

# *Following Jesus Together*

*A Guide for Christians who meet in Homes*

**This book is dedicated to believers who meet in homes around the world, especially those who are persecuted for their faith.**

*Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.  
(1 Corinthians 15:58)*

Free downloads of this book in English and other languages are available at [www.learnhisways.com](http://www.learnhisways.com).

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*Following Jesus Together: A Guide for Christians Who Meet in Homes*  
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# **1. Becoming the Glorious Church of Jesus Christ**

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God... (1 Peter 2:9-10)*

## What Is This Book About?

This book is about the Church of Jesus Christ. It's not as much about "going to" church as it is about BEING the Church that Jesus died for. But what does this mean? How can we BE the Church?

Some believers see their walk with God as something they do alone, as an individual. Yes, Jesus does call us as individuals to repent of our old way of life and follow him; we must each make that decision. But Jesus doesn't only look at you and me as individuals; he sees us together. The Bible teaches that we are all baptized into one Body—the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13), the universal Church of Jesus, made up of all believers in every generation and throughout the whole world. We are all part of that Body, and members of one another. Our life in Christ is a life together.

The New Testament gives us another important picture of this unity. It calls the Church of Jesus the Bride of Christ. The God of the universe created us for deep relationship with himself, far more beautiful and fulfilling than we can imagine! God's heart is full of love for us! The husband & wife relationship on earth was created by God to give us a picture of the oneness and the joy that God wants in relationship with his people, the Church. He delights in us and we delight in him.

Jesus died to cleanse us so that we might be his glorious bride. The apostle Paul, speaking to husbands, said this about Jesus' relationship to the Church, his bride:

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Ephesians 5:25-27)*

At the end of the apostle John's amazing vision in the book of Revelation, we see the Church of Jesus shining with the glory of God:

*One of the seven angels... said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. (Revelation 21:9-11)*

John continues in Revelation 21 to give more details about the glorious sight he saw. The bride of Christ is seen in a mysterious way as a glorious city, made out of precious jewels. But a question we all may ask is this: “How will this happen? How will we, his Church, be changed into the glorious bride John saw in Revelation?”

Of course, this is the work of God. The Lord himself is building his church into an eternal city where he will dwell. (See Matthew 16:18 and Rev. 21:3.)

But one way that he builds us into his beautiful city, his spotless bride, is through our learning to follow Jesus together—in community—that is, in our local churches. And that is what this book is about. Jesus told us that if we love him, we will follow his teachings (John 14:23). This book will help you learn those teachings and follow them as God’s people together.

## **THIS BOOK IS FOR HOUSE CHURCH LEADERS AND MEMBERS**

The chapters in this book are written to help house churches think more deeply about the most common things that all churches and their leaders should be and do.

Do you want to go deeper in studying God’s word together? Do you want to know how to worship God in a way that is pleasing to him? Perhaps you have questions about how and when to baptize new believers or what it means to take the Lord’s Supper. Are you wondering how your home group can build God’s kingdom through the offerings? Are there conflicts between your home fellowship members? These topics and more are covered in this book. Each chapter teaches things that Jesus and the apostles instructed disciples of Jesus to do.

## **HOW EACH CHAPTER IS ORGANIZED:**

Each chapter, except for Chapter 1, has 4 parts:

### **1) A Bible study**

God’s Word is the foundation for everything that is presented in this book. These studies sometimes speak directly to home group leaders, but you will also find it profitable to go through them with your whole fellowship. As you study the passages closely, the Holy Spirit will counsel you in key scriptural teachings on that subject.

## **2) A story from Christian history**

These are inspiring stories from believers throughout the centuries that help illustrate the topic being discussed. Be sure to share these with your home group for their encouragement.

## **3) Frequently Asked Questions**

This section won't answer every question your group has, but the answers given will help you to better understand some practical aspects of the topic presented in that chapter.

## **4) Application and prayer**

*“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22).* Don't skip these discussion questions. They will help your group pray together, take action, and as a result, grow.

Imagine what would happen if all house churches in your country grew strong in devotion to the Lord, in their love for one another and in their love and service to the world. This can begin as your group takes the first steps in applying the teachings in this book.

## **YOU DON'T NEED TO STUDY THE CHAPTERS OF THIS BOOK IN ORDER.**

It *is* recommended, however, that you read Chapter 2 after this first chapter, because it is foundational to the rest of the book. After that, go to the Table of Contents and choose any chapter that you feel your group needs most at this time.

God bless you as you seek to follow Jesus together.

**NOTE: THIS BOOK IS DESIGNED TO BE USED TOGETHER WITH *50 LIFE STUDIES***

You will notice that in many chapters there are references made to one or more related Bible studies in *50 Life Studies from the teachings of Jesus the Messiah*. For information on how to obtain a free copy of this and other resources, see Appendix A, “Resources,” at the back of this book.

## **2. The Home Fellowship is a Family**

*So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family.  
(Ephesians 2:19, NLT)*

## Introduction

### **Jesus Created a Family, Not a Religion**

Today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, followers of Jesus meet together all over the world. Some meet in large, beautiful church buildings. Many believers meet in homes. Sometimes two or three believers whisper their worship of Jesus quietly in a prison.

Some churches worship with candles and with the leaders dressed in long robes. Others, wearing blue jeans, lead worship with guitars. Some services are formal with written prayers. Others are informal, with believers studying God's word as they drink tea together in an apartment.

Over the centuries many ideas have emerged of what a "church" is. Think about your own ideas. What pictures come to your mind of the church? Do your ideas come from your own visits to a church service? Perhaps they came from movies or even YouTube. But here's a question we should all ask when we think about what a church should be: What are the central things that Jesus wanted in his Church?

Many different Church traditions have developed since the time of Christ on earth. But what is the "correct" way to worship? The purpose of this book is not to focus on what churches do today or traditions that churches started long after Jesus returned to heaven. Instead, it is to discover what Jesus taught in the New Testament. Did Jesus give us rules for the times we gather together for worship? Actually, Jesus did not talk of church buildings, or candles, or musical instruments. His simplest picture of believers gathering together was this:

*For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. (Mt. 18:20)*

It's important to remember that Jesus didn't come to establish a religion with rituals and rules. He came to restore our relationship to God and to others. Jesus actually created a family, not a religion! This family learns together how to live in Christ's love as people of faith in a dark, unbelieving world.

## **Bible Study**

### **What should our home fellowship look like?**

**Opening Discussion:** What do you think are the most important things that believers should do when they gather each week? (Take a few minutes to discuss this question before doing the study below.)

### **Read all of Acts chapter 2**

In Acts 2, we learn of the amazing birth of the Church at the Jewish holiday, Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came like a powerful wind and fire. The disciples of Jesus were filled with power and spoke in many different languages. The Jews from many nations heard them praising God in their own languages and were amazed. Then Peter preached to the crowd, helping them to understand that Jesus, whom they had recently crucified, was the one who poured out the Holy Spirit. God was calling all to look to Jesus Christ for forgiveness of their sin.

For this lesson we will focus on the last verses of Acts 2, especially verses 36-47.

1. How many people responded to Peter's message and were baptized? (v. 41)

Go back to chapter 1 of Acts. Read Acts 1:4-8. What did Jesus promise in verse 8?

At Jesus' trial before he was crucified, Peter had denied that he knew Jesus. Now, forty days later, when the Holy Spirit comes upon him, Peter boldly preaches to the crowd that Jesus is Lord and Christ. Discuss how the Holy Spirit has changed Peter?

2. Read Acts 2:42. What 4 things did the new believers devote themselves to?

In what way are these 4 things important to a healthy fellowship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? (NOTE: We can learn from the apostles today by studying the gospels and letters of the New Testament.)

3. Read verse 43. What were the apostles doing? What kind of attitude did this create in the people?

Do you think we should ask God for signs and wonders today? Explain your answer.

4. In verses 44-45, what was the attitude of the believers toward their possessions?

While it may not work well for us to have everything in common all the time, how can your group's attitude and actions improve in caring for the practical needs of one another?

5. Look at v. 46. How often did they meet? What were they doing in their homes? Do you think meeting together was a burden to them or a joy?

It seems that the believers in the early church thought of themselves as a new family. They did not just come together once a week for a worship service; they often spent time together and cared for one another. Today we sometimes see believers rejected by their families for their faith in Christ. If your family rejected you because you believed in Jesus, how important would it be to you to be welcomed into a house fellowship? Explain why. (Perhaps people in your group have experienced this.)

6. According to the last part of v. 47, what was the result of the outpouring of the Spirit?
7. In summary, look back over verses 42-47. What elements should be a part of a healthy fellowship today? What is your responsibility as a leader to make sure these are a part of your home fellowship?

**End in prayer:** Pray for your home fellowship to experience the life, joy and power of the early church.

**Go deeper in this subject:** Ephesians 4:1-16 and 1 Corinthians, chapters 12, 13, and 14.

*A Story from Christian History*  
*1st Century, Rome and Asia Minor*

**A Slave Becomes A Brother**

Before reading the story below, read Paul's letter to Philemon in the New Testament. It is only one chapter.

\*\*\*\*\*

Although this letter is short, it is like a valuable jewel in scripture. It teaches us much about how the gospel brings us all into one family—the family of God. It also teaches us to freely welcome all believers into our fellowships as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The letter to Philemon was written by the Apostle Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome, about 25-30 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. At that time, Philemon was a house church leader in Colossae, an ancient city near Ephesus (in modern day Turkey). From the letter we know that Paul knew Philemon and probably had been influential in bringing him to faith in Jesus (verse 19).

In verse 10 we read that Paul has led a young slave named Onesimus to become a follower of Jesus. Imagine Paul's surprise when he learns that this new convert has run away from his master in far away Colossae, and that his master is Paul's friend, Philemon! In God's sovereign way, he has brought Paul together with this young slave who has an open heart to the gospel.

In order to understand Onesimus' situation, it is helpful to know about slavery in the Roman Empire in the first century. For all of society, including the millions who were slaves, it was an accepted way of life. Slaves worked in all kinds of jobs. Some worked on farms, in mines or in construction jobs. This work was often very difficult, and masters could be harsh and cruel. Others worked in their owners' homes and were treated well, almost as if they were part of the family. But all were considered the property of their master to do with as he pleased.

Any slave who ran away could be punished in whatever way his master chose. He could be branded on his forehead to show that he was a runaway; he could be beaten or otherwise badly treated; he could even be killed. If he was caught and returned, his very survival depended on the mercy of his master.

Although Jesus did not speak out against the practice of slavery in his day, his teachings show us that he equally loved all people in the world. He gave his life for all people—both slave and free. And he commands us to love everyone as much as we love ourselves. The Apostle Paul said this about all who are followers of Jesus:

*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.  
(Galatians 3:28)*

This was a brand new, revolutionary teaching in Philemon's day. Let's imagine the day that Onesimus ran away. Think of the anger that Philemon must have had. He had purchased this slave with his own money. Now the slave has run away. It seems likely that he even stole money from his master (verse 18). The name "Onesimus" means "useful" but now Philemon is probably thinking his runaway slave is "Useless." (verse 11). It would be natural for Philemon to be thinking about how he will punish Onesimus if he is caught and returned. Philemon cannot imagine that his "useless" slave Onesimus will be saved by the same gospel that saved him and his family and friends. And he cannot imagine that Onesimus will be returned to him by the Apostle Paul himself!

