David wrote in Psalm 37:4, "Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart." Most of the time, what you desire to do for the Lord is a very good clue of His will for your life.
- **Fifth**, get involved in your church and outreach ministry. Do not wait until you know for sure what your gifting is before you serve. Some people never do anything because they do not take initiative. It is much easier to steer a moving vehicle than a parked car. So, try your hand at

several things to see what fits. Later, you can specialize or settle on doing particular things.

- **Sixth**, once you have identified your gift or gifts, focus on intentionally using them. If you are right about your choice, you will probably experience immense satisfaction and fulfillment.
- **Seventh**, seek to improve the effectiveness of your ministry by improving your giftings and skills through additional training. You can do this by reading books, watching videos, taking courses, or learning from others who have the same gift.

New Testament References to God's Giftings

There are three main New Testament passages that list various gifts God gives to His people. While there may be other gifts that God may endow us with, these lists reveal gifts and abilities necessary for the accomplishing God's purpose and plans.

- Romans 12:6–8
 1. *Prophecy*—the proclamation of God's truth. This supernatural gift enables certain believers to speak with authority as they bring relevant pronouncements from the heart of God concerning situations, needs, problems, and challenges. Prophecy must agree with the revealed truth of God's written Word.
 2. *Serving*—meeting the needs of others
 3. *Teaching*—effectively sharing truth from God's Word, the Holy Bible
 4. *Encouraging*—building up others, motivating them to continue in the faith
 5. *Contributing to the needs of others*—giving to help others in need
 6. *Leadership*—the ability to exert influence and lead people

7. *Showing mercy*—demonstrating compassion and offering emotional and spiritual help to those experiencing difficult times
- 1 Corinthians 12:27–31
 1. *Apostles*—people gifted with a passion to win souls and plant churches among those who have not received an adequate witness. Miracles often accompany their ministry.
 2. *Prophets*—people who have been given supernatural ability to proclaim God's truth. They do not always predict the future, but they bring relevant pronouncements from the heart of God concerning situations, needs, problems, and challenges. A true prophet's message always lines up with the revealed truth of God's written Word.
 3. *Teachers*—people who have the God-given ability to make biblical truth clear so all can understand it
 4. *Workers of miracles*—people enabled to perform supernatural signs and wonders which confirm the proclamation of the Gospel
 5. *Those having gifts of healing*—people gifted by God to bring supernatural healing to others.
 6. *Those able to help others*—people who feel a burden to assist others in difficult situations and find ways to help meet their needs
 7. *Those with gifts of administration*—people who are gifted to organize and manage the many details of doing God's work. This might include managing people, finances, and/or material.
 8. *Those speaking in different kinds of tongues*—people who use the gift of tongues for worship, intercession, or bringing a message (when interpreted) to the body of Christ.

- Ephesians 4:11–13
 1. *Apostles*—see definition above
 2. *Prophets*—see definition above
 3. *Evangelists*—people who are called and gifted with special ability to proclaim salvation to the lost and win them to Christ
 4. *Pastors*—people who are called and enabled to lead churches, preach the Word, and protect the flock of God
 5. *Teachers*—see definition above

As you can see, there is some overlapping in the lists. The main point in this section is that you should seek to know how God has gifted you, so you will be able to use your gift with confidence. When you serve with the assurance of whom God created you to be, you will be neither afraid to assume leadership nor will you be jealous of the positions of others. As you function in harmony with others, God will bless your endeavors.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE

Psalm 37:4

Mark 10:43–44

1 Peter 3:15

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *The essential first step to becoming a leader in Christ's kingdom is to*
 - a) *ambitiously desire to be a leader.*
 - b) *be a faithful follower of Christ.*
 - c) *learn the skills of leadership.*
2. *The most common definition of leadership is*
 - a) *partnering.*
 - b) *hierarchy.*
 - c) *influence.*
3. *An effective leader is one who*
 - a) *directs and commands others.*
 - b) *learns to bring his or her power and authority under control.*
 - c) *is more concerned about success rather than character.*
4. *Which of the following statements is false?*
 - a) *Skillful leaders will not have any conflict in their organizations.*
 - b) *A true leader shares the credit with others.*
 - c) *Servant leaders show genuine concern for others.*
5. *Jesus said that those who desire to be leaders should first be*
 - a) *servants.*
 - b) *smart.*
 - c) *organized.*
6. *A biblical servant leader who experienced loneliness was*
 - a) *Pharaoh.*
 - b) *Judas Iscariot.*
 - c) *Moses.*
7. *Which of the following is not a skill belonging to a servant leader?*
 - a) *Learner*
 - b) *Tyrant*
 - c) *Communicator*

8. *In the Bible, Pharaoh's leadership illustrates the need for leaders to be*
 - a) *flexible.*
 - b) *humble.*
 - c) *hospitable.*
9. *According to Romans 12, we all have*
 - a) *the same gifts and abilities.*
 - b) *the ability to teach.*
 - c) *different gifts.*
10. *A helpful clue in determining your gift is knowing what*
 - a) *you enjoy doing.*
 - b) *requires the most effort.*
 - c) *brings you the most praise from others.*

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ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. *b* (8.1)
2. *c* (8.1)
3. *b* (8.2)
4. *a* (8.2)
5. *a* (8.3)
6. *c* (8.3)
7. *b* (8.3)
8. *a* (8.4)
9. *c* (8.5)
10. *a* (8.5)

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LESSON 9

The Importance of Teamwork

Andrew Carnegie said, “Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. It is the fuel that allows common people to obtain uncommon results” (Ventura and Templin 2005, 1). Teamwork is a good thing. The local church needs to stress the importance of building teams of Spirit-infused and ministry-gifted people to serve God and people. The results of a team always transcend the outcome of any individual from that same team. It is said that geese can fly 72 percent farther when they fly in formation rather than alone. Together, everyone achieves more!

The Bible is full of examples of teamwork. God gave Moses the vision to build the tabernacle, but Moses did not do it by himself. God gave him a man named Bezalel, who had the “skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts” (Exodus 35:31). God also gave Ezra the dream to lead Israel into rebuilding their nation after the Babylonian captivity. Ezra did not do it alone. He gathered leaders from Israel to go with him (Ezra 7:28). And, of course, Jesus built one of the most famous teams of all—the twelve apostles—in order to change the world.

Many pastors today have shifted from the preacher-counselor role to the leader-trainer role. The outgrowth is the training and deploying of congregants to be key leaders in the local church. Some committed believers eventually become pastoral staff members as churches increasingly promote from within the congregation. In this lesson, we will focus on local church teamwork, but many of the truths we explore will help you in other areas such as work, family life, civic responsibilities, sports, and so on. Let us journey together in this chapter and learn the importance and practicality of working as a team.

LESSON OUTLINE

Biblical Examples of Teamwork
 Why Teamwork Is Important
 Things That Sabotage Teamwork
 Building Church Ministry Teams
 Teamwork Values

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1: Identify biblical examples of teamwork.*
- 2: Discuss the importance of teams.*
- 3: Explain why some people are not team players.*
- 4: Indicate characteristics of good teams.*
- 5: State Rick Warren's eight values of teamwork.*

Biblical Examples of Teamwork

Objective 1:

Identify biblical examples of teamwork.

The Bible teaches the value of community, unity, diversity, mutual trust, and interdependence of spiritual gifts. The phrase “one another” or “each other” (from the Greek *allēlōn*), which is used almost 100 times in the New Testament, often indicates that God wants us to work together, live in teams, and be the Body!

The Holy Trinity

As evangelicals we believe God to be a TRI-UNITY, three Persons wrapped in one. We call this the Holy Trinity. God himself has worked throughout history in a team of divinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have each complete unique purposes in creation and redemption. God created team. God is team!

Moses

Moses was an incredible leader, but he was reluctant at first and hampered by limitations. He needed a team, and God gave him Joshua, Aaron, and Caleb to share the load of leadership. Through his father-in-law, he became aware of his personal deficiencies and learned to divide his leadership responsibilities into manageable portions that were delegated to a team of gifted servants. That freed Moses to focus on directing his team and doing those things that only he could do. While solo leadership is limited to one's individual capacity, teamwork increases leadership capacity and the quality of life of those you lead.

Nehemiah

Nehemiah relied greatly on teams to restore the walls of Jerusalem. Gifted, skillful people were used to fulfill the vision of God. Nehemiah organized different teams for different purposes. The walls would never have been rebuilt had he tried to do it alone. It demanded a team.

Solomon

Solomon understood the wisdom of team ministry. In Ecclesiastes 4:9–12, he writes, “Two are better than one . . . a cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Teams are better and stronger than individual performances.

Jesus

Jesus modeled team ministry. Very few of Jesus' disciples seemed to be world-changing leaders. He called a group of uneducated, unknown persons who were willing to sacrifice all to be apprentices to Jesus. Though uneducated, these men were uniquely gifted, capable people who needed training and direction. Jesus' team was a humble group whose limitations forced them to work together toward a common vision. Jesus even sent seventy-two out in ministry teams (see Luke 10:1–24). He transferred this team model to His disciples, who would continue His vision and ministry after He was gone.

The Early Church

Had the early church depended upon some extremely gifted individual to replace Jesus, the church would have failed miserably. The disciples discovered that none of them had the complete package of gifts necessary to grow the early church. They did, however, understand that each had a role in the overall picture.

- In Acts 6:1–7 we read about the choosing of the seven for a new ministry to widows. As a result of recruiting and releasing teams in the early church the church grew exponentially, the Word of God spread quickly, more disciples were raised up, and many were called to the ministry.
- We see great examples of teamwork in the early church (see Acts 11:19–30). Paul and Barnabas worked as a team with the new church of Gentiles in Antioch.
- In Acts 12:12–17 teamwork is demonstrated in the believers' praying for Peter's release from prison.
- Paul and Barnabas were commissioned as a ministry team (see Acts 13:1–13). Along the way they built a team of others to work alongside them.
- Teams of leaders are consulted and sent out to Antioch (see Acts 15).
- In Acts 18:1–4, Aquila and Priscilla joined Paul's team in Corinth.

The Apostle Paul

In 1 Corinthians 3:7–10, Paul urges the Corinthians to work as a team. They had been bickering about which leader to follow, so Paul emphasized teamwork as foundational to growth. He was a church planter, Apollos was a nurturer and discipler, but God brought the results. Paul and Apollos were on the same team, God's team!

Paul was the ultimate team player! He partnered with Barnabas, John, Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen (Acts 13), Timothy, Judas, and Silas (Acts 15–16). He believed in the Ephesians 4:12 model of team ministry. He wrote about gift-

based ministry in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. God's plan has always been about using role players rather than superstars. When we work in concert with others, God orchestrates beautiful ministry that produces eternal results.

Why Teamwork Is Important

Objective 2:

Discuss the importance of teams.

Most Churches Are Small

Most churches around the world have under one hundred in attendance and cannot afford to hire a full-time staff of workers. They must look at building laity teams from volunteer help, and this is very good. I am convinced that the majority of ministry should be carried out by ordinary Christians who love God and are dedicated to serving Him. Individuals who reject the call to be team players hurt their local church and deny an important principle in the Word of God.

Pastors Are Not Called to Do It All

A leader succeeds only if his or her team or followers succeed. This is true in every area of life, including the church. Building teams of committed believers with complementary gifts will boost the impact of the local church. A wise pastor becomes a leader of a strong contingent of lay leaders who serve in their community.

The Local Church Benefits from Team Leadership

Following are several benefits to developing team leadership within the local church:

- Team approach is the biblical model.
- People get involved. Christ has given His church the leaders and workers necessary to accomplish the task of winning the lost and training the found. God takes great pleasure in His people serving together and attaining goals.

- A team environment is created. Jesus said, “If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand” (Mark 3:25). We are not here on earth solely for ourselves, but also for others. If you are there for others, then later on when you are in need, people will be there for you. It is the law of reciprocity! We reap what we sow.
- There is less stress for everyone. Ministry is hard work. It means sacrifice—giving of time, money, and other resources. The hardships of serving God are not eliminated completely by teamwork, but teamwork makes the work manageable.
- The results are multiplied. The group always outperforms the individual. The sum is greater than its parts. Our personal success is linked to one another’s success on the team.
- Greater creativity is fostered. There are many challenging issues churches must deal with, so God’s people must be problem-solvers. A team of believers tasked with the responsibility of meeting needs and impacting others’ lives can come up with a plethora of new ideas. Creative teams breed even greater creativity.
- Increased joy is produced. Joy increases as bonds of love and cooperation develop among people. Furthermore, participation in a successful team process can be a reward in itself. It is fun to do something effectively and, at the same time, serve and obey God.
- Greater individual and group potential is discovered. Believers will discover more about their gifts and talents when they link up with others to serve the Lord. Team-oriented ministry best deploys people’s gifts for maximum ministry effectiveness.
- Church growth occurs. Team ministry decentralizes the church and opens it to growth.
- Pastors appreciate great teamwork. When teams take the lead to serve God and minister to others,

the pastor is freed up to study, pray, and find fresh anointing for preaching and teaching. The pastor can dedicate himself or herself to training and mentoring lay leaders, promoting God-given vision for the local church, and equipping the people to fulfill their mission. In team-led churches, pastors enjoy their pastorates more, stay longer, and experience less burnout (Barna 2001, 74).

Things That Sabotage Teamwork

Objective 3:

Explain why some people are not team players.

Some people are not team players because of the following reasons:

Soloing is Easier

Getting a team on the same page takes time, persuasion, ownership, and energy. So rather than engaging in these time-consuming efforts, some people prefer to work alone. They think that soloing is more efficient.

Control Issues

It is easier to dictate than to rely on the wisdom and breadth of a group of leaders. But dictatorship results in stifled creativity.

Ego Needs

Teamwork diminishes the perceived value of the individual. The individual is no longer the center of attention. Individual egos are not stroked since the attention is spread out over a team.

Resistance to Change

Many people resist change within the local church. But effective team ministry involves doing things in new ways. Though it remains predictable, cozy, and comfortable, the old way may no longer be effective.

Ignorance

Many people in churches have never been trained to do team ministry, especially since some pastors never embrace the team approach. Such leaders have no idea how to make the change and are afraid.

Moral Failure

While all sin is failure to do God's will, some sins have more serious consequences. Sins of moral failure—adultery, fornication, homosexuality, uncontrolled gossip, disrespect for godly leadership, dishonesty, and embezzlement—immediately disqualify the individual from team leadership. Following the fallen leader's repentance and restoration, determination must be made as to when he or she can return to leading.

Few Models

Many people have never seen the team model used effectively. No wonder—the superstar model is easier, more natural, and more prevalent. Thankfully some businesses and churches are now aggressively promoting team leadership, but this thinking has not been widespread. New Christians may not understand that the church operates best as a network of committed teams, but mature believers can provide teaching and a credible example to follow.

Lack of Motivation

It is tough to admit that the things we have invested so much time and energy in are no longer effective. It calls into question the wisdom of our past decisions and the value of prior achievements. Many do not want to expend the energy it takes to learn how to do ministry in new ways. The upfront investment to build teams requires sacrifice from the leader.

No Vision

Some pastors do not believe their churches are going anywhere special. They have little or no vision for the future, thus they have no destination. Simply helping

the church to survive or exist in a holding pattern is unscriptural and requires no leadership whatsoever. Without vision the local church will die!

Local Church Culture

Culture is what gives meaning and context to experience. The local church structure must be able to facilitate teams. Since many churches are not team friendly, there has to be a transformation for the culture of the church to be healthy. In some churches, this innovation would require rethinking core values and practices.

Building Church Ministry Teams

Objective 4:

Indicate characteristics of good teams.

Are you already serving on a ministry team? This is where church involvement really starts. Many are content simply to come to Sunday services. They want to be fed and entertained but have little appetite for real ministry. I hope you have determined to get busy and make a difference. Following are many characteristics of good ministry teams:

Teams Should Be Kept Small

The best teams are small in number, consisting of people with complementary skills who are committed to the same purpose, goals, and approach. Each member contributes experience, skills, and viewpoints. This diversity fosters synergy, where the sum is greater than its individual parts. The group should not be too large, lest its effectiveness be compromised.

Teams Need Leaders

Successful teams are a collection of leaders who possess influence, character, and competencies. Influence must be used positively to motivate people to act. Character, as the well-known saying goes, is what you are when no one is looking. Leaders must be people

of integrity and fully committed to God. Competencies are the accumulation of skills, knowledge, and experience that allow individuals to lead others well.

Teams Need Complementary Gifts

The combination of various gifts allows teams to surge ahead. Do not look for similar aptitudes but for complementary aptitudes. Leadership aptitudes generally reflect the four primary personality quadrants: directive, influential, steady, and calculated (D.I.S.C.). Let me explain what this means in everyday terms.

Some leaders are more directing. They are catalysts who motivate people to get involved in the cause. Such leaders are natural decision makers. They do not shrink back from the tough calls.

Other leaders are more influential at team building. They love people but hate paperwork! They are good at mobilizing people around the vision through relationships. They are the life of the party, and their interpersonal skills are excellent. However, these leaders tend to be weak on details.

Then, there are steady managers who are operational or best at creating operating systems that facilitate ministry. These are the ministry managers, who maintain the status quo. Operational leaders create systems that make things run more smoothly. They tend to dislike and avoid conflict. These managers choose short-term fixes at the expense of long-term results.

Other leaders are more calculated and strategic in development. They love calculating detailed plans of action. These are the complex analysts who are very thorough and ask the hard questions. They take their time to arrive at decisions, are not afraid to create controversy, and are more loyal to the vision than to people.

One chronic mistake that churches make is teaming together leaders with the same aptitudes rather than complementary aptitudes. No single personality or leadership type is more necessary than the other. Yet, neither can be successful without the partnership of the others.

Teams work best when they comprise persons whose gifts contribute value while their deficiencies are compensated for by the strengths of other team members. Effective teams have multiple leaders with complementary aptitudes working together. You need all types on your team!

Teams Are Committed to Their Members

Team members must be committed to one another's growth and success. Members must demonstrate mutual respect and trust and must self-correct and monitor one another's progress toward the goal. Henry Ford said, "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success" (Straub 1998, 13). Therefore, for one to succeed, the whole team must succeed.

Teams Have Shared Vision

The corporate vision brings a team together and facilitates its passion to move forward. Proverbs 29:18 notes, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (KJV). Vision comes first from God and is intended to bring focus to us. God has a unique vision for your church and for each ministry within your church. It is our commitment to God's vision and our decision to bring it to pass that determines the health of the local church and the degree of influence that it has on the world. While cooperation gets teams moving together, it is the church's mission that gets them moving in the right direction.

Teams Share Values

Values are the standards that define what is right and worthwhile. Values relate to character and are non-negotiable. Every person and church acts in relationship with personal values, whether spoken or not. Values provide the behavioral parameters that limit what you may or may not do in the pursuit of your vision. Every church must clearly articulate its mission, vision, and values.

Teams Must Have Goals

A team without a goal is merely a social club. Goals focus the team on what is important. Effective ministry teams lean heavily on the Bible and prayer for guidance.

Team Members Are Mutually Accountable

Team members must evaluate their efforts and push one another to live up to their shared standards. Traditionally, in many churches, everyone answered to the senior pastor. This old model can be called one-on-one accountability. While the senior pastor is ultimately responsible for all that happens in the church, a better model for accountability is that all individual team members be accountable to the whole team. Performance is reviewed by the entire group, not just by one individual.

Trust and vulnerability keep us honest, focused, productive, and inspired to achieve. Excellence happens when performance standards are known and applied.

Sadly, in some church situations, there is little or no accountability required of teams and individual team members. In such cases, people assume that mediocrity is sufficient. However, most people will live up to the expectations placed upon them if they believe they will be held accountable for their respective performance. The level of community among team members is a telltale sign of their maturity and potential.

Teams Deal with Dysfunction and Conflict

We all make mistakes. Be sure to learn from them and make the needed corrections along the way. It is possible that team members slip into gossip, ministry sabotage, withholding important communication, or even more serious sin. Deal quickly, decisively, and graciously with such behavior that works against the team. Here are some conflict resolution tips to consider:

- Go straight to the source.
- Do not cast blame.
- Attack problems, not people.

- Listen to other people's concerns.
- Do not take it personally.
- Act swiftly.
- Believe the best of your team.
- Relieve stress from others. (Ventura and Templin 2005, 30–31)

Without trust, conflict can disable a team's progress towards its vision. But conflict can be resolved in different ways. For instance, bargaining generally resolves conflict through compromise. Teams can collaborate and come up with alternatives. Often we argue about things we know very little about. Our strong opinions are based on very few facts. Perhaps research and data gathering could help resolve a conflict. Also, voting by the team can resolve a conflict. The setback with this choice is that it leaves winners and losers. In the event of inflexibility, it might be best to have a third-party mediator. Objectivity is key. Conflict resolution can happen in several ways, but it must happen successfully for the sake of the team and the mission.

Teams Invest the Time

Take the time to have meetings, communicate frequently, attend retreats, brainstorm, and have fun together. Take the time to pray together and for one another. Take the time to build friendships and enjoy the team. Collaboration is best when the team has invested the time it takes to understand the individual strength, gifts, and personalities of its members.

Teamwork Values

Objective 5:

State Rick Warren's eight values of teamwork.

Well-known Christian leader and pastor Rick Warren outlines eight values of teamwork. Practicing these values can help you experience greater levels of teamwork in

your church. Some of these values are repeated in other ways in this lesson, but they are worth repeating.

1. *Trust.* Trust is the emotional glue that binds a team together. Three things can help create trust in a team: consistency, loyalty, and delegated authority.
2. *Economy of energy.* The quickest way to burn out your team is to run them too hard and not allow the needed rest times. Pace matters!
3. *Affirmation.* We can affirm one another by valuing ideas, appreciating uniqueness, commending efforts, and praising loyalty. Affirmation builds up the team.
4. *Management of mistakes.* Mistakes are not failure if you keep getting back up (see Proverbs 24:16). Mistakes teach us what does not work.
5. *Weekly staff meetings.* Communication on a consistent basis builds continuity, friendship, shared experiences, and loyalty.
6. *Open communication.* Three barriers to communication are presumption, impatience, and pride. Communication is the lubricant of ministry.
7. *Recognition and reward.* Give honor and respect to those who deserve it.
8. *Keep learning.* "The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out" (Proverbs 18:15). Books, conferences, networking, education, and risk-taking are important (Warren 2005, 1).
9. *What does all of this mean?* It means that we can do ministry more effectively in teams, as people are more motivated to join a team than to do ministry by themselves. Teamwork is well worth the effort. Team spirit is not accidental but intentional. Your success in serving God depends greatly on being a good team player. So get involved in a team today.