But God is moving in mysterious ways. Paul sends Onesimus back, appealing to Philemon to receive him, not as a slave, but now as a brother (verse 16). Paul says to Philemon, "...receive him as you would receive me" (v. 17, *ESV*). The gracious, peace-making apostle Paul even says that he will himself pay Philemon if Onesimus owes him anything (verses 18-19).

In verse 2, we see that this letter was not just written to Philemon; it was also addressed to "*the church in your house.*" It was to be read to all the believers. Imagine Philemon and his family and friends in the house church listening to Paul's appeal to Philemon, while the "useless" runaway slave, Onesimus, is standing in their midst! (verse 12)

Did Philemon and the house church receive Onesimus as a brother? The scripture does not tell us, but it seems likely that they did. This letter was copied many times and sent to churches everywhere to be read. If Philemon had not followed Paul's request, wouldn't he have torn up the letter?

Paul wrote in his letter that Onesimus was "useful" also to him (verses 11-13). Paul wrote,

*I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel... (v. 13, ESV).*

It is probable that Philemon, deeply touched by Paul's letter, forgave Onesimus and accepted him as a brother. What if he then freed Onesimus and sent him back to Paul to be a part of Paul's traveling missionary team? Imagine Onesimus, a young man when this letter was written, growing in Christ year by year as he serves alongside the Apostle Paul and other missionaries.

We can't know for sure if Philemon freed Onesimus to join Paul, but it does seem possible. There is another letter, written about 40 years after the death of the Apostle Paul, when Onesimus would probably have been approximately 70 years old. It was written by a church leader named Ignatius to the bishop of Ephesus. The bishop's name was Onesimus!

Although no one knows for sure if this is the same Onesimus, it seems possible that it is. What a beautiful story of how Jesus can transform a life—taking a rebellious slave and raising him up to be a leader in the Church. But it might not have happened if Philemon's house fellowship had not welcomed him.

Think about what your house fellowship can learn from this first century story. Philemon and the church in his home had to learn that all people are equal in Christ and they had to receive a runaway slave as their brother. The story of Onesimus is the story of all of us, is it not? We who were slaves to sin were set free by the grace of Jesus Christ and welcomed into his kingdom and work. May God help us all learn to love and care for one another as one family—regardless of race, or whether we are rich or poor, young or old, male or female.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### ***1. Are we really a church if we are just a small group of people meeting in a home?***

It may help you to know this historical information: For the first 300 years after Jesus ascended to heaven, the early Church mostly met in homes. The Church was growing throughout the Middle East and into Europe and North Africa. Because of persecution, and because the believers did not have money to build buildings, they gathered from house to house.

Because the groups were small, and because they suffered together, they had sweet fellowship and love among themselves that helped the Church continue to spread to more houses. It was the house church movement of those centuries that spread the gospel everywhere. Churches in public buildings did not exist.

As you go through the other chapters of this handbook you will see that even a very small group can, as a fellowship, follow all of Christ's instructions. And you have the advantage of knowing each other well so that you can do as the Apostle Paul said in Gal. 6:2: "*Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ*" (ESV).

Remember that the Church is *people*, not a building or a meeting. All followers of Jesus all over the world together make up the Church, Christ's Body.

### ***2. Besides meeting together once a week, what can we do to be more like a family?***

In a healthy family, the members care about one another. In the same way, a good leader is concerned about the needs of the fellowship members, checking regularly on them throughout the week and encouraging them to check on one another. Is someone sick or out of work and in need of something? Has someone had a family member die? Is someone going through a hard time and in need of prayer? Sometimes a phone call or visit for no reason at all except to say, "I'm thinking about you," can mean a lot to the other person. We should ask ourselves, "Do I really care for the members of the fellowship? Do they really care for one another?" If everyone is helping to care for everyone else, then no one person has a big burden to carry.

***3. The woman whose home we meet in has a servant heart, but she sometimes gets weary of hosting the home fellowship every week. She feels a burden to always provide food, and of course, she cleans the house before everyone comes and after they leave. Does the home fellowship always need to meet in the same home?***

The book of Acts tells us that believers met from “house to house.” (Acts 5:42) If there are other homes available, you can certainly take a burden off of one person or family and meet other places.

Also, help the members to understand the burden that the host home carries. Ask brothers and sisters to help serve the tea or wash the dishes afterwards. Like Jesus who “*did not come to be served but to serve*” (Mt. 20:28), everyone—both men and women—should learn to help in practical ways. Some may come a little early (or stay late) to help clean. Also, you don’t always have to have a meal together. But when you do eat together, encourage everyone to bring food to share.

***4. There are believers who don't attend our fellowship anymore and they don't go to other fellowships. They still call themselves followers of Jesus, but they don't see the need to meet with others. What can we do?***

There are many reasons why someone may leave a fellowship of believers and decide to live his Christian life alone. It's important to remember, though, that harsh words and scolding probably won't produce a desire in them to return. They need to know that they are loved. Look for ways to show them that you care about them and their needs. Take time to go and visit them; listen to them and pray for them. They also need to be reminded gently that they need the body of believers. (See Hebrews 10:24-25.) Yes, our home fellowships are imperfect, but we still need each other. Pray for them often.

Also, as leaders we need to teach new believers what the scriptures say about our being born into a body of believers. (See Scriptures below.) God has much bigger plans than just getting us saved as individuals. At the heart of God's plan are relationships of love, with him and with our brothers and sisters.

***5. Is there a way that our house fellowship can feel more like we are a part of the larger body of Christ in our country, and in the world?***

Anyone who is a believer needs to see himself as not only a member of a local home fellowship, but also part of the worldwide Body of Christ. You can help them by teaching the scriptures listed below.

It is also helpful to look for ways to join together with other fellowships in your community and even those from other countries for special times of prayer, celebration, conferences, camps, etc.

Scriptures to meditate on and teach:

John 17:20-21

John 10:14-16

Colossians 3:9-17

Romans 12:3-8

Ephesians 4:1-16.

Ephesians 2:11-22

I Corinthians 12:12-27

## **How can your group grow in Christ?**

### ***Application and Prayer***

1. Look carefully at Acts 2:42-47. Answer each of these questions separately:
  - What happened in the early church that your group also experiences?
  - What did the early church experience that you don't see happening in your group?
  - Does your group have joy, love for one another and a sense of awe that God is moving among you each week? What do you want to see changed?
2. What needs to change so that your home fellowship is more like a family where all people are welcomed and cared for? (For example: Are there changes needed in your attitudes toward certain people who come?)
3. Take time now to pray for your home fellowship. As you are praying, quietly read over Acts 2:42-47. Use it as a guide to help you pray. Ask the Lord to fill you with the same life and power that the church in the first century had.

### 3. Love, the Leader's Motivation

*Jesus called them together and said, "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."* (Mark 10:42-45)

## **Introduction**

### **Christian Leaders Learn Sincere Love from Jesus**

Jesus calls us to a totally new way of life. He calls us into his kingdom. One thing in his kingdom that is very different from this world is the way that leaders should lead.

When leaders in the church use people for their own purposes, it goes completely against the way Jesus taught. Such leaders have big egos and ambitions to build their own kingdoms. Or they want to gain financial wealth through their ministry. In the history of the church (to our great shame) leaders have sometimes even taken advantage of others for sexual reasons. It's important to know that Jesus calls us to a completely different way—the way of sincere love for people.

We all need a lifetime to learn love. No one is born naturally into this way of love. It comes year by year as we are changed by Jesus.

Jesus was the perfect example of sincere love. People saw that he wasn't pushing them down so that he could move to a higher position. Jesus was a loving servant.

In the following study we will look at the apostle Paul's ministry. Jesus changed Saul (a persecutor of Christians) into Paul, and the world has never been the same. When Saul met Jesus, love became his motivation for all of life. He later wrote the famous chapter on love, 1 Corinthians 13.

Looking at the apostle Paul's life gives us hope that we can also change and be leaders who love others deeply from the heart.

## **Bible Study**

### **The Apostle Paul's Example to All Leaders**

**Opening Discussion:** As you grow in leading a home fellowship, describe to the group what character qualities you want the Lord to develop in your heart.

In his missionary journeys, the apostle Paul traveled through what is now Turkey, parts of Greece, and other areas. He wrote several letters to the Thessalonians, a people who lived in what is now Greece. In his first letter he talked about his ministry in Thessalonica, when he first brought the gospel to them. Let's look at his attitude toward these people.

#### **Read together 1 Thessalonians chapter 2**

1. What had happened to Paul in Philippi, before he went to Thessalonica? (v.2)

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that when he came to them, he dared to tell the gospel to them, also, in spite of conflict there, too. (You can read about Paul's sharing the gospel in Philippi and Thessalonica in Acts 16 and 17.)

2. Look again at verses 3-5. Who was Paul trying to please as he brought the gospel to the Thessalonians?

What did Paul say he did NOT do while serving the Thessalonians? (v. 5-6)

Why is the praise of men sometimes a temptation to us?

Paul also says that he was not motivated by greed. If a leader has secret motives of greed, how could that destroy a fellowship?

3. Read again verses 7-10. Describe in your own words how much Paul loved the Thessalonians and how he demonstrated that love for them.

4. In verses 11 and 12, Paul describes himself as a father to them. What were his actions toward the Thessalonians that were like a good father?

If our home fellowships are led by men and women who act like loving parents, how will that affect the people who come?

5. What was the result of Paul's labor in Thessalonica? (v. 13)

In your home fellowship, do the people accept God's word as your word, or as the word of God?

6. Was it easy for the Thessalonians to follow Jesus? (v. 14-16)

If we, as leaders, have deep love for the people, how will that help them endure in times of persecution?

**End in prayer:** Paul is a wonderful model of sincere love and pure motives in serving a body of believers. Take time to pray now for your home fellowship that you may gain the same heart of love that Paul had.

**Go deeper in this subject:**

Meditate on Mark 10:35-45 and Philippians 2:1-11

*A story from Christian history*  
*20<sup>th</sup> century, USA*

**Leaders Show Love to a Wandering Church Member**

Gene Getz, an American pastor, tells a story about a Christian man in his fellowship who left his wife for an adulterous relationship with another woman. Gene knew this man well and was very disturbed over this brother's sin. He went with another elder to see the man. They walked into his office and told him they had come to help him change his mind and return to his wife. The man became very angry and told them to leave. Gene and the elder stood firm, insisting in love that they wanted time to talk with the man.

It was a long and difficult talk with him—about two hours. He was determined to pursue his sinful desires and the leaders wondered if they would be successful in turning him back to his wife and to clear thinking. Gene writes: “At one point my fellow elder—himself a businessman—placed his hand on the man's arm and with tears streaming down his cheeks, pleaded with him to reconsider his decision.”

Gene and the elder saw the man's heart soften a bit. Finally, the man agreed to talk with them more. Gene says, “Though he was not ready to leave the woman and return to his wife, he agreed for he and his wife to visit a Christian counselor.”

It took many weeks of talking with this man, listening to his struggles, and sharing God's word with him. One Sunday morning the man came to their fellowship. With tears in his eyes, he put his arm around Gene and said, “Thank God you didn't let me go.” He had returned to his wife. Over time, with much prayer and pastoral counsel, his relationship with his wife was fully restored.