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *In choosing the disciples—His team members—Jesus*
 - a) *sought for the greatest thinkers of His time.*
 - b) *called uneducated men.*
 - c) *consulted with the religious leaders of His time.*
2. *Who originated the team concept?*
 - a) *The disciples*
 - b) *Today's business leaders*
 - c) *God*
3. *The law of reciprocity suggests that*
 - a) *we will reap what we sow.*
 - b) *there is no consequence to our actions.*
 - c) *people will treat us badly no matter what we do.*
4. *Teamwork is important because it*
 - a) *completely eliminates the hardships of serving God.*
 - b) *increases everyone's stress.*
 - c) *makes the work manageable.*
5. *Some people are not good team players because they*
 - a) *have learned to submit to authority.*
 - b) *lack motivation.*
 - c) *are visionaries.*
6. *Teamwork impacts the individual*
 - a) *in that he or she is no longer the center of attention.*
 - b) *by making the individual more selfish.*
 - c) *in that it makes the individual a dictator.*
7. *Which is not a characteristic of good teams?*
 - a) *Shared vision*
 - b) *Unmanageable, large numbers of people*
 - c) *Commitment to one another*

8. *In managing conflict, it is important to*
 - a) *cast blame.*
 - b) *ignore other people's concerns.*
 - c) *attack problems, not people.*
9. *Which of the following helps create trust in teams?*
 - a) *Inconsistency*
 - b) *Loyalty*
 - c) *Dictatorship*
10. *Proverbs 18:15 states that the wise person*
 - a) *has no need of others.*
 - b) *has a clean heart.*
 - c) *seeks out knowledge.*

When used for HBMM SERVUS FIDELIS training:

Printout and mail a copy of your self test pages to the regional HBMM National Leadership Team member for your region. Their contact information is located on the "Contact Leadership Team" page on our website: <http://HBMM-National.org>

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. *b* (9.1)
2. *c* (9.1)
3. *a* (9.2)
4. *c* (9.2)
5. *b* (9.3)
6. *a* (9.3)
7. *b* (9.4)
8. *c* (9.4)
9. *b* (9.5)
10. *c* (9.5)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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LESSON 10

Building Unity in the Local Church

Unity is a powerful force; just ask any military commander, business executive, athletic coach, national president, or pastor. Charles Swindoll describes a cartoon showing two characters. One is a timid-looking man who sits alone, watching television. The other is a headstrong woman who storms into the room and demands that he change the channel to a show she wants to watch. He sheepishly asks what makes her think she can just take over. She shows him her tightened fist and forcefully mutters, "These five fingers!" The threat works. In meek obedience, the man changes the television and silently slips out of the room. He looks down at his own five fingers and asks, "Why can't you guys get organized like that?" (Swindoll 1998, 599).

Indeed, united we stand and divided we fall. A church that is united in worship, ministry, and vision will accomplish much for the kingdom of God. That same church can also be destroyed by factions and judgment. As a pastor, I have experienced the wonderful fruits of unity as well as the bitterness of division. It is imperative that congregations be unified in ministry and mission.

When it comes to unity, every believer has a choice, every church a mandate, and every leader a challenge. Attaining and maintaining unity is never-ending. The goal for any leader is to see the congregations unified and strong. Too often leaders experience what a forgetful pastor once encountered. He and his wife invited all of the elderly women to a very special garden tea party. At the last minute, he realized he had forgotten to invite one of the faithful church ladies. He quickly called her just hours before the party and invited her to attend. She declined his invitation and matter-of-factly said, "It is no use. I've already prayed for rain!"

As Christians, we need to foster compassion and unity such as was present at the Seattle Special Olympics a few years ago. Nine contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the 100-yard dash. At the gun they all started running, not exactly in a dash, but with the goal to run the race to the best of their ability. All headed for the finish line except for one boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled a couple of times, and began to cry. As the other eight heard the boy's sobs, they slowed down. They turned around and went back—every one of them. One girl with Down's syndrome bent down, kissed him, and said, "This will make it better." Then all nine linked arms and walked together to the finish line. Everyone in the stadium stood; the cheering continued for ten minutes.

Unity is not only powerful but beautiful. When believers lock arms with one another and cross the finish line together, all of heaven rejoices. Unity is not easy to accomplish, but each of us—with the direction of God's Word and wisdom of the Spirit—can be a catalyst for unity in the church. Let us prepare our hearts as we go through this lesson.

LESSON OUTLINE

- Defining Unity
- Defending Unity
- Developing Unity
- Displaying Unity
- Discovering Its Potential

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Define unity from a practical and biblical perspective.*
2. *Identify the attacks against unity.*

3. *Discuss how unity is developed in the believer and the church.*
4. *Show how humility, gentleness, and love aid in building unity.*
5. *Describe how unity impacts evangelism.*

Defining Unity

Objective 1:

Define unity from a practical and biblical perspective.

The New Testament word translated “unity” comes from the Greek word *henotēs* and is found in two verses in Ephesians: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3) and “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). Clearly, unity is an important goal for which all Christians must strive. Unity should never be an afterthought or a low priority aim.

Unity Starts with God

The idea of unity actually starts with God. God is one; there is none beside Him. Although there are three eternal members of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—God is One. There is never disunity in the Trinity. Our love and devotion to the Lord, likewise, must be undivided. Jesus said, for instance, that we cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24). We are commanded to flee from anything that turns us from serving the One True God (1 John 5:21).

Genuine Unity through Christ

Christian unity goes beyond human relationships. Our unity with other believers is established by our spiritual connection to Jesus Christ. He brings us into fellowship through His sacrifice on the Cross, atoning blood, redemptive grace, and powerful resurrection. He

binds us together by His Spirit and gives us a common yet divine purpose, promise, and future.

You may have seen an old Frankenstein movie. A mad scientist pieces together body parts from various cadavers, gives the ghastly assembly a jolt of electricity, and—presto—one evil monster, ready for action! The church is compared to one body, but it is not produced by simply combining various anatomical parts, like the Frankenstein monster. Rather, the body of Christ derives its existence and life from its Head, Jesus Christ. A typical human organization derives its power from the association of individuals. The body of Christ derives its power from the sharing of divine life. Christ makes His body, the church, powerful!

The New Testament links many aspects of our Christian experience to God's essential unity and our oneness with Christ. We are one Body in function and purpose. We have one hope of eternal life. The believer's allegiance, dedication, and commitment are founded in one Lord. The foundation of our trust, assurance, and gospel is rooted in one faith. The process of spiritual regeneration and purification happens only by one baptism. And, we serve one God—the universal Father, exalted King, Creator of all things (Ephesians 4:4–6).

Unity Is Not Uniformity

Unity is not uniformity. Followers of Jesus Christ are not like cookies cut by the same cookie cutter or like wooden blocks cut to exact precision and detail. Our unity is not founded in a theology of dressing, talking, or looking alike. God has not designed us to be robots or clones. Instead God wants to use the unique qualities of each individual to advance His kingdom. Yes, there are standards of holiness and discipleship, but Christ brings our unique differences and molds us into oneness. Our differences are not removed but are blended by the marvelous work of Christ.

Defending Unity

Objective 2:

Identify the attacks against unity.

The Need to Defend

It is necessary to uphold and defend our God-given unity. In Christ's high-priestly prayer, recorded in John 17, Jesus prays for himself, His disciples, and those who would come to trust in Him as Savior. Thus, He prayed for us—that we would be one as He and the heavenly Father are one. Jesus still petitions the Father to keep us in unity.

Christians Can Be Their Own Worst Enemies

James writes, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (James 4:1). Often the impediments to unity are not a result of the world's actions; the impediments are of our own making. Individual opinions and preferences cause us to ignore the divine call to unity. Instead of working together, we work against each other or pull away in isolation. When our flesh takes control, misunderstandings lead to hurt, which later results in bitterness. But discord, dissension, and factions are works of the flesh. Paul writes,

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.
(Galatians 5:19–21)

If you are practicing any of these behaviors, your life is not pleasing to God. It is time to change!

Specific Enemies of Unity

Therefore, to promote unity, we need to guard against several vices. In Ephesians 4:31, Paul warns, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” Bitter people are resentful, cynical, prone to complain, and quick to attack others. Bitterness affects our speech, thinking, and reactions. It forms a resentful spirit that refuses reconciliation.

Rage is a vehement passion—an emotional attack that seemingly has no reason or direction. Destruction is left in its path. Anger has many manifestations, including a smoldering sense of indignation, personal animosity, inward resentment, feelings of dislike or enmity toward someone, hatred, and a desire for revenge. While rage is an outburst of the moment, anger is a settled disposition. Many people have what some psychologists call “free-floating” anger. Such people are perpetually angry but do not know why. Little irritations can set off rather explosive episodes.

Paul warns against brawling, which is quarreling noisily. Brawlers shout in their attempt to shut down opposing voices. People in the habit of brawling may also turn to violent threats to get their way. They think that their speech and actions will force others to comply with their wishes. Brawlers usually manifest arrogance and are quick to blame others when problems arise. Brawling is a visible expression of immaturity and an unsubmitted heart to God. This ungodly behavior produces strife, pain, and uneasiness among godly people.

Slander is the deliberate and cowardly act of destroying another person's character and reputation. Slanderers spread false reports, gossip, and belittle others who are often not present to defend themselves. This description resembles that of the devil, who spreads false accusations about God's people to destroy them, to hinder the work they do, and to impede the advancement of God's kingdom. When I was a child and someone would say mean things to me, I would remember these

words: "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." The fact is, however, that evil and malicious words do hurt. Destructive words break hearts and undermine unity.

The final enemy of unity that Paul lists is malice, which is wishing evil or harm on another person. The person given over to malice is consumed by the offenses of another. Such a person wants to see his or her enemies suffer pain. How antithetical to Christ's attitude! Though wronged and insulted, Jesus continued to love and bless others. He is our supreme example.

Disunity Spawned by the Devil

We should not ignore the possibility that some disunity among believers is the work of the devil. Satan is not only not for us, he is vehemently against us. For this reason the apostle Paul commands, "Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:11–12).

Satan is described as the deceiver, tempter, and accuser. He or his demonic agents can sow doubt in believers' minds and cause division in the body of Christ. The enemy will attack the church any way he can. Remember, our battle is not with other people; it is with the enemy of our souls, Satan. He can use individuals, in the moment of their weakness and lust, as pawns for his purpose. Just as the devil entered the heart of Judas to carry out Jesus' betrayal, the devil takes great pleasure in manipulating situations to destroy unity in the church. It is imperative that we stand against him and his schemes.

Developing Unity

Objective 3:

Discuss how unity is developed in the believer and the church.

Unity Is Not Optional

Paul shares with the Ephesians this challenge: “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1–3). Unity is both a gift and a work of the Holy Spirit and something we develop as vessels yielded to God. We can either destroy unity or enhance it.

Paul speaks of keeping unity as our “calling.” Other translations list this responsibility as our vocation or job. A job conveys the idea of toil and effort, and this is what we are called to do. Getting along with one another can be toilsome as our patience is tested. Yet, we are to spare no effort to keep, develop, and enhance unity. Unity is not optional for the church; it is mandatory!

Perhaps we are too lax in promoting unity. We find it easier to ignore division and differences than to address their destructiveness. Physically, some diseases can spread infection throughout the whole body. If a cancerous tumor is left untreated, it can quickly grow out of control, multiply, and possibly kill the affected person. Disunity in the church does the same thing. It eventually kills people spiritually.

Principles for Promoting Unity

Here are some foundational principles for promoting and developing unity in the family of God:

1. *Take care of the small stuff.* We tend to overlook and sometimes excuse the behavior and words of someone who displays divisiveness. We may chalk it up to personality or going through difficulty.

Subtle divisive actions and comments may seem insignificant, but a seed of discord might be taking root. Ask God how to handle the situation. The Holy Spirit will give you discernment and wisdom to respond properly. Even within ourselves, we need to weed out the smallest signs of discord. We personally need God to shine His light upon our own hearts.

2. *Realize conflicts will occur in all human relationships.* Being a Christian does not make you immune to conflict. In Acts 15:36–44, a disagreement emerged between Paul and Barnabas. In a previous missionary journey, their companion, John Mark, left the team and returned home. This was apparently a huge disappointment for Paul. As a result, when Paul and Barnabas prepared for the next missionary trip, Paul did not wish to take John Mark along. Barnabas, however, always the encourager, saw potential in their young brother in the Lord. In fact, Barnabas strongly desired to invite Mark to travel and minister with them.

Two spiritual giants, Paul and Barnabas, wound up in conflict. What was their solution? They chose not to embroil themselves or the church in a painful fight. Rather, they decided to engage in different spheres of outreach ministry. Paul partnered with Silas, and Barnabas worked with John Mark. Was this arrangement successful? Absolutely. Both of their ministries were effective and anointed by God. Did Paul ever reconcile with John Mark? Yes. Some years later, Paul called for John Mark to visit him because John Mark was helpful to him in the ministry (2 Timothy 4:11).