Later the man said, “Gene, I'll be indebted to you the rest of my life.” Gene writes: “That, of course, makes being a “shepherd” worth all the time, effort, and even the initial rejection.”

Gene writes about this kind of sacrificial love:

*What then should characterize a leader with a shepherd's heart? He is willing to give himself to the members of the body of Christ that inhabit his fold. He stands by them no matter what the cost. He knows his sheep. He calls them by name!*

Gene was referring to Jesus, speaking of himself in John 10:14. Jesus is the example of all who want to be caring shepherds in the church.

*We must be with our people, not separate from them. We must know them personally—their needs, their concerns, their problems! We must be willing to leave the ninety nine in the fold and go into the darkness of the night to find the straying lamb that has wandered away from the safety of the flock and has been caught in the thicket of disillusionment and sin. (Matthew 18:12-13).*

Pastor Getz continues by saying that our lives, not just our words, must say to the people in our fellowship,

*“We love you, we care about you, and we’re here beside you; you can talk with us anytime, anywhere, and about anything you wish. We won’t condemn you! We will help you become the person you really want to become: a mature functioning member of His body, the church.”*

Leaders who follow Christ’s example and persevere over many years know that not all stories end as happily as this one did. Some people harden their hearts and walk away from the Lord. Sometimes we have no choice but to let them go. But a true pastoral heart is always learning more of Christ’s love, a love that seeks to always protect, always trust, always hope, always persevere (1 Corinthians 13:7). This is the love of Jesus Christ, our Savior.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This story is retold from the book *Elders and Leaders* by Gene A. Getz, copyright 2003, Moody Publishers. Used by permission.

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### ***1. How do we as leaders build love into our home fellowships?***

As Gene Getz said above, love is first shown to the people through our actions. But we also have a responsibility to teach on love. Christ commanded us to love each other. He taught us that loving God with all of our heart, mind and strength, and loving our neighbors as ourselves was the greatest of the commandments. You have a responsibility to teach your home fellowship often about this most important command. It's the heart of our faith.

As we take time to do this, we plant seeds into the hearts of the people. We can trust the Lord to make those seeds grow. Imagine Christians here in this country becoming known by all as people of love! Here are a few passages on love to study in your home fellowship:

#### **1) Jesus explains what love really is:**

John 15:9-17

John 13:1-17

John 14:15-24

#### **2) Three parables of God's great love for sinful men:**

Luke 15:1-7 (the lost sheep)

Luke 15:8-10 (the lost coin)

Luke 15:11-32 (the lost son)

#### **3) A parable of love in action:**

Luke 10: 25-37 (The good Samaritan)

#### **4) The apostle Paul's beautiful description of love:**

1 Corinthians 13

#### **5) The fruit of God's Spirit in our lives (as opposed to living by the flesh):**

Galatians 5:16- 26

1 John 3:11-18 & 4:7-21

## ***2. As a leader in the home fellowship, how should I help people of the opposite sex?***

Sexual temptations are very real, and leaders are no exception. Though you are to love and help people in your fellowship, you should never meet with someone of the opposite sex alone, even when they want to share their problems with you for prayer. Satan has used such meetings many times to destroy the lives of Christian leaders and the churches they serve. Always go with another mature member, perhaps your husband or wife, or perhaps another brother or sister. Avoid rooms with closed doors. True Christian love is wise as a serpent, but harmless as a dove.

## ***3. What does the word “pastor” mean?:***

The word we translate “pastor” means “shepherd” in the New Testament. We understand what it means to “pastor” when we look at Jesus’ words to Peter after the resurrection. He told Peter, “*Take care of and feed my sheep.*” (See John 21:15-17.) Peter was given the job of shepherding God’s people. Being a pastor in those days was not a “church position” but a ministry of serving.

Peter didn’t have a diploma from a Bible school. He never preached in a church building! He was a simple fisherman who learned to take care of the people of God because he had been changed by the love of Jesus.

**Don’t forget this:** Whoever you are, if you are taking care of Jesus’ sheep, you are acting like a true pastor.

## **How can your group grow in Christ?**

### ***Application and Prayer***

1. All Christian leaders, if they are honest, know they are inadequate for the job of leading God's people. In what areas of your life do you know you need to change in order to love people sincerely?
2. Take time to pray for yourself. You may also want to ask members of your fellowship to pray for you. As you look over the previous pages on learning to be leaders of love, ask the Lord to change you where you have need for growth in your life.
3. Look over the list of scriptures in the Frequently Asked Questions section, Question 1. Choose one or two passages to study with the members of your fellowship soon.

## **4. Understanding God's Wonderful Gift of Salvation**

*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)*

*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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16-17)*

*I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. (Acts 20:21)*

## **Introduction**

### **The Good News That Saves the World**

The gospel is “good news” for sinners. And it is preached by people who know they also are lost without Jesus. Wherever this good news of Jesus is preached faithfully from his word, chains fall off from people's hearts. Prisoners of sin and darkness who had no hope, now come out of their dark, cold dungeons into the warm sunshine of God's love. Their hearts are filled with joy and deep gratitude to Jesus for his gift of salvation. Throughout their lives they will continually hold on to faith in Jesus' eternal sacrifice for them on the cross and they will find strength and life in Jesus, the Bread of Life.

This chapter looks at the foundation of our faith—the spring of life that blesses every home group. If we understand and bathe ourselves often in Christ's salvation, there will be life flowing through our home group. Our meetings will not be boring. We will read the Bible with hearts eager to learn more of the God who has shown us such incredible grace. Our love for each other and for a lost world will grow.

We will then find that the Holy Spirit is filling us with a strong desire to take this good news to others. When we are in love with Jesus, sharing our faith is not a heavy burden. The Holy Spirit fills our hearts with power and courage, and we find great joy in helping others find the same freedom that we have found.

Telling others about Jesus is not always easy, though. Unbelievers eyes are blinded by Satan. They cannot understand God's deep love shown through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. But thanks be to God, we are not working alone. The Holy Spirit is working through us and in the hearts of the unbelievers we talk with. He convicts of sin. He is calling them to lay those sins at the cross of Jesus. He is showing them the Father's costly grace for them.

Let's not forget this: The gospel has come to us because faithful believers throughout the centuries have guarded its message from corruption and shared it with others. Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the gospel message is ours to take to others. Each home fellowship has great potential to reach the world around them. Only God knows how far the seeds you plant will go.

## **Bible Study**

### **Jesus Helps a Religious Leader Understand True Salvation**

**Opening Discussion:** In your own words, or using scripture verses, can you describe what salvation is?

#### **Read John 3:1-21.**

1. What did Jesus tell Nicodemus in verse 3?

Did Nicodemus understand what Jesus was talking about? (v. 4)

2. Read verses 5-7 again carefully.

Many Biblical scholars have sought to understand the meaning of being “born of water” (v. 5). Some say water in this verse means baptism. Others link verse 5 with verse 6, saying that being “born of water” is referring to natural birth, the water in the mother’s womb.

Whichever the meaning, Jesus does give us a picture of natural birth in verse 6. He says that we need to understand that being born “of the flesh” is not enough. We need a second birth. We must be born again by the Spirit. (v. 7)

The major point that Jesus is making to this Jewish leader is that he cannot trust in his natural birth as a Jew. His Jewish heritage, which he was so proud of and trusted in, will never make him right with God. He must receive a brand new life that transforms him from within.

3. Quietly read verse 8 several times and then describe its meaning in your own words.
4. Read verses 14 and 15 again. Then, read the explanation below.

Jesus reminds this Jewish teacher of an illustration from their own Jewish history to help him understand this new life in the Spirit. If you have an Old Testament, take a minute to read it in Numbers 21:4-9.

The people were bitten by poisonous snakes because of their rebellion against God and against the prophet Moses, who brought them God's law. Though they were rebellious, God showed that he still loved them. God told Moses to make a replica of a poisonous snake and hang it on a pole. The people could look at that snake

and they would be healed. They deserved to die for their rebellion, but God gave them new life. This unusual picture of God's healing grace was given to the ancient, tribal people of Israel. He gave it to point to the day that Jesus would come.

Now many years later, Jesus opens up this story from Jewish history to help Nicodemus understand salvation. Do you remember the snake's lies to Eve in the Garden of Eden?

Adam and Eve chose to listen to him instead of God. Therefore, the devil's poison entered the world through them. Sin and death came in through Adam and Eve and everyone since then has been born under Adam's curse and continued in rebellion against God. The serpent who bit Adam and Eve has bitten you and me, too.

But Jesus changed everything. Jesus came to take the serpent's bite away from us. He came to destroy the serpent's power. How? Jesus was lifted up on a cross, as an eternal sacrifice.

The New Testament tells us: "*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.*" (1 Peter 2: 24) He who was completely free from sin received the poison of sin. He took our sin and death into his body, and he carried them to death so that we might be healed from the poison of our rebellion against God.

When we know the meaning of Jesus' death and his victory over it in the resurrection, we look in faith to him, as the ancient Jewish people looked to the serpent on the pole to be healed. We trust in Jesus who died in our place. Death's power is broken. We receive the life and righteousness of Jesus.

5. John 3:16-17 explains salvation very simply. That is why young believers love to memorize these verses. Have you ever memorized verse 16 and 17? Can you say them now and tell the meaning of each part in your own words.

How can you use John 3:16-17 to help unbelievers and new believers to understand the gospel? What else can you do to help them understand salvation?

6. Read Ephesians 2: 1-10

In verse 1, Paul talks about our condition before we knew Christ. How did he describe us?

In verse 2, he says we followed someone. Who did we follow?

Describe our actions in verse 3.

7. In verses 4-5, Paul says that God did something for us. What did he do?

In verse 6, it says he raised us up. Where did he raise us? Why did he do this? (v. 7)

8. Take a minute to memorize verses 8-10.

Can you say verses 8-10 now without looking at the New Testament?

Now, think about what you have memorized. Paul says we are NOT saved by something. What does not save us? Then, he tells us how we are saved. Explain in your own words what Paul is saying in verses 8-10.

9. What kind of emotions do you feel as you think about God's great grace toward you?

**End in Prayer:** Now take time to pray that your home fellowship will be empowered by God to bring this grace to many people.

*A Story from Christian History*  
*16th Century, Germany*

**A German Monk Discovers the Gospel  
and Changes the World**

When Jesus sent his disciples into all the world, he told them to preach the good news of salvation everywhere they went. They taught how his death and resurrection brought forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who believed in him. Many came to faith through their preaching and the gospel spread rapidly, although often with much persecution. The Church grew until thousands all over the Middle East, Europe, Northern Africa and beyond were following the Savior.

Over time, however, traditions of the Church began to be considered more important than the Holy Scriptures, and many Church leaders began to teach a false gospel that did not point men to Jesus as their only hope of salvation. It seemed the vibrant, life-giving message of salvation through Christ alone was about to be lost.

Most people in those days were uneducated, and they had no access to the Word of God. In fact, the Word of God did not even exist in their language. In church, everything was read in Latin, which only the priests could understand. The common people had no way of knowing what the Bible actually taught. They did not know the gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus alone.

It was at this time, at the beginning of the sixteenth century in what is now Germany, that God raised up a young man who would bring many people back to the truth of the gospel. His name was Martin Luther.