3. *Unity is a lifelong challenge.* The story is told of a child expert who wrote a dissertation on the “10 commandments for raising children.” He then had a child and edited the content to “10 rules for raising children.” Following the birth of another

child, he changed the paper to “10 suggestions for raising children.” After his children became teenagers, he finally rewrote his paper, entitling it “10 questions when raising children.” Experience and wisdom gained from having children changed his outlook.

When it comes to building relationships and maintaining unity, you never stop learning. People may always surprise you. They will say and do things that irritate you. They will undermine unity, many times unknowingly. However, God will use every conflict to develop character and depth in our relationships. Do not give up the cause of unity; it is worth defending and developing.

Displaying Unity

Objective 4:

Show how humility, gentleness, and love aid in building unity.

Ephesians 4:2 states, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Here, the apostle Paul mentions a few key ingredients to building unity in the family of God. These ingredients are also necessary for unity in other relationships.

Humility and Gentleness

Humility is the opposite of pride. The ancient Greeks regarded humility as a flaw, a weakness, and not a virtue. Life was to be lived in fullness, so there was no room for humility. Even today, we are encouraged to demand our rights, flaunt our possessions, be heard, prove our worth, broadcast our achievements, and loudly decry any and all kinds of mistreatment. Following the world’s standards, pride can easily spread its roots deep in our lives.

In contrast, Jesus said that we should learn from Him: “‘Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart’” (Matthew 11:29). The person who is humble does not assert his or her own importance or position. He or she is submissive to those

in authority. In Philippians 2:7–8, Paul writes that our Lord “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Unity will not be put into practice until we have displayed the heart of servant, exemplified by Christ.

Patience and Forgiveness

It is not hard to find people who advocate revenge and stir up hatred. But Colossians 3:12 states, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” We are imperfect people who live among other imperfect people. Therefore, we must learn to be patient with ourselves and with one another, even as God is patient and forgiving.

Love

Ephesians 5:1–2 reads, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Walking in love may leave you feeling vulnerable. In other words, you may wonder if your love for others will be reciprocated or if others will take advantage of you. The reality is that certain individuals will not respond to love, and others may take advantage of you. Still, God calls us to walk in love.

Discovering Its Potential

Objective 5:

Describe how unity impacts evangelism.

Unity is a prerequisite for successful evangelism and missions. Every committed Christian should be passionate about winning souls. Spreading the Good News of Jesus is too big a task for one person, one local

church, one denomination, or one mission agency. Jesus prayed for His church: "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one" (John 17:11). He added, "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:22–23).

Ecclesiastes speaks of the power of unity. "If two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:11–12).

A Lesson from Nature

Effectively sharing the Gospel at home and around the world is rewarding but very taxing. Faithful soul winners and evangelistic churches place themselves in many situations that require support—prayer, encouragement, financial backing, special training, and so on. We will go farther in spreading the Gospel with less stress when each member of the family of God does his or her part and works for the good of the whole.

Consider how geese help each other in their yearly migrations. As they fly together in formation, they create a special pocket of air in which to travel. Canada geese travel far distances in a "V" formation; by doing so they can travel about 70 percent farther than if each bird flew alone. When a goose falls out of formation, it quickly feels the resistance of flying unaccompanied. It then moves back into formation to take advantage of the smoother air. When a goose flying the point position tires, it rotates back into the formation and another goose takes its place in front. The geese also honk to encourage those in front not to slow down too much. When a goose gets sick or is wounded, other geese will drop out of formation and follow it down. They stay with the injured bird until it dies or is able to fly again.

Conclusion

So, are you promoting unity in your church? The story is told of a visitor to a mental hospital who was amazed that only a few guards were in charge of so many patients, including some who were potentially dangerous. The visitor asked his guide why the hospital administration did not assign more guards. The guide replied, "There is no fear. Lunatics never unite" (Green 1989, 65).

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE

Ecclesiastes 4:12

Galatians 5:19–21

Ephesians 4:2

Ephesians 5:1–2

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *A true statement about unity is that*
 - a) *God molds our uniqueness into oneness.*
 - b) *our unity is uniformity.*
 - c) *in unity, our differences are removed.*
2. *The idea of unity originated from*
 - a) *business leaders.*
 - b) *God.*
 - c) *football coaches.*
3. *Ecclesiastes 4:12 speaks to the idea of*
 - a) *wisdom versus folly.*
 - b) *youthful arrogance.*
 - c) *strength in numbers.*
4. *According to Galatians 5, those who practice the works of the sinful nature*
 - a) *are only human.*
 - b) *will not inherit the kingdom of God.*
 - c) *please God.*
5. *Who is the mastermind behind the demise of unity?*
 - a) *The devil*
 - b) *We are the mastermind.*
 - c) *Church leadership*
6. *Paul speaks of unity as*
 - a) *an unachievable goal.*
 - b) *a calling.*
 - c) *a piece of cake.*
7. *Which is not a foundational principle for developing unity?*
 - a) *Taking care of the big things*
 - b) *Realizing relational conflicts will happen*
 - c) *Embracing unity as a lifelong challenge*
8. *The ancient Greeks regarded humility as a*
 - a) *virtue.*
 - b) *strength.*
 - c) *flaw.*

9. *The opposite of pride is*
 - a) *humility.*
 - b) *irritability.*
 - c) *retaliation.*
10. *What lessons of unity can we learn from geese?*
 - a) *Stick our heads in the sand, and ignore one another.*
 - b) *Repeat everything we hear, and gossip about one another.*
 - c) *Join the formation and encourage one another.*

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ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. a (10.1)
2. b (10.1)
3. c (10.5)
4. b (10.2)
5. a (10.2)
6. b (10.3)
7. a (10.3)
8. c (10.4)
9. a (10.4)
10. c (10.5)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

James Clark has served as senior pastor of Calvary Assembly of God in Demotte, Indiana, from 1985 to the present. He also has served as Youth and Music pastor in Illinois and Indiana. James is married and has six children.

LESSON 11

Handling Conflict

How we handle conflict is usually determined by what we believe about conflict. The following “agree-disagree” exercise will give you a starting point for this lesson. Put a mark on either the “agree” or “disagree” line that best indicates your response to each statement. You will find answers to these statements as you progress through this lesson.

Agree Disagree

1. ☐ ☐ Conflict is usually wrong, especially among Christians.
2. ☐ ☐ Conflict is evidence that something is seriously wrong.
3. ☐ ☐ Direct confrontation is the best way to deal with conflict.
4. ☐ ☐ Nothing good ever comes from conflict.
5. ☐ ☐ Conflicts could be avoided if people were more spiritual.
6. ☐ ☐ There are seldom any winners in a conflict situation.

Following are some general observations about conflict. First, conflict is unavoidable. Jesus said that “in this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). Therefore, we should not be surprised when we find ourselves in conflict. As hard as we may try to avoid it, we will find ourselves in conflict. One reason for this may be that many of our conflicts are self-produced.

Second, conflict is difficult. It is normal to dislike conflict. There are some logical reasons why it is difficult to confront someone in a conflict situation. For instance, we dislike being rejected or disapproved of by others, even though we know it is probably going to happen anyway. We do not like being misunderstood or misrepresented by others, which we see as a challenge to our character and good intentions. We fear making things worse. We may know the situation

is bad but feel we can tolerate it. If we confront the other person, the conflict that erupts may become intolerable. We fear what is unknown or unfamiliar to us. Since we do not know how a conflict situation may turn out, we simply choose to avoid it. Furthermore, most of us lack confrontation skills, since we were never taught to confront a situation without becoming involved in heated conflict.

Third, conflicts are often symptoms of other serious problems. They may result from uncontrolled anger, low self-worth, unresolved issues from childhood or youth, an unforgiving attitude, or unmet needs and desires in our lives.

Fourth, how we handle conflict determines to a great extent our success in life. Conflict has the potential for producing joy or sorrow as well as spiritual growth in our lives. This being the case, it is important that we identify the wrong approaches people use in trying to handle conflict.

- Some take the win at any price approach. As a result, they often win the battle but lose the war.
- Some prefer peace at any price and choose to ignore the significance of the conflict or pretend the conflict does not exist. Their motto is hear no evil; see no evil.
- Still others spend all their time and energy complaining about the conflict, but take no positive steps to resolve it.
- Some prefer to withdraw from the conflict either by physically leaving the scene or by going into psychological isolation.
- Some try to handle conflict by engaging in gamesmanship, which involves changing the rules, keeping score and waiting for their turn to win.
- Others are ready to throw in the towel and give up at the first sign of unrest. Their approach is to quit and leave. Or they may feel it necessary to give in for the sake of keeping the peace. In doing so, they often repress their true feelings.
- Others constantly look for someone to blame for the conflict—be it the church, the pastor, the school, the boss, fellow workers, or the spouse.

- Others try to use their position and power to handle a conflict. They are quick to remind others of who they are and why their way is the only way to resolve the problem.

Fifth, conflict can be resolved. We can learn to handle conflict in a positive way if we use the right methods. That will be our aim as we progress through this lesson.

LESSON OUTLINE

Good Versus Bad Conflict

Common Causes of Conflict

What the Bible Says About Conflict

Handling Conflict

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Differentiate between constructive and destructive conflict.*
2. *Identify the common causes of conflict.*
3. *Discuss what the Bible says about conflict.*
4. *Indicate steps to take in handling conflict constructively.*

Good Versus Bad Conflict

Objective 1:

Differentiate between constructive and destructive conflict.

The dictionary uses some of the following terms to define conflict: to strike together; a clash or contention; discord, disharmony or friction; sharp disagreement or opposition regarding interest, ideas, values; a state of opposed wills; and emotional tension resulting from

incompatible inner needs or drives. Conflict is often the result of the differences two or more persons bring to a situation. Conflicts differ from quarrels. A quarrel can be defined as verbal strife in which angry emotions are barely in control, and in which the parties involved attack each other instead of the issue. The Bible makes allowance for occasional legitimate conflicts in our lives, but the following verses strongly forbid quarreling:

- “It is to a man’s honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel” (Proverbs 20:3)
- “As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife” (Proverbs 26:21).
- “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” (Ephesians 4:31).
- “Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels” (2 Timothy 2:23).

Conflict can be destructive if used in the wrong way, or it can be helpful if used correctly. The basic differences between good conflict and bad conflict follow. Good conflict is constructive in that it can help clarify issues. Good conflict encourages and develops maturity as the people involved are forced to face themselves and each other as they really are. Good conflict can promote better communication. Good conflict can also be God’s way of teaching us humility, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Everyone needs to learn how to deal effectively with conflict.

Bad conflict is destructive in that it does not build relationships; it tears them down, especially when the parties involved attack one another rather than the issue. Bad conflict is characterized by accusations, threats, name-calling, and strident tones. Little by little personalities are destroyed, and at least one of the parties comes out beaten. As a result, the relationship is cheapened and companionship is demolished. Unresolved and destructive conflicts make a mess of lives.

Common Causes of Conflict

Objective 2:

Identify the common causes of conflict.

The experience of the early church in Acts 15 provides an excellent case study for predicting where conflicts will arise, how to solve them, and the benefits that result when they are solved correctly. The chapter recounts how the early church responded to the influx of new, non-Jewish converts. The Jewish Christians had insisted they be circumcised, but Paul and Barnabas felt otherwise. Anyone could see this situation contained potential causes of conflict. Below are some situations that produce conflicts among believers today.

Change

Here is a little experiment you can do: Fold your arms across your chest. Take note of which arm is on top. Now fold them the other way with the other arm on top. What are you feeling and thinking right now? What does this illustrate about change? Simply that we are all resistant to even the most simple changes. Someone observed that no one likes change except a wet baby. Here are some reasons why people resist change:

1. Change threatens security. The unknown and unfamiliar are frightening. Because the new and different may appear strange or uncomfortable, people prefer what is familiar because they like to know what to expect.
2. Change may threaten status or position. Vested interests may appear to be at stake. People are concerned that they will not hold the same position of respect or influence they had.
3. Change implies criticism of the past or present. New ideas may suggest dissatisfaction with the way things are being done now or that the old way is not good enough.
4. Change seems like additional work. Even though the new way of doing things may mean less effort

in the long run, the process of making the change may require more effort than is presently required.

5. Change may seem unnecessary or unhelpful. People may view the present situation as satisfactory or hopeless, but normal. The change may be resisted because it appears similar to another that was tried before without success.

Both positive and negative changes can cause conflict. For instance, the early church was undergoing tremendous changes as many Gentiles were receiving Christ. The makeup of the church was changing radically. So it was not unusual that conflicts would arise even in this great revival. The early church's experience is a model for today's church. The reality is that change, even positive change, makes people feel insecure. This insecurity leads to conflicts.

Differences

Think of all the differences confronting the members of the early church. It consisted of many racial, cultural, and ethnic groups. They came from different nations, spoke different languages, and practiced different religions. Such differences exist in the lives of the people with whom you associate today. Here are some of the ways people differ from one other:

1. Different convictions and values
2. Different approaches to logic and reasoning
3. Different decision-making styles
4. Different communication patterns
5. Different levels of spiritual growth
6. Different expectations and perspectives
7. Different racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds
8. Different habits, needs, and wants

Stress

Amidst the excitement in the early church, there was a lot of stress, false teachings, opposition, and persecution. When people are under stress, there is

tendency for more conflicts to arise. Conflicts always involve people, so it helps to examine people to further understand the root of conflicts.

Self-centered People

American President Abraham Lincoln was once walking with his two sons, both of whom were crying. “What’s the matter with your boys?” a passerby asked. “Exactly what is wrong with the whole world,” Lincoln said. “I have three walnuts and each boy wants two.” People are just naturally selfish and want their own way. And when they do not get it, the end result can be discontent and conflict.

Divisive People

Some people are just prone to sowing discord. Often the conflict has nothing to do with you, but if they had problems with others, they will have a problem with you. Such people are problem mongers, and stirring up dissension makes them feel important. Others may have a hidden agenda or some other underlying issue that drives them.

Hurting People

Author John Maxwell is credited with popularizing the expression, “Hurting people hurt people.” When conflict arises, it is wise to understand where people are hurting. Other potential problem producers include breakdown in communication, self-centeredness, circumstances out of one’s control, reactive rather than proactive leaders, persons making unreasonable demands, and bad timing when making changes.

What the Bible Says About Conflict

Objective 3:

Discuss what the Bible says about conflict.

Learning from the Prodigal

Read Luke 15:25–32. Look for answers to the follow study questions as you read: What differences do you notice between the two sons in the story? How did

these differences lead to conflict? What causes of conflict do you find in this parable? In what way did the elder brother contribute to the conflict?

The parable of the prodigal son presents a typical scenario for conflict. The younger son is headstrong and foolish. He wastes all his resources on wild living and ends up in a pigpen. The older brother, on the other hand, is responsible and industrious. But when his brother returns home after squandering his resources, the older brother refuses to join in the celebration. Here are the makings of a conflict.

1. Anger boils to the surface. The elder brother is indignant that a party is being thrown for his no-good, squandering brother. Indignation turns to rage and accusations when his father comes out and entreats him to join in the festivities. Conflicts often erupt when anger gains control.
2. Self-righteousness rears its head. The elder brother considers himself a good guy because he did good things. But he fails to deal with deep-seated resentment and hatred. It is easy to feel so self-righteous when we find ourselves embroiled in a conflict.
3. Pride contributes to the conflict. The elder son considers the farm and everything on it his own—the result of his good management, rather than the result of his father's love and generosity. Pride is the cause and continuance of most conflicts. We are too proud to say we are wrong or sorry.
4. Judgmentalism enters. As far as the elder son is concerned, his younger brother got what he deserved for abandoning the family. But the younger brother was not the only one who went to a far country. The elder brother did too; only his straying was not physical. The older brother was quietly feeding on the husks of anger, jealousy, pride, and insecurity. St. Augustine notes, "A darkened heart is the far country, for it is not by our feet but by our affections that we either leave God or return to Him."

Learning from the Book of James

Read James 4:1–10. Look for answers to the following study questions as you read: What does James say are the causes of interpersonal conflict? What does he offer as the cure for conflict?

James gets right to the heart of the matter when he asks, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” (4:1). Notice that wrong desires and motivations create interpersonal conflicts.

James 4:2 says, “You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.” We all want our needs met, and we yearn to enjoy nice things. This, in and of itself, is not evil. First Timothy 6:17 says that “God . . . richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” But those who base their contentment on what they have will never be happy, no matter how much they have. Someone once asked John Rockefeller, a famous American millionaire, how much money it takes to make people happy? His reply was, “Just a little bit more than they have.” Count on it—when pleasure becomes our primary goal, we will stir up conflict.

James 4:3 also observes, “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives.” Most often those motives are driven by pride and a desire for prominence. Proverbs 13:10 says, “Pride only breeds quarrels.” Why is that? Because we are too proud to give in or admit we are wrong. James 4:6 continues, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Pride causes conflict with others and with God. To be in opposition to God is dangerous!

So if pride and misguided desires are the cause of arguments, then what is the solution? James sums up his answer in one phrase—“humble yourselves” (4:6, 10). The obvious antidote to pride is humility. “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up”

(James 4:10). James offers three steps we need to take in dealing with conflict.

First, we must surrender ourselves to God (James 4:7). Conflicts with people happen because we may have conflict on the inside. We do not get along with others because we are at war with God and ourselves. Colossians 3:15 says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace." When we have the peace of Christ in our hearts, we will be at peace with ourselves and with others. The absence of this peace makes us want to manipulate and control others.

Second, learn to resist Satan. The second part of verse 7 says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." The word *resist*, as used here, is a war term that means "to be prepared, to stand against or to withstand an attack." The devil wants to destroy you. Jesus said that "the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10). Satan causes conflict, arguments, confusion, stress, hurt feelings, disappointment, anger, and chaos. How does he operate in a conflict situation? He plays on our pride. He whispers things like, "You do not have to put up with this. Who do they think they are? Come on, assert yourself." These are things our pride loves to hear. However, in those moments we must resist the devil by quoting the Word of God.

Third, get closer to God. James 4:8 beckons, "Come near to God and he will come near to you." How you manage conflict in your life is dependent on your relationship with God. When you spend time with the Lord, you get along better with others because He keeps your heart at peace and you are not as irritable. Isaiah 26:3 affirms that God will "keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in [God]." We get closer to God by spending time in His Word, talking with Him in prayer each day, going to church, getting involved in a Bible study, and so on.

Handling Conflict

Objective 4:

Indicate steps to take in handling conflict constructively.

The following are some steps you can take in handling conflict constructively. Most of these can be illustrated through the life of the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son.

Do Not Ignore the Conflict

There are times when silence is not golden, but a conflict situation is not one of them. Opening up avenues of communication is essential in resolving conflict. Proverbs 25:11 says, "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver."

Do Not Bottle Up Your Emotions

Ignoring the conflict leads to denial and bottling up one's feelings. When you bury your emotions, they will resurface at some point. Do not save up all your hurts to use them in an all-out war. Learn to deal with situations as they arise.

Attack the Problem, Not Each Other

The story is told of a shepherd who observed that when a band of wild horses were attacked by wolves, they formed a circle with their heads to the center and kicked out at the wolves, driving them off. When a band of wild donkeys were attacked, they too formed a circle, but with their heads toward the wolves. When they began to kick, they ended up kicking each other. These illustrations show the benefits of banding together and attacking a problem, not attacking one other.

Communicate Your Feelings Appropriately

Do not assume the other person knows what you are thinking or feeling. You can do this by making "I" statements rather than "you" statements. For instance, if you say, "You make me so mad when you do that,"

two things happen. First, you accuse the other person of making you feel a certain way. And this is unfair because no one can force you to feel any particular way. Second, you eliminate any chance of the other person hearing your real feelings because you have put him or her on the defensive. A better way to express your feelings is to say, "I get angry when you do that." In this way, you own your feelings and help the other person to be a better listener.

Focus on the Future

The elder brother in the story of the Prodigal did not focus on the positive. He chose to remember his brother's sins rather than rejoice in his repentance. Psychologically, it is easier to begin new behaviors than to terminate old ones. But rather than describing the faults you have seen in the past, concentrate on defining for the other person the improvements you would like to see in the future.

Avoid Saying "You never" or "You always"

Phrases like "you never" or "you always" do not help the conflict resolution process. In fact, they leave you open for contradiction. A better policy is to let the facts speak for themselves. Paul said we are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Also, try not to raise your voice.

Define the Areas of Agreement and Disagreement

Set some parameters, some boundaries for your discussion. Do not tackle all the problem areas at once. Begin by finding issues or points with which you agree. Then, define in rational terms your points of disagreement. Often you will find that you both want the same thing. You just have different means of achieving it.

Accept Responsibility for Your Contributions to the Problem

This was the step the elder brother found difficult. His pride got in the way. Few conflicts are one-sided; most involve contributions from both sides. When you

are willing to accept responsibility for the problem, the other person will be more likely to meet you halfway. Furthermore, if you are willing to admit blame, the situation is almost immediately defused.

Explain What Change You Are Willing to Make

It takes courage to take this step. There is risk involved as the other person may not respond in kind. But the only way some situations are going to change is if you are willing to change. So admit your error, and state what you will do to change.

Forgive

The father of the prodigal was quick to forgive his errant son, something the elder brother could not bring himself to do. Instead, the older brother felt it was his duty to punish the prodigal. Yet, God said in Deuteronomy 32:35, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay." Since punishment is in the hands of God, we are left with only one option regarding those with whom we are in conflict. We must forgive them! What makes forgiving difficult is that often our offenders have done nothing to deserve our forgiveness. But when we unconditionally forgive those who have wronged us, it means: 1) we are not demanding a change on their part or "cutting a deal with them," 2) we are not just being tolerant or lenient with them, 3) we are not pretending that what they did to us did not matter and that we are just trying to forget about it. We forgive simply because it is what God would have us do, and because we sincerely want to end the conflict.

This lesson has given you plenty to think about. You may be in the midst of a conflict today. Why not apply the biblical principles from this lesson? God will honor your willingness to practice His principles. Regardless of your role in ministry, the more skills you learn in dealing with conflict, the happier you and others you deal with will be. It takes practice and determination to become proficient in handling conflict, but you can do it!