In 1505, at the age of 21, Martin entered a monastery to fulfill a vow he had made and to try to find peace with God. What he found in the monastery was many rules to guide the monks in every aspect of their lives: how they should talk, walk, eat, look around, bow to those above them, and many, many other things. Everything had a rule!

Martin tried hard to follow all the rules, hoping that, somehow, this would make him acceptable to God. Besides this, he wore rough, uncomfortable clothing and often slept on the freezing cold floor in winter. He thought that suffering would help to cleanse him from his sins. He prayed and fasted and confessed every sin he could think of to the

priest, but nothing brought him peace. The more he looked into his dark soul, the more he was filled with despair. How could he ever please a holy God? “*Do I love God?*” Martin asked himself. “*Sometimes I hate Him!*” He felt that God was requiring something impossible from him and then condemning him when he could not do it.

In the midst of his despair, Martin began to study the Holy Scriptures intensely for himself. He knew Latin, and therefore could read the Bible of his day, and he had a strong mind. He also had a deep longing to please God and find rest for his tormented soul.

When Martin read the apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans, a light began to shine into his heart. Before he met Jesus, Paul, like Martin, had been very religious, carefully following all of the laws of the Jews in order to be acceptable to God. Then he had a dramatic encounter with Jesus.

Many years later, in the book of Romans, Paul wrote that no man can stand before God’s holiness in his own righteousness, no matter how many righteous deeds he has done. We are all sinners; we have all broken God’s law. But God himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, paid the penalty for sin.

Martin began to discover that God has done for all people that which no one can do for himself. He saw that righteousness was God’s free gift, given to all through faith in Jesus the Messiah.

What great freedom and joy arose in Martin’s heart! He didn’t have to make himself holy; instead, he looked to Jesus and his death and resurrection. He would trust fully in that gift of God’s grace throughout his life and for all eternity. There could be no more condemnation from Satan, no more accusations, no more shame, because God had declared him clean. Jesus, in his death, had taken Martin’s penalty for his sin.

Many years later, Martin told about the time when he began to understand the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. He wrote, “*...I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise.*”

Throughout his lifetime, Martin Luther was greatly used of God to call people from the darkness of false teaching into the light of the true gospel. He was declared a heretic by the established Church, and threatened with death. But Martin was not afraid. In spite of suffering many illnesses and fighting against depression, he worked with great energy. He preached, he wrote many books, he translated the Bible

into German—the common language of his people. His great desire was that everyone come to know the freedom of salvation that he had found.

Martin Luther's many followers were called "Reformers," and the movement he started was called "The Reformation." Many people suffered, and some were killed for preaching the truth, but the life-giving gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone spread throughout Europe and the world. The apostle Paul wrote,

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation... (Romans 1:16)*

May God help us today to follow in the footsteps of Paul and of Martin Luther, proclaiming boldly this same wonderful gospel!

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

The following questions will help you think more deeply about how to lead people to an authentic encounter with Jesus Christ.

### ***1. “What must I do to be saved?”***

When someone asks a question like this, we can rejoice. This question is asked by people of all nationalities in many ways: “*What must I do to go to heaven?*” “*How can I receive forgiveness for my sins?*” “*How do I become a Christian?*”

Sometimes they ask more general questions: “*Does life have meaning?*” “*Why am I here on this earth?*” All these questions show that people are spiritually hungry. They are feeling their lostness.

What they are asking is basically how they can be reconciled to God and find purpose in life. As followers of Jesus, we are called to help them understand the good news. Many people believe they must do something religious, like lighting a candle in a church, sacrificing an animal, giving money to the poor, or visiting a holy place. None of these things will save them.

The questions and answers below will help you know more about how to lead someone to trust in Jesus as their Savior.

### ***2. How do I know if someone is ready to receive Jesus?***

Sometimes a person will agree to pray a prayer with you because they think that prayer is a way to manipulate God to give them something they want or need, such as money for rent or a good grade in university, or they want him to get them out of a bad situation. But they don’t understand what true repentance is. They need to understand that God is calling them to turn from their life of sin and trust in Jesus Christ for forgiveness and a completely new life.

Don’t rush them to repent; ask the Holy Spirit to help you know when they are ready. There should be some evidence that they know they are a sinner and in need of a Savior. Take time to teach them from God’s Word and allow the Holy Spirit to work in their heart, convicting them of sin. In *50 Life Studies* there are 10 Bible studies in the section titled “Repent and Believe” that can help you open God’s Word to them.

### ***3. How can I help people come into the new birth that Jesus offers?***

We must realize that people are spiritually dead. Their separation from God makes them blind to spiritual truths. Our words alone will not bring people into the kingdom of God; only a work of God's Spirit in their hearts will give them new life. We may win a spiritual argument with them, but it is possible that they still will not see their personal need for salvation. Only the Lord can open their eyes to see their sin and Jesus who died for them. That is why prayer is so important in evangelism.

Therefore, each time you meet together as a fellowship, take time to pray for the lost and for opportunities to share the gospel with them. Ask God to open their hearts and prepare them to receive the good news. And ask him to give you love and boldness in speaking about Jesus.

Of course, we ourselves should be growing in understanding the message of salvation in Jesus Christ so that we can share it correctly with others. Take time to meditate on Peter's sermon in Acts 2, especially verse 38, and also Paul's explanation of salvation in Ephesians 2:1-10. Ephesians explains what God has done, and Acts 2 explains what we must do to be saved.

God's gift of salvation is free, but, as Peter instructed people on the day of Pentecost, God calls everyone to "*repent and be baptized*" (verse 38) in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. This means we must leave our old life of sin behind and trust completely in the sacrifice of Christ for our sins, which is symbolized by baptism. Jesus becomes our Lord and Savior.

All who trust in Jesus become a new creation, born into God's family. We receive the righteousness of Christ, given to us by grace—a free gift from God. It is not something we create ourselves by good works; we trust God for it. This is what you must know yourself and what you must help those with whom you are sharing the gospel to see.

#### ***4. Can you give some practical ideas to start introducing people to Jesus?***

- 1) Introduce people to Jesus by telling stories about his life. Or you can open up the New Testament and read the stories together. Every story about Jesus shows something about his authority, his divine power, his kindness and mercy. You may find it helpful to use a book such as ***50 Life Studies*** to guide you in studying the

life and teachings of Jesus with them. Be sure to give them a Bible, too, and encourage them to study about Jesus at home.

- 2) Or you may decide to start in the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Read or tell the creation story. Or you could use the study guide *Exploring the Ancient Book of Genesis*. Show them that man was created in the image of God. Then show them how the relationship with God was lost through Adam and Eve's sin. (Genesis 1-3). This will lay the foundation for sharing about their need for a savior.
- 3) Give them a copy of the Psalms. Read with them the beautiful, honest prayers. Use those prayers to teach them that through Christ they can have a friendship with God, and they can talk with him about anything.
- 4) Don't forget to use electronic media such as the *Jesus* film, *Magdalena*, *The Hope* and audio recordings of the Bible. Also, if they like to read, give them a good Christian book telling about someone who came to Christ.

(**Note:** Information on how to download all of the books and videos mentioned here can be found in Appendix A, "Resources".)

- 5) Perhaps one of the most powerful ways to help people come to Jesus is to ***tell them your own story*** of how you came to Jesus. Tell them how Jesus brought his light into your darkness.

## *How can your group grow in Christ?*

### *Application and Prayer*

1. Find a time to ask people in your home fellowship (those who call themselves believers in Jesus) to share with you their understanding of salvation in Jesus based on what the New Testament teaches. As you listen to their stories, do you see that they understand, as is explained in the Martin Luther story above, that we are saved by God's grace, through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins? Or are they trusting in their own righteousness to be saved?
2. Over the next few weeks when you gather with your home group, study these passages regarding salvation:
  - **Luke 18:9-14:** This parable from Jesus on the mercy of God for sinners is found as a Bible study in *50 Life Studies*, lesson #3.
  - **Galatians 2:11-21:** In this passage, the apostle Paul explains that we are not saved by works, but by faith in Jesus.
  - **Acts 2:29-41:** In this passage, the apostle Peter preaches to Jews in Jerusalem on how to be saved from their sin.
3. Take time for believers in your fellowship to share how they came to faith in Jesus. Help them see that their personal testimonies can be powerful tools for sharing their faith with unbelievers.
4. In your home fellowship, take time often to pray that each of you would be filled with the power of the Spirit to share the gospel with unbelievers. Pray specifically for people your group members know (family members, friends, etc.) who need to hear the gospel. Talk about how people in your group can share the gospel with these unbelievers. Discuss how you can take the gospel into other cities and towns of your country.
5. Take time to find out what evangelistic tools are available in your language, for example: The *Jesus* film, *Magdalena*, *The Hope*, audio scriptures, a copy of the New Testament, etc. Where can you get them? Do you keep a supply of these? Do you know how to help people download digital copies on their phones? Does your group use these tools with unbelievers? (See "Resources," Appendix A.)

## 5. Baptism in the Home Fellowship

(The last words of Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, the day the Church was born)—

*“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”*

*When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles,  
“Brothers, what shall we do?”*

*Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*

*With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:36-41)*

## **Introduction**

### **Baptism Brings New Life**

A day of baptism in the home fellowship is like a refreshing spring of cool water on a hot day. It can bring renewed life and strength to every person who attends.

First, those who are baptized will remember the day for the rest of their lives as the day they declared before others that they are not ashamed of Jesus Christ. Through baptism they are showing that they are leaving their old life of sin and trusting in the One who offered his life as their sin sacrifice. They come out of the water to live in his resurrection power.

Second, it brings spiritual renewal into the hearts of the believers who have already been baptized. In their hearts they think of their own lives. They renew their love for Christ in different ways. Some quietly repent of letting their love for God and others grow cold. Others are reminded of the meaning of baptism and are strengthened by the Holy Spirit to live each day in Christ's resurrection life.

For believers who have not been baptized, the Holy Spirit is speaking to them to obey Jesus' command to be baptized.

Finally, if unbelievers are present (perhaps family members or friends of those being baptized), they begin to think about eternal things. They sense the Holy Spirit's power. Seeds of repentance and faith are planted in their hearts, as they see the death and resurrection of Jesus acted out before their eyes.

Jesus commanded all his followers to be baptized. We may not intellectually understand all that happens at a baptism; there are mysterious things that God's Holy Spirit is doing in every heart. We can expect, however, the blessings of Jesus upon the church that obeys him.

## *Bible Study*

### **What is the Meaning of Baptism?**

**Opening Discussion:** Tell about the day of your baptism? What did it mean to you then? What does it mean to you now?

**Read Romans 6:1-14 together.**

1. Satan wants us to live our lives defeated by sin. Paul understands that. He wants us to understand what happened when we trusted Jesus Christ and obeyed him in baptism. He says in verses 1-4 that two very important things happened in our baptism. What are those two things?

2. Read again verses 5-7 together. What is the result of our old self being crucified with Christ? (v. 6-7)

In general, do you think believers have an assurance that sin's power has been broken in their lives? If the answer is "no," what is needed to give them that assurance?

3. Paul states again in verse 8 that our baptism into Christ means **that we die with him** and then **that we are raised with him**. Read verses 8-10 again to review what the purpose of Christ's death and resurrection is.

4. In verse 11, Paul tells us that we also should count ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. What do you think he means by this?

5. Explain what Paul means when he tells us to not let sin reign in our bodies and not obey its lusts. (v. 12)

Most of us wish that we would never be bothered by temptation. Notice that Paul does **not** tell us that we are now free from temptation. But Paul tells us that because we have a new life in Christ, we now have the power and the responsibility to say "no" to evil.

6. We not only say "no" to evil, we say "yes" to God. How does Paul describe that "yes" in verses 13 and 14?

Jesus told his disciples in John 10:10: *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*

When we give our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness, how does that give us a full and joyful life?

7. Are there believers in your home fellowship who have not been baptized? As a leader, have you taught them to obey Jesus Christ's command to be baptized? (See the "Application and Prayer" section at the end of this chapter.)

**End in Prayer:** Close this study time by taking time to pray for a deeper understanding of what baptism symbolizes: that we have died to our old sinful self and that we have been raised to new life in Christ.

## *A story from Christian History*

*21<sup>st</sup> century, Central Asia*

### **A Joyful Easter Baptism**

The small house fellowship was especially excited to be worshipping together this morning. It was Easter, and they were celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! They were meeting in the apartment of two single sisters, Maryam and Sara.

One of the participants that morning was the sisters' elderly mother. For several years she had listened to the gospel, but this quiet woman had never made it clear to her daughters that faith was growing in her heart. After the worship time, she and her daughters were preparing tea in the kitchen together.

"I want to be baptized this morning," the mother told her daughters. Maryam and Sara looked at each other in amazement! After questioning their mother to make sure that she understood and believed the gospel, they knew her faith was real. "But let's do it another day, Mother," Sara said.

"No, I believe in Jesus with all my heart, and I want to be baptized today," she replied.

Knowing that their mother understood the meaning of baptism, and not having a good reason to wait, they returned to the living room to tell the group of their mother's decision. Everyone rejoiced.

But there was a problem. "Mother is too old to go down into the water," Maryam said. "She's never gone swimming. She won't even put her head completely into bath water! She's too afraid."

"And we don't have a bathtub in this apartment," Sara added. "In fact, we don't even have very much water reserved, because no water has come to our apartment building today! What shall we do?"

The believers discussed the problem. Is the actual baptism what saves someone, or is it the grace of Christ, received by faith? All agreed that the scriptures teach that baptism is not what saves us.

"And what do believers do in desert areas, where water is very scarce?" one of them asked. "Do they disobey Jesus' command to be baptized because they don't have enough water to go down into?" The

little house church was struggling with questions about baptism that Christians have asked for centuries.

“Let’s think about this together,” Eldar, one of the leaders said. “What is really happening at baptism?”

He paused as each member thought about it. Then he began, “I think several things are happening at each baptism, and these things are happening today in our house church. First, baptism gives the opportunity for your mother to obey Jesus. We should be so happy that she is not just believing in Jesus philosophically. She knows that Jesus said, ‘If you love me, you will obey my commandments.’ She is starting her life of obedience to Jesus today. Let’s not hinder that!

“Secondly, she who grew up Muslim, is saying that she is not ashamed of being called a follower of Jesus. That is a big step for her, especially at her age.

“She is clearly connecting herself with us as believers and with the Church around the world. Until today, we did not know if she had true faith or not. Her request for baptism shows us she truly believes.

“One more thing,” Eldar added. “This is Easter. Her baptism will always remind her that she has died with Christ and also that she is joined with him in His resurrection.”

By the time Eldar finished talking, the group was ready to baptize her. “But how?” they asked.

“I definitely prefer immersion baptism,” Eldar said. “But in this case, let’s place her on a chair in the bathroom. Then I will pour a pitcher of water over her head.”

“What!” Maryam exclaimed. “Mother will never allow a man in the bathroom with her, even when she is fully dressed.”

Eldar paused quietly. “Ok, before she goes into the bathroom, let’s ask her questions about her faith so she can testify to the whole group. Then the women will go into the bathroom and baptize her.”

The women objected again. “None of us are ordained. And where in the Bible does it say that women can baptize?”

Eldar answered, “I’m a house group leader, but I’m not ordained either! Where in the Bible does it say who must baptize? From reading the New Testament, I believe it is telling us that it is not so important WHO places the person into the water, or in your mother’s case, who

pours water over her head. What is essential is WHOSE NAME she is baptized into! That's the most important thing for all of us!"

Soon the mother was in the living room, confessing her faith in Jesus to the whole group. Then the women gathered in the bathroom with the mother sitting on a chair. "And now, we baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit..."

Tears mingled with the water running down the face of the elderly woman, and her eyes shone with joy. "Thank you, Jesus," she whispered.

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### *1. How soon after someone repents should we baptize them?*

Let's look first to the teachings of Jesus and the practices of the apostles. Jesus commanded that all who follow him should be baptized. (See Mt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16)

After Jesus ascended to the Father, when the apostles saw that someone repented and believed in Christ they baptized them right away. The apostles did not see baptism as a graduation ceremony for perfect believers. They knew that baptism was the place where Christ called sinners to repentance. New believers stepped into the water as sinners who were trusting God's grace. Baptism was one of the first steps of their new life in Christ.

In countries where Christians are persecuted it is common for churches to wait to make sure the new person is a true believer. They don't want a spy to ask for baptism and after the baptism report it to the police. In such situations, it is important to be careful. But we also don't want to turn away a true believer.

Some groups require a year or more of waiting, and while the new believers are waiting, they are taught the scriptures. Leaders believe the new believers need to prove that their faith is real. It is interesting that the apostles did not do that, nor did Jesus teach it.

Look at the following examples in the book of Acts and notice how quickly people were baptized:

- **Acts 2:41:** At Pentecost 3000 people hear Peter's sermon, believe in Jesus and are baptized.
- **Acts 8:36-38:** The Ethiopian eunuch is baptized by Philip.
- **Acts 10:44-48:** Cornelius' household is baptized.
- **Acts 16:22-34:** The Philippian jailer and his household are baptized.

All of these stories (and more in the book of Acts) involved immediate baptism when people responded to the gospel in repentance and faith. Even the persecutor of the Church, Saul of Tarsus was baptized just a few days after his repentance. Ananias said to him,

*And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name. (Acts 22:16, ESV)*

## ***2. Shouldn't there be some type of training for new believers before they are baptized?***

It is important that new believers understand what baptism means. Take them to God's word for this. Such training need not take months, however. Usually a few classes on baptism are enough. In ***50 Life Studies*** there are 2 Bible studies on water baptism and 3 studies on the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit.

## ***3. How do we plan for the baptism?***

Whether the baptism will be at a beach or a river or in a bathtub, some planning is helpful. Remind them to bring an extra set of clothes and a towel. It also is good to show the new believer beforehand how you will do the baptism as they enter into and rise from the water. However, the New Testament gives no detailed instructions, only the command to baptize disciples in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore, churches around the world have different baptism practices.

One practice that is often done is to give an opportunity for the new believer to proclaim his faith in Christ publicly. Jesus said in Matthew 10:32: *"Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven."* You could do this by asking them before they are baptized to share with the group their story of how they came to believe in Jesus. You could also ask them a few simple questions in front of the whole group, such as:

- Do you confess that you are a sinner and need forgiveness and salvation from God?
- Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior whom God has sent into the world? Do you believe His sacrifice on the cross was for you?
- Do you put your faith in Him alone for forgiveness of sins and eternal life?

After the baptism is a good time to take the Lord's Supper together (see chapter 9), and also to pray as a group for those who have been baptized.

## **How can your group grow in Christ?**

### **Application and Prayer**

1. Have you ever taught in your home group about baptism? Do your group members understand what it means? If not, you may want to go through the Bible study on baptism in this chapter with your whole fellowship.

In the New Testament, water baptism is often mentioned together with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist said,

*I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Luke 3:16, ESV)*

As you baptize new believers and pray over them, make sure they understand the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit that is available to them. As mentioned above, there are 2 studies on water baptism and 3 studies on the Holy Spirit in **50 Life Studies**.

2. Are there believers in your fellowship who are ready to be baptized? What must you as a fellowship do to prepare for it?
3. Pray for spiritual renewal to come to your group through your time of baptism.

## **6. Worshiping Together in Spirit and Truth**

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. (Romans 12:1)*

## Introduction

### **True Worship: Offering Ourselves to God**

God created all people for worship. Therefore, all people throughout the world worship something in some way. Those who do not worship the true God, Creator of the universe, will worship something that he has created. Many people worship themselves, seeking only their own happiness. To worship anything less than God himself is idolatry.

God's Word teaches us that what we focus on (worship) we will become like (Psalm 115:4-8). If we set our hope on things of this fallen world, it will bring death. If we make Jesus the center of our lives, loving and worshiping him, we will become more and more like him. With hearts full of joy and peace, we will know true life.

Before reading further, take a minute to discuss the answer to this question: What is true worship of God?

In this chapter, we will look at Biblical teaching on group worship and personal worship of God. We will see that worship is much more than rituals, and more than singing songs. In fact, many times people in the Bible worshiped God without music at all. Their worship came from hearts that were filled with gratitude to God for who he is and what he had done for them. Often worship in the Old Testament was expressed by sacrificing an animal. Since the time of Jesus' death and resurrection, his followers have offered a sacrifice of praise to him in thanks for his sacrifice for their sin. (See Heb. 13:15.)

And believers don't just worship once a week in a church service. They worship every day. The Holy Spirit helps them *to offer their lives daily to God* in worship, whether they are singing in church, busy at work, or sitting on a bus. (See Rom. 12:1) They worship by putting God first in their lives, loving him with all their hearts, souls, minds and strength, as Jesus taught.

In John 4 Jesus told the Samaritan woman that the Father desires worshipers who worship in spirit and in truth. Learning to worship in spirit and in truth is one of the most important things we can do when we gather together in our house churches. We will talk more about what this means in the pages that follow.

Most of all, God wants our hearts. As we offer ourselves daily to him, we learn true worship and enjoy friendship with God.

## **Bible Study**

### **A Key to True Worship: Remembering to Give Thanks**

**Opening Discussion:** What does this verse from Psalm 50:23 mean?

*The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God! (ESV)*

Gratefulness is an important aspect of true worship. Let's look at two passages that teach this truth.

#### **Read Luke 17:11-19**

1. How many lepers cried out to Jesus? (v. 12) What did they say to Jesus? (v. 13)

NOTE: Let's try to understand the culture in Jesus' time. Leprosy was a horrible disease that still affects people today. But beyond the physical aspect was a deeper wound: societal rejection. They were strictly taught that they were not to go near people (see v. 12: "they stood at a distance"). Wherever they went, they had to announce that they were lepers by crying out about themselves, "Unclean! Unclean!" so that people wouldn't come near. They lived a life of rejection and hopelessness.

2. There are accounts of lepers being healed in the Old Testament. To prove their healing, the law of Moses required them to go to the priest to be examined to see if a healing had actually taken place. It was like telling someone who has been healed today to go to a doctor to confirm the healing.

What did Jesus tell them to do? (v. 14) And what happened as they went?