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *Conflict usually emerges as a*
 - a) *lack of spiritual maturity.*
 - b) *symptom of other unmet needs.*
 - c) *sign that two persons are incompatible.*
2. *What does the Bible say regarding quarreling?*
 - a) *The Bible strictly forbids quarreling.*
 - b) *It has nothing to say about quarreling.*
 - c) *It encourages people to freely express their feelings.*
3. *What is a basic difference between good conflict and bad conflict?*
 - a) *Good conflict focuses on the other person; bad conflict focuses on the problem.*
 - b) *Good conflict can help clarify issues.*
 - c) *This is no such thing as good conflict.*
4. *Which is not a characteristic of constructive conflict?*
 - a) *Constructive conflict reveals the weaknesses in people's lives.*
 - b) *Constructive conflict can promote better communication.*
 - c) *Constructive conflict can be God's way of teaching us humility, forgiveness, and reconciliation.*
5. *What were some situations the early church faced that can also produce conflicts today?*
 - a) *Rapid changes and many differences among believers in the church*
 - b) *The early church was not growing; it was stagnant.*
 - c) *The early church did not experience conflict.*
6. *Which is true regarding the effect of change on conflict?*
 - a) *Both positive and negative changes can cause conflict.*
 - b) *Only negative changes cause conflict.*
 - c) *Only positive changes cause good conflicts; only negative changes cause bad conflicts.*

7. *In the story of the Prodigal, which attitude of the elder brother contributed to the conflict?*
 - a) *He was jealous of the good time his younger brother had.*
 - b) *He was glad that his younger brother had returned home.*
 - c) *The older brother was judgmental of his brother's actions.*
8. *James suggests the solution to interpersonal conflict is*
 - a) *prayer.*
 - b) *humility.*
 - c) *repentance.*
9. *What could you do to better inform another person of your feelings?*
 - a) *Learn to make "you" statements rather than "I" statements.*
 - b) *Learn to make "I" statements rather than "you" statements.*
 - c) *Ignore the person.*
10. *What is likely to happen if you accept responsibility for your part in a problem?*
 - a) *The other person may agree that it is your fault entirely.*
 - b) *The other person may consider the matter closed.*
 - c) *The other person may be willing to meet you half way.*

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ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

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1. *b* (11.1)
2. *a* (11.1)
3. *b* (11.1)
4. *a* (11.1)
5. *a* (11.2)
6. *a* (11.2)
7. *c* (11.3)
8. *b* (11.3)
9. *b* (11.4)
10. *c* (11.4)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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LESSON 12

Improving Your Attitude

Tennis player Andre Agassi, in a television commercial promoting a particular soft drink, states that “attitude is everything.” In a very real sense, he is right. You cannot control much of what happens in this world, but you can control your attitude at all times. No matter what happens, you make the choice to have a good or a bad attitude. Your attitude can affect the attitudes of those around you. Attitudes are contagious.

The Bible speaks to the issue of attitudes. The apostle Paul writes, “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22–24).

LESSON OUTLINE

Good Versus Bad Attitudes
The Cause of Bad Attitudes
Bad Attitudes to Avoid
The Danger of Bad Attitudes
Christlike Attitudes

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Explain the difference between good and bad attitudes.*
2. *Identify factors that lead to bad attitudes.*
3. *List bad attitudes that should be avoided.*
4. *Discuss the danger of bad attitudes.*
5. *Explain why having Christlike attitudes is important.*

Good Versus Bad Attitudes

Objective 1:

Explain the difference between good and bad attitudes.

Attitude is “an enduring pattern of evaluative responses towards a person, object or issue” (Colman 2006). Attitude is the way you act or react, thereby showing those around you what you are thinking or feeling. Attitude is more than a temporary or momentary thought or feeling. It is a persistent frame of mind or long-standing feeling.

Although no one can control everything that happens in life, we can control our own attitudes. No matter what anyone else says or does, you choose how you respond. We all have attitudes—some good and some bad. It is important to know whether a particular attitude is good or bad. The simplest way to differentiate between good and

bad attitudes might be to ask this question: "Is my attitude beneficial or detrimental to me or to others?" If the attitude you are displaying is beneficial to yourself or to others, then it is a good attitude. Bad attitudes discourage you and/or others. Bad attitudes can be changed, however, through godly persuasion. God can persuade us through our personal reading of His Word, through a sermon, or through other means.

The Cause of Bad Attitudes

Objective 2:

Identify factors that lead to bad attitudes.

The first step toward controlling and keeping your attitude good is identifying the factors that lead to bad attitudes. These factors are either internal or external.

Internal Factors

Internal factors are tendencies within you that cause bad attitudes. Maybe you have a short temper; you get angry quickly without thinking through a situation. James advises, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires" (James 1:19–20).

It could be that you are temperamental. You feel fine one moment, and the next moment your attitude becomes offensive. Maybe you are not well physically, and that is causing you to have a bad attitude about life. One's physical condition can and does affect one's mental disposition. In psychological terms, this is called "psychosomatic," which simply means there is a strong connection between what we think and how we feel.

External Factors

External factors are things outside of you that cause bad attitudes. Possibly the way a co-worker does his or her job bothers you. You probably would not always agree with the way your boss wants you to do your work, but if you let that bother you it can develop into a bad attitude toward

him or her. Or maybe a relationship you have with someone is not going well. Sometimes parents and children have strained relationships. Spouses have difficult periods in their marriage. Even clergymen and parishioners do not always agree on everything. How these very important relationships are going can and will affect you.

Even bad weather can trigger a negative attitude in people. Whatever it is, you do not have control over external factors. Yet you still have control over your reaction to those factors. So, make it a daily practice to ask God for help to manage your attitudes.

Bad Attitudes to Avoid

Objective 3:

List bad attitudes that should be avoided.

The following bad attitudes are not the only possible bad attitudes that exist, but they represent the most common ones. See if any of these bad attitudes apply to you. Be honest.

Know It All

The *know-it-all* attitude is a common bad attitude that causes people to avoid the offender. Even if you are knowledgeable, it is not always good to continuously share everything you know. Remember that others may know a lot about a particular subject also. It is possible that you can learn something new from others if you give them the chance to share. When you behave as though you know it all, you offend and insult people. Your attitude affects others! The know-it-all attitude is detrimental to the well-being of others.

Note what the Bible says: "No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it" (Ecclesiastes 8:17). In other words, no one knows everything. So we should never think we know or pretend we know all things.

It's Not My Fault!

The *it's-not-my-fault* attitude is another prevalent bad attitude to avoid. It is easy to blame others when the problem is your own fault. Taking responsibility for your own mistakes or faults is an important step to becoming Christlike. And do not forget that some things happen that are no one's fault. Life on this earth is not perfect. Always looking for someone or something to blame is detrimental to you and to others. New Testament writer Jude speaks to a similar issue: "These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage" (Jude 16).

It Can't Be Done

Imagine how many wonderful things would not have been invented if the inventors believed that their projects or discoveries were impossible. For example, we would not have electricity, air travel, the combustion engine, the printing press, computers, and so many more conveniences. The *it-can't-be-done* attitude is a defeatist attitude. You are defeated when you are unwilling to try something new. But God encourages us to attempt great things for Him.

Woe Is Me

The *woe-is-me* attitude is one of self-pity. This attitude causes you to see everything from a negative point of view. It is normal for things to go wrong at some point. However, when you always feel that everyone is out to destroy you, you are living below the standard God desires for you. Furthermore, comparing yourself to someone else will usually cause wrong attitudes. Either you have self-pity because someone's life is better than yours, or you feel superior because you have it easier than someone else. Both attitudes are bad.

Each person must rejoice in whom God has made him or her to be. God does all things well. Genesis 1:31 tells us, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."

You Can't Trust Anyone These Days!

The *you-can't-trust-anyone-these-days* attitude is more prevalent today than we might want to believe. Within the body of Christ are many well-meaning but misled people who have caused others to mistrust people in general. This has created an epidemic of insecurity in the church and in the world. It is appropriate to have a healthy attitude of caution when it comes to trusting people, especially strangers, but it is unhealthy to distrust everyone. Jesus assured His disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me" (John 14:1). God will never let you down. His Word is full of promises you can trust. There are also many wonderful people you can trust because they live according to God's Word.

They Are All That Way!

Having a *they-are-all-that-way* attitude is unacceptable for Christians. Many times prejudice is imperceptible to us, but others can see it in us quickly. It is important to remember that God created and loves everyone. Therefore, we are to love all people, regardless of their ethnic, racial, religious, physical, or social differences. The New Testament tells us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves (see Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; and Galatians 5:14). Jesus said it simply: "This is my command: Love each other" (John 15:17).

The Problem Is Far Worse Than You Think

The *the-problem-is-far-worse-than-you-think* attitude is one of exaggeration. Exaggeration is making something out to be more than it is. The Bible tells us that "a truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies" (Proverbs 12:17). As a Christian, you are required to be honest, not given to exaggeration. Jesus said that our communication should be straight-forward: "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" (Matthew 5:37).

The Danger of Bad Attitudes

Objective 4:

Discuss the danger of bad attitudes.

Just as wind and rain can cause damage to your home or your church building, bad attitudes damage important aspects of your life. Following are a few instances of the impact of bad attitudes.

Damaged Relationships

When you have a bad attitude you will likely cause damage to relationships with people you care about. Proverbs 17:9 notes that “he who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.” Bad attitudes can cause serious problems like abuse and divorce in a marriage. They also cause serious damage to children by setting a poor example that these children later perpetuate in their own relationships. A bad attitude can cause you to lose your job or fail to get employment in the first place. Bad attitudes can also diminish your joy, as people tend to avoid a negative person. Bad attitudes damage any relationship, including your relationship with God.

Reduced Effectiveness

Many churches are hindered in their efforts to share the gospel and grow steadily because of lack of unity. Few, if any, visitors will stay in a church that is not loving and united. To maintain unity takes more than just human effort. It takes willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul urges us to strive for unity: “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1–3).

Fortunately, it is not too late to change. The first step is to recognize and turn away from those ways of thinking that you now recognize as unhealthy and wrong. This is repentance. The Bible says, “Godly sorrow brings

repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret" (2 Corinthians 7:10). Ask the Lord to forgive you, and trust Him to renew your mind. When you are tempted to return to your old way of thinking, refuse to do it. Prepare to think and act differently.

Christlike Attitudes

Objective 5:

Explain why having Christlike attitudes is important.

A Christlike attitude is an attitude of love for God and others. "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37–39). Your love for God will direct your love for others. John writes, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:19–21).

Christ showed His love for His Father in many ways. John quotes Jesus: "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4). Jesus was concerned about doing the will of His Father. "'Here I am, I have come to do your will'" (Hebrews 10:9). And He was concerned about God's Word. Jesus showed this when He prayed for all believers, "'Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth'" (John 17:17).

Developing Christlike Attitude

Although rules for every specific detail of life are not given in Scripture, guidelines and principles for you to live by are in the Bible. Scripture is your best source for having a Christlike attitude. The best way to learn what God's Word says on any given subject is to read it, study it and think about it. King David wrote, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, O Lord; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the

laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word" (Psalm 119:11–16).

Another aid in developing good attitude is to submit to a Christlike mentor. This mentor could be a friend, family member, pastor or an elder in your church. The apostle Paul encourages mentoring. He urged the Corinthian believers: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Paul also exhorted Timothy, "Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). We are all called by God to follow the example of His Son, Jesus Christ. "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'" (John 8:12).

Surely, the difference between a good and a bad attitude is not difficult to understand. It is vital for you as a believer to cultivate good attitudes through the continual application of God's Word, through prayer, and through emulating Christians who exhibit godly attitudes.

SUGGESTED BIBLE VERSES TO MEMORIZE

Psalm 119:11

Matthew 22:37–39

John 15:17

Ephesians 4:22–24

James 1:19–20

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *What is an attitude?*
 - a) *The soft drink Andre Agassi likes*
 - b) *A control issue*
 - c) *The way you behave that shows how you feel or think*
2. *A short temper is an example of what type of factor that causes bad attitudes?*
 - a) *Internal*
 - b) *External*
 - c) *Uncontrollable*
3. *Which of the following is not an attitude to avoid?*
 - a) *Know it all*
 - b) *Rejoice in the Lord always*
 - c) *It's not my fault*
4. *In managing our attitudes, it is important to know that*
 - a) *we cannot control our attitudes.*
 - b) *not everyone has bad attitudes.*
 - c) *we can control our own attitudes.*
5. *James advises that everyone should be*
 - a) *slow to listen.*
 - b) *quick to judge.*
 - c) *quick to listen.*
6. *Unwillingness to try new things*
 - a) *is a bad attitude that should be avoided.*
 - b) *indicates an attitude of victory.*
 - c) *is the reason for today's technological advancement.*
7. *Godly sorrow produces*
 - a) *only regret.*
 - b) *repentance.*
 - c) *guilt alone.*

8. *Who would not be a godly mentor?*
 - a) *Your pastor*
 - b) *A Christian friend*
 - c) *An unbeliever*
9. *Bad attitudes affect us by*
 - a) *increasing our effectiveness.*
 - b) *damaging our relationships.*
 - c) *stimulating our joy.*
10. *What is not a good way to develop Christlike attitude?*
 - a) *Praying to God*
 - b) *Memorizing Scripture*
 - c) *Being unloving*

When used for HBMM SERVUS FIDELIS training:

Printout and mail a copy of your self test pages to the regional HBMM National Leadership Team member for your region.