Remember that now they are not only healed physically; their life of rejection is over. People will hug them and kiss them now. People will welcome them into their homes. People will speak kindly to them.

3. Did the same thing happen to all ten of the lepers?

What did the Samaritan leper do? (v. 15-16)

NOTE: Samaritans were not of the Jewish faith. Their instruction in following God was confused, not like the clear instruction Jews were trained in.

4. Read verses 17-18. What did the other nine do?

It seems that the other nine were Israelites. They would have been taught from the law to honor God for the blessings he gives. However, they neglected to give glory to God for their healing. What do you think is the reason they didn't think about returning to thank Jesus?

### Read Psalm 103

5. In verses 1-2, what is David telling himself?
6. In verses 3-5, David finds 6 different things to thank God for. After reading these verses several times, can you close the Bible and say them from memory?
7. In your own life, have you seen the Lord's blessings in similar ways to those expressed in these verses?

Think about these rich blessings from God. Think of *specific* times that you have experienced some of the things mentioned in verses 3-5. Can you speak with others in your group about these things?

8. Throughout our lives we grow in understanding what God is really like.

Read again verses 6-14. How do these verses help you to understand God's character better?

Do you have times when you turn off your phone and go into a quiet room (or go for a walk in a park) to give thanks to God for his rich blessings? Is your worship of him only when you are in the house fellowship, or do you enjoy thanking him, and giving glory to him when you are completely alone?

**End in Prayer:** Close this study by entering into a time of thanksgiving to God for his many blessings. You may want to keep Psalm 103 open. Reading it slowly can help you remember to return to Jesus (like the one leper) to thank him for who he is and the many things he does for you.

## *Stories from Christian History*

### **Three Stories about Worshiping God in Hard Times**

#### ***20th Century, China***

*China Cry*, a movie produced in 1990, is the true story of Nora Lam who comes to faith in Christ. It is at a time when persecution of the Church in China is intense. The atheistic state punishes severely those who claim faith in God. A very touching scene of the movie is when believers in Christ, meeting secretly, begin to offer up a song of praise to God.

The pastor tells them the song they will sing, and then begins to lead them, moving his hand as a choir director. All the people in the little gathering begin to sing enthusiastically, with joy on their faces... but there is no sound at all! No musical instruments are played. Only the believers' lips are moving... in complete silence. Because of neighbors and police nearby, they know they must be careful. The persecuted Chinese believers show us true worship from the heart!

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#### ***20th Century, India***

In the mid 1900's a young mother who was a missionary walked up a mountain in northern India. She was taking her 7-year-old daughter to a boarding school where she would live and study for nine months each year. At the time, this was the little girl's only option for an education. As they walked, the mother wept bitter tears. "How can I leave my little girl so far away from her family? How can I give her up?"

Then the Lord reminded her in her heart of Abraham's words to his servant as he went away to offer Isaac as a sacrifice: "[We] will go over there and worship." (*Genesis 22:5, ESV*) Just like Abraham's offering of his son, her giving up her little daughter for the sake of serving God was an act of worship, a gift that she could give to show her love for God. In her heart, she offered up her child to God. Suddenly, she was filled with joy and peace.

Years later, that same daughter returned to India, also to serve God as a missionary.

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## ***1<sup>st</sup> Century, Ancient Philippi***

In our third story, we will travel back to the 1<sup>st</sup> century, to remember a remarkable time of worship where God came down in power. The worshipers were under great stress, having been beaten severely that very day for their faith in Jesus. They were then bound with chains and put in prison. But their earnest prayers and open singing of hymns to God were heard by the other prisoners. Then something amazing happened:

*Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. (Acts 16:26)*

You may recognize this story as Paul and Silas in prison in Philippi. Their sincere worship of God while in pain from the beatings and while chained in prison is a story that is told around the world. The day was very dark and Paul and Silas had every reason to be depressed and defeated by fears and doubts. Perhaps their hymns were not lively and full of great emotional joy. They may have been Jewish hymns crying for God's help in a very hard situation, like some of the mournful Psalms. We don't know for sure. Paul and Silas may have been praising with joy, even though they could not see God's hand of help. Whatever the type of song, God saw their worship of him and their faith. Using the earthquake, He tore off their chains and opened the doors of the prison!

Through this, the jailer's whole family came to Christ. Probably some prisoners did, too! You can read this amazing story in Acts 16:22-40.

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**Throughout the Bible, we see worship of God outside of a traditional, church setting. Here are a few more stories from the Bible for your group to read together to better understand what true worship is:**

### ***Daniel 3***

In this story, Nebuchadnezzar made his people bow down and worship a statue that he set up, threatening them with death if they did not obey. Although the people bowed down, this was not true worship

from their hearts. In contrast to that, we see a beautiful example of true worship. Although they spoke no words of praise, nor sang any hymns to God, the three young Hebrew men offered up their lives by choosing to worship only the true God. This is the kind of worship we are called to in Romans 12:1.

### **2 Chronicles 20**

Here we read how King Jehoshaphat led the people of Israel in seeking God's help against a much more powerful enemy. When God told them not to be afraid because he would be with them,

*Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD. Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the LORD, the God of Israel, with very loud voice. (2 Chron. 20:18-19)*

God miraculously intervened to defeat Israel's enemies as they praised him. In this story we see that they praised and worshiped God **before** they saw the answer to their prayer!

### **Luke 7:36-50**

Here we read of an unusual way that one woman worshiped Jesus. With a heart overflowing with love and gratitude, she washed his feet with her tears and anointed them with ointment.

## Frequently Asked Questions

***1. Our worship used to be full of joy and life. Recently it seems that our hearts are cold toward God and our prayers have no life in them. We sing songs, but not with the happiness we had before. What is wrong?***

What you are experiencing can happen in any church or home group. A burning fire can grow cold. There is a danger of “acting out” our faith in superficial ways when our hearts are not engaged in true worship. Jesus rebuked religious leaders for this by quoting the prophet Isaiah:

*These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain... (Matthew 15:8-9)*

All believers go through times when God seems far away and they are not experiencing the joy they had at the beginning of their walk with him. At these times, they need to persevere in faith, believing that God has not left them, even when they don't feel his presence. They need to fill their minds with the truths of God's Word. They must call out for the Holy Spirit to strengthen them to fight off the lies of the enemy. Then they can offer a sincere sacrifice of praise and worship to God, in spite of feeling that he is far away.

But there may be other reasons that believers experience joyless worship. Here are two common reasons:

- 1) **We keep sin hidden in our hearts, thinking that it doesn't affect our worship.** Psalm 66:18 says, “*If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*” Do your group worship times include moments of quiet for confession of sin? This allows each worshiper to release guilt to Christ for cleansing and for the joy of fellowship with God to return.

One common way that sin is held in hearts is when brothers and sisters have wronged each other but have not sincerely asked for (or given) forgiveness. Jesus taught us this:

*Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24)*

Read the above verse again slowly and think about how important human relationships are to God, especially among brothers and sisters. God puts them in higher priority than our gifts to him in worship.

- 2) **Another reason the fire goes out in our home groups is that we have slowly moved away from the gospel of grace.** The scriptures teach us that our walk with God is by faith in his grace from first to last. Sometimes churches talk so much about rules that they become “legalistic”—in other words, the people begin to think that the Christian faith is simply about teaching what we must do and not do.

When we begin to think and act in this way, our worship times drift away from every person expressing sincere gratitude to God for his mercy and grace. Our thoughts move away from the greatness and holiness of God and his deep love for lost humanity shown to us by the sacrifice of his Son for our sin. We either boast quietly to ourselves that we are better than the others around us, or we live in condemnation and fear that we will experience God’s wrath. We’ve returned to performance-based religion. Our faith is in ourselves, not in Christ’s salvation. That is not Christian thinking.

Taking the Lord’s Supper regularly in our home groups is one way to re-emphasize the beauty of the gospel and refresh our faith. Also, as we baptize new believers, we are reminded of God’s amazing grace to all of us.

For a more in-depth understanding of what true salvation is, go to chapter 4, “Understanding God’s Wonderful Gift of Salvation.”

## ***2. Our new group doesn’t have anyone to play piano or guitar for our worship time. What should we do?***

In the New Testament there is no mention of musical instruments being used in worship, probably because most home fellowships had no instruments. We do know that the early believers sang songs (see 1 Corinthians 14:26). In the Old Testament, many of the Psalms speak of praising God with musical instruments, and it’s wonderful when people in our fellowship have musical talents they can offer as part of our group worship. However, group members need to understand that true worship does not depend on music. John 4 can help us understand what is the kind of worship that pleases God.

The woman at the well in John 4 thought it was most important to worship God in the right location.

*Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem. (Jn 4:20)*

Jesus answered her in these helpful words:

*Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:21-24, ESV)*

Our home groups need to understand that these two things are essential for true worship:

- 1) **Worshiping God in spirit**— The location of our worship (a certain city, a certain building or holy place) is physical. Many other things that we do in worship are also physical: lighting a candle, kneeling, playing a guitar, or raising our hands. Such actions may help us in worship, but God is looking at the heart. True worshipers understand that worship in spirit means we not only honor God with our lips on Sunday; we offer our time, our energy, our possessions, our thoughts and actions to him every day.

Look at this verse in Romans where the apostle Paul explains that spiritual worship means offering ourselves wholeheartedly to God:

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Romans 12:1, ESV)*

- 2) **Worshiping God in truth**— We need to worship God in the way that he has revealed himself to us in his word—the way he really is. This includes his eternal existence before he created anything, his unlimited power and wisdom in his creation of everything, his ability to be everywhere and to see all things, and his perfection in holiness and love, which means he is the perfect judge of all. The God of the universe does all things perfectly, even though we may not understand everything in this life. At the Olympics, an audience jumps to its feet to applaud a gold-medal gymnast who per-

forms his or her routine with perfection. “Bravo! Unbelievable! Hooray!” How much more should we worship God for his absolute perfection in everything that he is and does!

To worship God in truth, we must also realize that it is only by the sacrifice of Jesus to pay for our sin that we come into the presence of the holy God. We have nothing in ourselves to offer to make us worthy. And so we come with humble and grateful hearts to worship the Father and the Son, who have shown us such amazing love. (See Hebrews 10:19-23.)

All through the Bible the Lord clearly declares that he wants us to have an accurate understanding of what he is like. (See Jeremiah 9:23,24) And, amazingly, he wants us to know him personally! (See John 17:3) The better we know God, the more we will trust him from our hearts and worship in truth. To study this subject more in depth, see Bible study #34 in *50 Life Studies* on worshipping God in spirit and truth.

### ***3. Christians around the world worship in many different ways. How do we know which is the correct way?***

Yes, it is true that people in cultures all around the world worship Jesus in their own distinct way. And not only cultures, church traditions (i.e. denominations) usually have their own style of worship. Some worship with songs and dancing, while shouting their praises to God. Others worship quietly with soft music and meditation, sometimes with the people on their knees, sometimes with much silence as they think about God’s greatness. Of course, persecution also may pressure us to more quiet ways of worship.

In the Bible we see many different ways that people worshiped God. (See the story section above for examples.) While we may each have certain types of worship that we prefer because they speak deeply to us personally, we can also learn from others who worship in ways that differ from ours.