Their contact information is located on the "Contact Leadership Team" page on our website: <http://HBMM-National.org>

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. *c* (12.1)
2. *a* (12.2)
3. *b* (12.3)
4. *c* (12.1)
5. *c* (12.2)
6. *a* (12.3)
7. *b* (12.4)
8. *c* (12.5)
9. *b* (12.4)
10. *c* (12.5)

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LESSON 13

Overcoming Obstacles

In 1992, a young man, his wife, and their young son packed a few of their belongings in cardboard boxes, sold everything else they owned, and moved from the United States to the country of Turkey. The Turks are one of the largest unreached people groups in the world. At the time, there were fewer than 300 Turkish Christians in a country of over 50,000,000. (That is less than 0.001 percent.) The couple had dreamed of this move and had prepared for it for years. They had extensive experience in full-time Christian work, had strong support from their mission agency and sending church, and they were joining another couple who had been “missionary kids” and now had a growing mission of their own. Everyone prayed and expected that by working together this new team would be used mightily by God to reach the Turks. Their plan was to spend at least ten years in Turkey, serving and ministering to the lost of that country.

Within weeks, however, obstacles to the work appeared. Great tension developed between the young man and his wife. As the months progressed, depression and discouragement became the daily norm. While language learning progressed steadily, the new couple felt useless and sidetracked from their goals of evangelism and church planting. The birth of their second son was a wonderful experience, but the demands of raising two small boys in a foreign country drained their energy. After a year and a half, misunderstandings between other members of the team surfaced repeatedly, and there were deep feelings of frustration and judgment. Cultural differences continued to worsen the couple's isolation. At the end of two and a half years—facing a third pregnancy and with no hope of reconciling the differences with their teammates—the

young man brought his family back to the United States. At the airport in Turkey, they said tearful farewells to their friends and teammates. When they arrived in America, their home church greeted them with cheers and love. But deep inside, they were dying. Their marriage was a wreck, and their hearts were broken. The mission had failed.

In this lesson, we will look at the obstacles faced by Christians as they serve God. Our study will be an introduction to many topics that deserve deeper investigation. We will survey what Scripture says and seek out practical solutions to common problems. This discussion is not necessarily intended to help you avoid obstacles. Rather, it is intended to give you hope and perspective when you face obstacles. Difficult times will come, and these difficulties can be intensely personal. I should know. I am the young man who went to Turkey with high hopes and came home feeling like a total failure.

LESSON OUTLINE

Satan, the World, the Flesh, and Broken Relationships
Who Is Really Behind This?
Facing Difficulties

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1: Identify the four sources of obstacles typically faced by believers.*
- 2: Discuss God's purposes in obstacles.*
- 3: State biblical principles for dealing with obstacles.*

Satan, the World, the Flesh, and Broken Relationships

Objective 1:

*Identify the four sources of
obstacles typically faced by believers.*

One of the most difficult things about obstacles is not the obstacles themselves, but the fact that we have to face them at all. Obstacles reveal our expectations about life and God, and often these do not match up. Particularly in the western church, obstacles often take us by surprise. Perhaps you know what I mean. You gave your life to Christ, trusting that everything would go smoothly. You stepped out in faith to serve Him, you have a vision for the ministry God is calling you to, and you pursue it, sometimes at great sacrifice. Then trouble starts. Everything feels as though it is coming apart, and even the things that seem intact take so much work. Shouldn't God be making things smoother? Here you are giving your all for God, and nothing seems to be going right. Sometimes it is just tough. Sometimes it is absolutely tragic.

It just does not make sense. Why doesn't God keep His part of the deal? Well, because there is no deal. God never promised that life would be easy or predictable. In fact, Scripture makes it clear that obstacles and difficulties are normal. Peter encourages believers, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Peter 4:12–13).

The obstacles you are facing are not unusual; God did not go on vacation or decide to punish you for some unknown reason. Obstacles are simply an opportunity for you to rejoice and bring glory to God. What obstacles are you facing? Why not rejoice to the degree that you feel you are suffering? (You may have to do this by faith if you are unable to make sense of the challenges you face.)

Following is a discussion of four specific sources of obstacles: Satan, the world, the flesh, and broken relationships.

Satan

Behind all evil is the Evil One, Satan. Directly or indirectly, every obstacle we face is a consequence of his existence. Peter writes, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). The apostle Paul also writes about Satan’s role in creating obstacles. “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12).

The Bible reveals much more information about Satan. Below are a few key passages.

<u>Satan’s Actions</u>	<u>Scripture References</u>
Satan torments.	1 Samuel 16:14
Sin began in Satan’s heart.	Isaiah 14:13
Satan was a model of perfection until he sinned. Pride caused his rebellion.	Ezekiel 28:12, 15, 17
Satan is the prince of this world.	Matthew 4:8–9; John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11
He is a murderer and a liar.	John 8:44
He blinds the minds of unbelievers.	2 Corinthians 4:4
He is the ruler of the kingdom of the air.	Ephesians 2:2
He ensnares.	1 Timothy 3:7
He deceives.	Revelation 20:7–8

Satan hates God, and because Christ is in you, he abhors you, too. Were it not for God’s continual

protection, Satan would have already destroyed us. As God allows, Satan directly attacks us or places challenging obstacles in our way as we seek to worship and serve God. Sometimes Satan's obstacles are direct. Demonic oppression and possession bring us face to face with such evil. The lies that bombard us from the world are part of an intentional strategy to deceive and destroy us. Often the obstacles we face are an indirect consequence of his work. The sinful inclination we are born with is an indirect result of the original temptations Satan presented to Adam and Eve.

When we were in Turkey, it was easy to see the direct influences of the devil. Blood sacrifices took place daily. Fortune tellers made profitable business. Curses could be bought and cast on anyone. The indirect influences were always tougher to see, just as they are in America.

The World

God created a perfect world in which humans, nature, and God existed peacefully and harmoniously. But this changed when Satan tempted Adam and Eve and they disobeyed God (Genesis 3). Though humanity has longed for a perfect world since then, sin has introduced to this world difficulty, deceit, disease, and death.

Difficulty

To Eve, God said,

"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." (Genesis 3:16–17, 19)

Deceit

Satan introduced lies into the world, and now the world is filled with deception. What seems right is not; what is right seems wrong. The world promises to offer meaning and fulfillment through power, possessions, and popularity—but the promise does not hold. Millions of human beings have accepted the world's lies as truth and have "exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Romans 1:25).

Disease

When Adam and Eve left Eden and were cut off from the tree of life, an irreversible process of decay began in their bodies. Sickness is a direct result of that original sin. Specific illness can also be caused by individual sin (2 Kings 5:27, 2 Chronicles 21:12–19), by God (John 9:1–3), and by Satan (Job 2:7).

Death

Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." Because we live in a sinful, fallen world, each of us will die a physical death (unless God intervenes in our lifetime). Death is the final obstacle we will face after a lifetime filled with struggles. Hebrews 9:27 notes, "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." However, while we live on this earth, Jesus assures us, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The Flesh

Even though our spirits have been made new and we are born again, we still struggle with the desires of the flesh. Paul describes this battle: "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (Romans 7:14–15).

So many of the obstacles we face are a direct consequence of our own sinful flesh. These fleshly tendencies cause specific acts and attitudes of sin that make our lives difficult. We can blame Adam and Eve for

this heritage, but every sin comes from a choice of our own individual will.

Broken Relationships

Difficulties with fellow workers and those we love are perhaps the most painful of all obstacles. God designed us to work together as a body, with each individual doing his or her part for the greater good of the mission. God also designed us for relationship. While our primary needs are to be met in our relationship with Jesus, we naturally seek love, respect, and admiration of other humans. This need for community makes us vulnerable as unfulfilled expectations and broken promises cause pain, anger, and division.

Disagreements also cause broken relationships. In Acts, we read of a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas who had been partners in ministry.

Some time later Paul said to Barnabas,
 “Let us go back and visit the brothers in
 all the towns where we preached the word
 of the Lord and see how they are doing.”
 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called
 Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it
 wise to take him, because he had deserted
 them in Pamphylia and had not continued
 with them in the work. They had such
 a sharp disagreement that they parted
 company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed
 for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left,
 commended by the brothers to the grace of
 the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia,
 strengthening the churches. (Acts 15:36–41)

Paul, the man who would pen so much of the New Testament, and Barnabas, a dedicated servant of God, had a “sharp disagreement.” Unable to agree on a ministry-related issue, the two separated.

On a personal note, when my wife and I left for Turkey, we knew that we had differences with our team leaders. Because we were all Spirit-filled believers focused on the same goals, we thought that we could

work out those differences on the field. Instead, the stress and demands of cross-cultural living amplified our differences. When we parted from our team and came home, I felt devastated and disillusioned. The pain was almost more than we could bear.

Who Is Really Behind This?

Objective 2:

Discuss God's purposes in obstacles.

Satan, the world, the flesh, and broken relationships—these are clear sources of obstacles, and each of them is responsible for interfering with the work of God. But at the same time, we must consider an issue that has perplexed believers in Christ for hundreds of years: If God is really God, isn't He ultimately responsible for everything that happens, even the obstacles we face?

This is a tough issue that has been debated over and over. On one level, we see that the choices of Satan and humanity have caused the difficulties we face. On a higher level, however, we must admit that an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present God is in complete control of everything that happens. The prophet Isaiah recorded these words of God:

"I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things." (Isaiah 45:5-7)

In the book of Job, God permitted Satan to test Job. Job was "blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1), yet God willingly placed Job in the power of Satan. In this case, God did not directly cause Job's obstacles, but He certainly allowed them.

However, Job himself saw the adversity as coming from God. He asked, "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" (Job 2:10). This scenario shows how debatable is God's role in obstacles. Nevertheless, the apostle Paul writes, "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Recognizing God's Purposes

When we serve God and obstacles appear, it is very easy to get frustrated. We want to see things happen in a certain way in a certain time, but something gets in the way. If we are not careful, our frustration can lead to anger and stress. Many believers who deeply desire to serve God are very goal focused. They want to get things done for Him. They want to make a difference in their families and in the world. They want . . . they want . . . they want.

Often, the motives behind these desires are not at all pure. In my case, I had a powerful need to perform for God in order to feel accepted by Him. Understand this: My theology was correct. I knew in my head that Ephesians 2:8–9 was true: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." The problem was that I did not really believe this in my heart.

Because of the world's influence on my soul, I believed that my true value and purpose came from my works. I felt accepted by God only when I had given everything I had for Him. On the outside, I was a devoted young missionary. Inside, however, I needed to be a missionary in order to be valuable and accepted by God and others. I never would have admitted to this at the time, but my life was not driven by compassion or a desire to see God glorified. I was driven to prove myself to God and to my church. This was very selfish.

When we started to face obstacles in the work, I panicked and tried everything I could to control the situation and fix it. But I made things worse. Then, when everything came apart, my life was shattered. I could not perform for God

anymore. I had lost my identity as a missionary. I did not know who I was any longer. I was absolutely devastated and disillusioned. Nothing had worked out the way I expected.

Looking back at it all right now, though, I recognize God's purpose in the obstacles we faced. God was stripping away at the lies that had imprisoned me. He cared so much about me that He was willing to break me and then rebuild me so that I could be free in the truth about who I really was. I believe that obstacles are gifts from God that He uses to make us more like His Son. When obstacles come, we are more likely to be concerned about our goals, but God is more concerned about us. When we learn to discern what He is doing in our lives and how He desires to change us, then we can clearly see at least part of His purposes in the obstacles and how He will use them to our good.

James writes, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance" (James 1:2-3). When trials come, we tend to focus on how they affect our work, but God intends for them to give us endurance, making us perfect and complete. Trials also break us of our fleshly desire to serve God in our own strength rather than depending on His presence in our lives and His power working through us to His glory (see 1 Timothy 6:16, John 9:1-3). This was certainly Paul's realization. He recognized God's purposes in the obstacles that he faced with his own health:

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake,

I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7–10)

God has a personal purpose for you in every obstacle you face. He is diligently using circumstances to reshape you so that you can enjoy a closer relationship with Him. God also uses obstacles to direct His work. We may have a plan, a way that we think things should be done. The plan might seem obvious to us, but God knows best. Proverbs 16:9 observes, “In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.”

The broken relationship that Paul and Barnabas suffered is a good example of God's direction through obstacles. Paul had planned for everyone to revisit the established churches. After their separation, however, God used them to reach new territory, sharing the Gospel with thousands who would not have heard. This is the bottom line: No matter what obstacles you face, God is using them for good.

Facing Difficulties

Objective 3:

State biblical principles for dealing with obstacles.

In this short lesson, we do not have the space to address all aspects of dealing with obstacles. However, the following guidelines should help you get started in the right direction.

Dealing with Satan

The first step for dealing with the obstacles of Satan is recognizing that he exists and is at work. First Peter 5:6–10 gives insight in approaching obstacles from this perspective:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around

like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

Two other passages are applicable. Matthew 4 records Jesus' direct confrontation with Satan. Satan tempted Jesus with food, power, and all the possessions of the world. But in each situation, Jesus relied on the truth of the written Word of God to defend himself.

Wise Christians will arm themselves with Scripture and use it to combat the lies that Satan uses to tempt and deceive. Study the Bible, and memorize its truths. "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Learn to use the Scriptures as a powerful weapon against the evil one.

Start by studying the passages from Matthew 4. You can use Jesus' words to combat temptations. Next, study and apply Ephesians 6:10–18. This passage describes the battles Christians face and tells of the weapons and armor that God has given us. Always prioritize your personal relationship with Christ. Without Him, you can do nothing (John 15:5), but through Him all things are possible (Philippians 4:13). "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you" (James 4:6–8).

Dealing with the World

The Bible offers dozens of suggestions for dealing with the obstacles in this fallen, sinful world. Here are a few:

Difficulty: Accept it and be at peace! In John 16:33, Jesus says, "'In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.'" Jesus does not promise to remove the difficulty. Instead, He promises

to give rest and peace for those who bring their heavy burdens and concerns to Him (see Matthew 11:28–29).

Deceit: Recognize it and replace it! The world is filled with false hope and false promises. In many situations, the Gospel has been veiled. People have been blinded by Satan and can no longer see truth (2 Corinthians 4:4). We are called to speak the truth in love to others and to renew our minds (Ephesians 4:25). Paul urges, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

Disease: Pray for healing, but do not be afraid to seek help! James 5:14–15 offers a plan for dealing with sickness. This plan calls for prayer. How often do we rush to the doctor or pop medicine into our mouths without first asking God to heal us? While it is not a part of God’s original design, disease is a normal part of life in this fallen world. God knows this, and He wants us to call upon Him when we have health problems. At the same time, we must also be open to the possibility that the healing process may involve consulting medical experts and undergoing treatment. God has allowed humans to develop procedures and medicines that bring relief. We should take advantage of these gifts.

Death: Embrace it and look forward to it! God uses even the worst possible obstacle, death, to fulfill eternal purposes. Unless Christ comes back in this generation, each of us will die, so it is vital that we live each day for Him. If God leads you into martyrdom, your death could be the ultimate act of service. In the eternal sense, death is really no obstacle, for death ushers us into the everlasting presence of God.

Dealing with the Flesh

When dealing with sinful desires of the flesh, common sense and accountability are important. Second Timothy 2:22 instructs us to “flee the evil desires of youth.” Also, James writes, “Confess your sins to each other and

pray for each other so that you may be healed" (5:17). When you gather with people you trust and share your struggles and obstacles, the bondage of sinful flesh can be broken. Many obstacles we face come from a lack of understanding of who we are now as born-again Christians. Too often we face defeat and discouragement because we buy into the lies of Satan and the world. Replace those lies with God's truth.

- You are God's child (John 1:12).
- You are God's friend (John 15:15).
- You are united with God in one spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17).
- You are a saint (Ephesians 1:1).
- You have direct access to God (Ephesians 2:18).
- You have been forgiven of all your sin (Colossians 2:13).
- You are free from condemnation (Romans 8:1–2, 31).
- You have a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7).
- You have been crucified, and now Christ lives in you (Galatians 2:20).
- You are a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:16–20).

Dealing with Broken Relationships

When relationships become strained or broken, your response is the only thing you can monitor. What other people do is out of your control. Therefore, the only changes that you can make are the changes in your own attitudes and actions. Following are suggestions for dealing with broken relationships.

Receive Others As God's Loving Tools

We have already established that obstacles are tools of God to make you more like Jesus. This is absolutely true when it comes to relationships. Since God is in control of every circumstance, He has the power to cause or allow anything He wishes. He is also a loving, caring God. This means that you can receive any relational

difficulty as a gift from God. Even if it feels terrible or seems evil, God is using it to make you more like Him. So, if you are facing broken relationships now, stop here and praise God for this struggle. His purpose is greater than this present situation.

Change Your Goals

Many broken relationships come from desires that we try to control. For instance, we want someone to be a certain way, but the person would not or cannot. So we try to manipulate situations to make it happen. If it is your goal to make others do your bidding, you are headed for disaster. But if you focus on wholesome goals, the desire for personal manipulation will be lost. So, pray for your desires and make it your personal goal to allow Jesus to love others through you. You may still have to deal with issues, but your anger and frustration will be defused.

Become an Expert in Forgiveness

In his book *Rest Assured*, Bill Ewing wrote, "Forgiveness is the divine transaction, paid in full by the blood of Jesus, which frees both the offender and the offended from the bondage of sin. The act of forgiveness follows in the footsteps of Christ to the very shadows of the Cross, where healing, liberty and power find their genesis in His punishment and death." Broken relationships and anger are healed only by forgiveness. Forgiveness is essential for healthy marriages, friendships, churches, and ministries. According to Ewing,

- Forgiveness begins when you fully embrace the wrong that you have encountered.
- Forgiveness is built on the understanding that all sin is ultimately against God, not against us (Psalm 51:3–4; Romans 14:7–8; Acts 9:4).
- Forgiveness is empowered when we embrace the extent of God's forgiveness toward us (Psalm 103:3–4; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 2:13).
- To be willing to forgive, we must trust God with our feelings of anger.

- Forgiveness is something that God must do through us; it is not something we can do on our own (John 15:5).

Steps to Forgiveness

1. Make a list of the specific hurts that were committed against you. List things the offender did or did not do that hurt you.
2. List all the ways this action has affected you. Your pain will help guide you to the consequences of the person's offense. (For example, if someone steals your car, you might be mad that you have to walk to work. If your spouse has left you, you might be depressed because of how it has caused other couples to avoid you.) The ramifications might be financial, social, mental, emotional, or physical.
3. Claim the truth that your life is Christ's and, as part of His body, you shared in His suffering. Thank God for His forgiveness toward you, and thank Him for forgiving the offender through you. Pass the sin on to the Cross. Since God has already paid the price for this offense, pass God's forgiveness on to the offender.
4. Release the responsibility for punishment to God. While you may still need to pursue legal recourse or church discipline, recognize that it is not your place to punish the offender. Also, forgiveness does not mean you have to forget. If someone has sinned against you, you do not have to be foolish and set yourself up for further pain or abuse. It does mean, however, that in God's power you free the offender from your condemnation and judgment, and choose to love him or her.

A prayer of forgiveness might be something like this: Heavenly Father, you are aware of the sins that have been committed and the effect they have had on me as Your child. (Give Him the specifics.) I know that my life is in Your hands and all I am and all I do is through You. So, thank You for forgiving them and me. Thanks for paying the cost for their

sin and mine when Your Son died on the Cross, and when I was crucified with Him. I will not punish my offender in any way. Free me from my feelings of anger. Make me a blessing to those that have hurt me.

5. Destroy the list. Destroying the list symbolizes that you are choosing to no longer carry the burden of the sin. You are letting it go; you are setting yourself free.
6. Give a blessing.

Peter sums this up: "All of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing" (1 Peter 3:8–9). An act of kindness toward someone who has done wrong unleashes the power of forgiveness and breaks the stronghold of emotion that Satan uses to control those who have been hurt.

There are also times when you will need to seek forgiveness when God shows that you are in the wrong. Again, Ewing outlines the steps to take:

- Clearly identify what you did and the impact it had on the other person.
- Thank God for forgiving you.
- Ask the person you sinned against to forgive you. Do not just say "I'm sorry." Be specific and ask "Will you forgive me for _____?"

Freedom always comes with a price. Forgiveness comes with humility and awkwardness that the flesh would just as soon avoid. But it is worth it.

If the person extends forgiveness, you are free from the sin, and so is your forgiver. If the other person does not forgive you, you are still free. The offended will have to carry the weight of your sin. Asking for forgiveness does not, however, release you from earthly consequences of your actions. You may still face serious ramifications because of what you did. One of those consequences may be living with a broken relationship.

(There is no guarantee that the person you have hurt is going to forgive you.) The relational implications of your actions could be severing and severe. There may be legal, financial, and physical implications as well. But no matter what you have done or continue to do, it is never too late to do the right thing. Seeking forgiveness is the right thing. Embracing the forgiveness of God, forgiving others, and forgiving yourself—these are the privileges, rights, and responsibilities of those who walk in the shadow of the Cross.

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. Which of the following is not true about obstacles?
 - a) Obstacles are normal in a fallen world.
 - b) Obstacles are an opportunity to bring glory to God.
 - c) All obstacles are God's punishment for your sin.
2. According to Ephesians 6:12, our enemies are
 - a) the politicians of world governments.
 - b) Satan and his fallen angels.
 - c) the leaders of false religions.
3. Every obstacle we face is
 - a) a result of our own sin.
 - b) a disappointment to God.
 - c) directly or indirectly a consequence of Satan's existence.
4. The account of Paul and Barnabas teaches us that
 - a) broken relationships are to be expected, even among Christians.
 - b) disagreement causes God's mission to be discontinued.
 - c) Christians with the same goals will always work together for the same purposes.
5. God's purpose in our facing obstacles is to
 - a) show us that He is not always in control.
 - b) help us develop a closer relationship with Him.
 - c) help us stick to our own plans.
6. The first step in dealing with obstacles from Satan is
 - a) standing strong in our own strength against him.
 - b) recognizing that he exists and is always at work.
 - c) rebuking those under his influence.
7. Although Job was blameless and upright,
 - a) he cursed God when he faced obstacles.
 - b) God directly caused Job's obstacles.
 - c) God permitted Satan to test him.

8. *First Peter 4:12–13 says that*
 - a) *trials come as a result of our sin.*
 - b) *we should rejoice in our trials.*
 - c) *trials are unusual in the Christian faith.*
9. *In dealing with the obstacle of deceit, Christians must*
 - a) *embrace deceit as a natural way of the world.*
 - b) *accept it peacefully.*
 - c) *recognize it and replace it with God's truth.*
10. *When you forgive people, you*
 - a) *must understand why they offended you.*
 - b) *no longer judge or condemn them.*
 - c) *automatically forget the wrong committed against you.*

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ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. *c* (13.1)
2. *b* (13.3)
3. *c* (13.1)
4. *a* (13.1)
5. *b* (13.2)
6. *b* (13.3)
7. *c* (13.2)
8. *b* (13.1)
9. *c* (13.3)
10. *b* (13.3)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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