However we choose to worship, we must be careful not to judge others in their style of worship. The Bible warns us of the serious consequences of that. (See 2 Samuel 6:14-23 where David’s wife criticized him for the way he worshiped God.) The attitude of each person’s heart is what is most important to God, and only he knows the heart. We must also remember that over the years, styles of worship can become traditions that can lead us to worship God with our lips when

our hearts are far from Him. Jesus accused the Pharisees of this. (See Matthew 15:8-9.)

In 1 Corinthians 14, we find some instructions for worship in the small group setting, such as the home fellowship. In a large church this may not be possible, but here Paul urges the Corinthians who worship in homes to give opportunity for everyone in the group to minister to one another. The entire meeting does not need to be dominated by one or two people. Here is how Paul summed up his instructions:

*What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. 1 Corinthians 14:26)*

It seems that the Lord's focus is not on the type of music that is sung, or whether people sit or stand or kneel, etc. The above verse tells us he wants each member to contribute the gifts God has given them for the growth of the whole body.

## **How can your group grow in Christ?**

### ***Application and Prayer***

1. Think about your weekly gatherings and discuss the questions below together:

Do you think that worship of the Lord in spirit and truth is happening in your weekly meetings? (You may want to read again question 2, in the Frequently Asked Questions above that explains what Jesus taught about this.)

Do you think you are truly worshipping God from the heart, or is it just a time for singing songs? Does your group understand that they are also worshipping when they give attention to the teaching of the word of God, or when they give offerings?

2. Ask the group members if they are also growing in worship when they are alone during the week. Do they enjoy giving thanks and praise to God for His kindness and mercy to them? Are they regularly offering themselves to the Lord, as it says in Romans 12:1?

3. Discuss:

How can your group grow in worship so that you are honoring the Lord for His greatness and goodness when you meet together each week?

Look back over this chapter, especially the scripture passages that are given. Which ones do you think might be most helpful for what your group is presently experiencing? Plan to study these passages together as a fellowship in the coming weeks.

4. Take time to pray together for all that you have discussed.

## 7. God's Word: Our Daily Bread

*Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matt. 4:4)*

(Jesus, praying for His disciples before He went to the cross)—

*"Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth."  
(John 17:17, ESV)*

(Speaking of the new believers who came to faith on the day of Pentecost)—

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching...  
(Acts 2:42)*

## **Introduction**

### **Learning Together from God's Word**

The good news of Jesus Christ changed the lives of his disciples so radically that they took it everywhere. They preached with power, and lost people trusted in the Savior. In Jesus' name they healed the sick and set people free from demons. They even suffered persecution and death for believing and preaching that Jesus Christ was Lord of all.

This WORD about Jesus Christ was the power that started a movement which has now spread to all nations of the world. We have that same Word in the writings of the early apostles, telling us what the gospel of Jesus Christ really is. This same message can start a movement of faith in your nation, too, and your small group can be a part of the movement.

Think about the Holy Book this way: As you read and study God's Word together in your home fellowship, you are inviting the ancient men and women of faith to visit your home group and share what they learned with you. It is as if you are sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing Him teach and seeing Him heal with authority. The same faith that empowered the early church can overflow into your group.

Every week, it is important that the Word of God be at the center of your gatherings. Every member of your group needs to hear the Word, meditate on it, discuss its truths, and OBEY what is learned. God himself through the Holy Spirit is your teacher when you learn from his Word.

Paul exhorted Timothy, “

*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. (1Tim. 4:13, ESV)*

Each week as you give careful attention to the Word of God in your meetings together, you will find yourselves growing into maturity and being changed into the image of Christ.

*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17, ESV)*

This chapter will help your group learn God's word more deeply. God bless you as you grow together!

## **Bible Study**

### **The Power of God's Word to Change Lives**

**Opening Discussion:** How has hearing and believing God's Word affected your life?

**Read Acts 17:10-12.**

1. How were the Bereans more diligent than the Thessalonians in receiving Paul's word? (v. 11)

Paul and Silas were proclaiming to Jews in a synagogue that the long-awaited Messiah had come and that Jesus was the Messiah. The Bereans didn't accept that word immediately. Instead, they searched the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah to find out if Paul was teaching the truth from God's word.

How can you in your home fellowship show that you are diligent, like the Bereans, when you study the scriptures?

**Read 2 Tim. 3:14-4:5.**

2. Where does scripture's life come from? (3:16). What are 4 purposes of scripture that Paul mentions? (v. 16)
3. Paul tells Timothy to be prepared at all times to do something. What must he do? (4:1-2) What should Timothy's attitude be as he preaches? (v. 2)
4. Read 4:3-4 again.

How do these two verses describe the day we are living in now? How will studying God's Word in our home fellowships save some people from this rebellious spirit?

5. In verse 5 Paul tells Timothy how to resist this spirit that rejects God's truth. How can Timothy stand strong?

**Read Heb. 4:12-13**

6. To what does the writer compare God's Word? (v. 12)

How has God's Word judged the thoughts and attitudes of your own heart?

When you study God's Word in your home fellowship, do you keep in mind its power to search deep into people's hearts and reveal secret things?

**Read Luke 6:46-49**

7. Why do you think we need to learn the truth presented in this parable in our home groups?

How can we warn group members who only listen to God's Word but don't obey it?

**End in Prayer:** As you end this study, take time to pray that you and your group members would be people who know God's Word and who obey it from the heart.

**Go Deeper in this subject:** Here are three studies from the book *50 Life Studies* that you can do with your group to help you see the importance of God's Word:

- Study 9: "Receive the Word in a Good and Noble Heart"
- Study 26: "Make Time to Get to Know God"
- Study 36: "Overcome Temptation by the Word of God"

*A story from Christian history*  
*16th Century, England*

**The Battle for God’s Word in the English Language**

One man who loved and valued the Word of God even more than his own life was William Tyndale. Born in England in 1494, he grew up during a time in history when the truth of the Scriptures was mostly unknown throughout England. Although most people were part of the Church, they were not hearing the true gospel because the priests themselves often did not know it.

As in Germany (see the story about Martin Luther in chapter 4), so also in the churches in England, God’s word was read and preached in Latin, which the common people did not know. The Bible was not available in English; in fact, it was punishable by death to translate the Bible into English—or even to own it in English. For the people of England, God’s truth was locked behind closed doors, and they had no key.

But God was about to open a door for them. William Tyndale was a young man uniquely gifted by God for the task of translating the Bible. He was a genius when it came to learning languages. In fact, he spoke eight languages so fluently that people said it was hard to tell which one was his mother tongue! Among these languages were ancient Hebrew and Greek, which he learned so that he could study God’s Word in the original languages.

The more he read and studied the Old and New Testaments, the more he found the life and freedom that only Christ could bring. And the more he found life and freedom, the more the fire burned within him to bring this good news to the common people. A passion began to grow in Tyndale to translate the Bible into English and to get it into the hands of everyone, both rich and poor.

The Church leaders of his day, however, did not share William’s love for God’s Word. He once got into an argument with a church leader who insisted that the Pope’s laws were more important than God’s Law. William replied furiously, “I reject the Pope and all his laws! If God allows me to live long enough, I will make sure that a boy who plows in the field will know more of the scriptures than you!”

Of course, statements like this did not make Tyndale a friend of the church leaders. When he sought permission from church authorities to translate the Bible into English, they rejected his appeal. Over the next several years both church and political authorities would more and more become his enemies.

Realizing that he would never be able to work openly in England, William Tyndale moved to Germany where he went into hiding. There he began to work diligently on translating the Bible. He often had to move from one town to another to escape the men who were sent by the king of England to find and kill him. In spite of these troubles, in a little more than a year he finished his translation of the New Testament into English.

Hundreds of copies were printed on the Gutenberg printing press, which had been invented less than 100 years before. These were then smuggled back into England on merchant ships. As the merchants sold the New Testaments in England, many were bought up by Church officials and burned. But the money received from these purchases was sent back to Germany, where more New Testaments were printed! In this way, little by little, the Word of God began to spread throughout England.

Tyndale then gave himself with great energy to the translation of the Old Testament. He was translating from the ancient language of Hebrew (the original language of the Old Testament) and it was long and tiring work. Just imagine, working alone day after day to translate the long, and often confusing books of the Old Testament. But his deep love for God and for his Word drove him to continue.

William Tyndale was living in Antwerp, Belgium, at this time, where he thought he could enjoy a little more freedom. Sadly, he was mistaken. For most of his adult life, he had lived with the knowledge that he was being hunted by men who hated him and wanted him dead.

Finally, in 1535, he was betrayed by a man he thought was a close friend. Tyndale was arrested and put in prison. For sixteen months he suffered greatly there. His prison cell was cold, damp, and dark (he was not allowed to have a lamp), and his health was poor. Besides this, he suffered with loneliness and terrible boredom, since he was not allowed to have any of his precious books.

In October of 1536, William Tyndale went through his final suffering. His prison cell was opened and the guards led him into the open air for

the first time in many months. There a crowd was gathered to watch as he was led to a pile of wood and tied to a pole. A herald shouted William's crime before the people who were watching. The crime? He had translated God's Word into the English language. Then the torch was placed on the wood pile and William Tyndale was burned alive. As the flames leaped up, he shouted out his final words: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes!"

Less than three years later, a copy of the Bible in English was placed in every church throughout England by order of the king, Henry VIII. Although this was done for political reasons and not out of love for God, nevertheless, it was the beginning of the fulfillment of William Tyndale's dream.

In the years to follow, hundreds, then thousands, then millions of people throughout the English-speaking world would read the Bible in their own language and come to know and love the God of William Tyndale. No other book has influenced the English people more than the Bible.

In Psalm 119:162, David wrote this: "*I rejoice in your word like one who discovers a great treasure.*" William Tyndale loved God and treasured his Word even more than life itself.

Do you have God's Word in your language? Is it like great treasure to you?

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **1. Why is the Bible so important in the home fellowship?**

The Bible—the Old Testament and New Testament (Incl)—is the foundation of the Christian faith. If we want to be true followers of Jesus, we need to know and follow the scriptures. People who do not know the scriptures can easily begin to teach their own ideas and wander from the true message of the gospel.

In the Bible study above we looked at the apostle Paul’s exhortation to Timothy. Let’s now take a closer look to discover four reasons the Word of God is important.

#### **2 Timothy 3:14-17:**

*[14]But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, [15]and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16]All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, [17]so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

#### **1) As we learn the Holy Scriptures, they make us “wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.”** (Read v. 15 again.)

The entire purpose of the scriptures could be summed up in verse 15. Jesus Christ came into the world to save us from sin and darkness and bring us back to God. He is the way, the truth and the life. (John 14:6) We learn this from the scriptures.

#### **2) All the scriptures are inspired by God to teach us how to live in God’s righteousness.** (Read v. 16 again.)

Besides just coming to Christ in the beginning of our Christian life, we must learn God’s way to live our daily lives. Paul teaches Timothy that all of us need teaching. We sometimes need rebuking and correcting. And we need to be trained, like an athlete, in how to live righteous lives.

#### **3) The scriptures (through the ministry of the Holy Spirit) supply us with all that we need to serve Him and His kingdom.** (Read v. 17 again.)

We used to serve Satan and his dark kingdom. Now the Lord has called us to serve the kingdom of light. The Lord has many good works which he wants to lead us into, and the scriptures will be our guide.

- 4) **Because of the above three truths, we need to continue to learn and obey the teachings of Christ.** (Read verse 14 again.)

This exhortation is not just for individuals, but for home groups who present the message of Jesus each week. Jesus taught that his true disciples will continue in the teachings he gave them. That's why Paul teaches Timothy the same thing.

## ***2. How can I teach the Bible in a home fellowship when I don't know it very well myself?***

It is important to remember that the Holy Spirit is our most important Teacher. We should begin every study of God's Word by asking him to lead us and speak to us. He will be faithful to feed hungry hearts, even if the leader does not know a lot.

Also, it is not necessary for one person to preach or teach a message to the group every week. In a home fellowship, there is opportunity for everyone to read God's word together and discuss it as they sit around a table or in a circle.

Below are 3 methods to help your group study God's word together. As you read through these, ask God to help you discern what might work well with your group. You may want to use one method for a time and then change and use a different one for a while. How we study God's Word is not as important as that we are learning, and allowing God to change us through what we learn.

### **1. READ THE BIBLE TOGETHER AND ASK QUESTIONS**

Start by reading a passage of scripture together as a group. Read it slowly several times and talk about what you are learning. Ask: "What is the writer trying to say?" Instead of just one person preaching the text and everyone sitting silent and passive, understanding comes more by asking questions about the text and letting individuals think and talk about what they are learning.

Here are some simple questions suggested by the Discovery Bible Study method:

- **What does this passage teach us about God?**

- **What does this passage teach us about ourselves?**
- **What do you like about the text?**
- **What in these verses bothers you? (Perhaps something in these verses convicts you of sin, or shows you that you are not whole-hearted in your love for others?)**

Of course, your group should also ask questions that come naturally from the members of your group (both believers and nonbelievers). Every time you open God's Word in your group can be different, but the important thing is that everyone is allowed to think, ask questions, and discuss what they are learning.

**Two final questions you should always ask in your group:**

- **What will you do with what you are learning, that is, how will you change?**

The religious leaders of Jesus' day liked to teach God's Word to others, but they themselves did not obey it. That is called hypocrisy. These leaders looked religious, but they were dead inside their hearts.

The Christian faith is about our hearts growing bigger in love and faith, not about our heads growing bigger with knowledge. As we follow what God teaches us, our faith in the power of the gospel will grow and our joy will increase. As followers of Jesus, we should always keep a soft heart to learn more from him and from others regardless of our age!

- **With whom will you share what you've learned?**

Every member of your group will find new people to lead to Christ if they will step out and talk with others about what they are learning in God's word. Everyone can learn to make disciples of others. And from that, new house fellowships can start!

**2. USE BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES FROM THE WEBSITE**  
**[www.learnhisways.com](http://www.learnhisways.com) .**

Many home fellowships around the world are using prepared Bible studies that lead them into fulfilling group study. The website above offers this kind of Bible studies.

With these studies, the leader simply has the group read the Bible text and follow the questions in the Bible study step by step. This is similar

to the first method above, but the questions are designed especially for that passage of scripture.

**Two books on that website are especially helpful for new groups:**

- *From the Teachings of Jesus the Messiah: 50 Life Studies*
- *Exploring the Ancient Book of **Genesis*** (14 studies)

For more information about this website, see Appendix A, “Resources.”

### **3. TELL THE STORIES OF THE BIBLE**

Much of the Bible consists of stories that show how God worked in the lives of people throughout history. These stories teach us his truths and lead us to Jesus, the focus of all of scripture. They stay in our minds and hearts and give us faith that God cares about us, too. During the time of the Old and New Testaments, very few people had access to written scripture. Therefore, truth was often passed from generation to generation by telling the stories of the Bible.

Even in our modern time, many people find listening to and learning Bible stories an enjoyable way to grow in God’s Word. This is especially true for individuals or groups who have difficulty reading or do not read at all.

In Appendix B you will find a list of stories from the Old Testament and New Testament that you could use in your group. Some suggestions of how to use the stories are also given there.

## **How can your group grow in Christ?**

### ***Application and Prayer***

Take some time to discuss the following questions:

1. Do you personally love God's Word? How important is it to you to take time throughout the week to read and study it? Are you applying what you learn to your life?
2. What would you like to change in your own life to help you grow in your knowledge of God's Word? Take some time to pray about this.
3. How are you helping your fellowship members grow in their love for God's Word? Take some time to think through each of the following questions:
  - Is studying God's word an important part of your meeting times?
  - Do you encourage them to think deeply for themselves about what you are studying together, or do you just tell them your own thoughts?
4. Look back over the three methods of Bible study suggested above in the Frequently Asked Questions. Choose one or more of these to help your fellowship go deeper in God's Word.
5. Take some time to pray for all the members of your group, including yourself, that God would help all of you to grow in both knowledge and application of his Word.

## 8. Passing the Gospel on to the Children

*People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant.*

*He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” (Mark 10:13-15)*

## **Introduction:**

### **Will You train the Children?**

Someone may ask: “How many seeds are in one apple?” That’s not difficult to discover, is it? But here’s a mysterious question: “How many apples are in one seed?” One seed’s potential is very great.

We might make the same comparison with our home groups. “How many children do you have in your home group?” If your group has several families, you might have five or more children. Counting them is not difficult.

But here’s a more difficult question, “Can you measure the influence of these children in this world for God’s kingdom in future years?”

Have you ever thought about what a treasure the children in home groups and churches are? Do you see it as your privilege and responsibility to raise them up to follow Jesus?

Jesus taught us that we are to be good stewards of the gifts that he has given us. Children are priceless gifts from God. Jesus expects us to welcome the children in our home groups as real people who need his salvation just like we do. How will you train them in the ways of God? Do you look at them as seeds of righteousness that will be later planted in the fields of this world?

Take a minute to read and discuss Mark 10:13-15 on the previous page. Do you sometimes think about children in the same way that Jesus’ disciples did?

This chapter will help you and your home group to value and train the children God has given to you.

## **Bible Study**

### **God Calls the Boy Samuel**

**Opening Discussion:** Do you think children have the capacity to have a relationship with God? Explain your answer.

You may want to tell about any experiences you had with God when you were young, or perhaps tell about conversations you have had with children about knowing God.

Our study will focus on 1 Samuel 3, but we will first read 1 Samuel 1 to understand the context of the story.

#### **Read 1 Samuel 1:1-28**

1. For what reason is Hannah grieving? (v. 6)
2. Read verses 10 and 11 again. What did Hannah ask for, and what did she promise the Lord?

What could happen in our nation if believers dedicated their children to the Lord from an early age?

3. God heard her prayer and gave her a son. What name did she give him? (See verse 20)
4. Read verses 24-28. When did she take Samuel to the house of the Lord? What did she say to Eli, the priest?

#### **Read 1 Samuel 3:1-21**

5. What was Samuel doing in God's temple under Eli's leadership? (v. 1)

Samuel was faithfully doing his duties in the temple, "ministering before the Lord" under Eli's direction. This young boy was given responsibilities in the worship of God.

Are children allowed to participate in worship in your home fellowship? Do you involve them in reading scripture, helping to lead worship, or telling a testimony of God's faithfulness?

Why is it important that children know that we value their participation in our home group?

6. What happened during the night? (Read verses 3-4)

When God called Abraham (Genesis 22:1), his response was "Here I am." Others throughout scripture responded in the same

way: a few examples are Moses (Exodus 3:4) and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8) in the Old Testament, and Ananias (Acts 9:10) in the New Testament. It basically meant, "I am ready to serve you."

7. Here Samuel does not know it is the voice of the Lord, so he runs to Eli, the priest. What does Eli tell him on two occasions? (Read v. 5-6)

What does Eli tell Samuel the 3<sup>rd</sup> time? (v. 8-9)

Are the parents in your home group paying attention to what is going on spiritually with their children? Are they noticing spiritual openness to God? When they talk with the children, are the parents listening carefully to see if God is moving in the children's lives?

8. Samuel returned and did what Eli told him to do. When the Lord called again, Samuel said, "*Speak, for your servant is listening.*" What did the Lord tell Samuel was going to happen? (v. 11-14)

Eli had already heard this word of judgment before in chapter 2. What Samuel told him confirmed it as more certain.

For this first time of hearing God speak to him, did Samuel receive an easy word from God or a difficult one? Would you have given such a word to a child? (Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived many years later, says that Samuel was 12 years old when this happened. But the text does not say his exact age.)

9. Looking carefully at verses 19-21, describe how Samuel grew in hearing from God and delivering God's word to the people?

What was the response of the people? (v. 20)

10. In the last verse of chapter 3 ( see verse 21), the writer tells us that God revealed himself to Samuel by his word. Here we see that Samuel was growing to know God by the word that God spoke to him. In the same way week by week in our home groups, we and our children learn what God is like especially by the teachings of scripture which he has given to us.

Do you believe the children in your group can learn God's ways through scripture? How important is it to your group to make sure that children are taught the word of God each week?

**End in Prayer:** Take time now to pray for the children who attend your home group.

## *A Story from Christian History*

### *20<sup>th</sup> century, An Orphanage in China*

#### **Children are Visited by Outpourings of God's Spirit**

Throughout history, from Bible times to the present age, there have been incidences where God has poured out his Spirit in unusual ways to revive his people and to start new waves of kingdom growth in the world. These waves did not just touch adults. The Spirit moved among children, too.

Jonathan Edwards, writing on the revivals of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in America wrote:

*The influences of God's Holy Spirit have also been very remarkable on children.*

The great evangelist D.L. Moody said this:

*The devil has been very crafty to make us believe that children cannot understand religious things... Why would Christ have made a child the standard of faith (Luke 18:17) if he had known that children were not able to understand his words?*

Children *are* able to understand the things of God! Here's one amazing example: In the 20<sup>th</sup> century a powerful revival among children shows us that children can grasp profound spiritual things and learn to follow Jesus passionately at an early age. This revival is recorded in the book, *Visions Beyond the Veil* by H.A. Baker.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Baker and his wife had traveled to the Yunnan Province of China in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They started a Christian orphanage, called the Abdullam Rescue Mission. The orphan children, mostly boys from ages 6 to 18, had been beggars, many of them part of children's gangs on the street, stealing and finding ways to survive, having no education or moral training.

At the orphanage Mr. and Mrs. Baker taught the children the Bible and the message of the good news of Jesus Christ. Some of the children had given their lives to Christ. Others were not born again yet but were growing in their knowledge of scripture.

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<sup>2</sup> This story is retold from the book, *Visions Beyond the Veil*, by H.A. Baker, Minneapolis: Osterhus Publishing House, 1950.

The revival among the children started as a morning prayer meeting was ending. Some of the children had already left to begin their academic studies in the school room, but some continued praying earnestly. The Holy Spirit's presence began to be felt intensely, with strong conviction of sin among the boys.

Soon many of the students were face down on the floor, crying to the Lord for forgiveness for their sins. Mr. Baker, slipped out of the prayer room and went to the school room to tell those boys who had left what was happening in the prayer meeting. He told them they were free to return for prayer if they wanted to.

The Chinese teacher who was in the school room was soon left alone, as all the boys returned to the prayer meeting. The Chinese teacher, a man who did not know Christ, started to go home. But soon Mr. Baker saw that the teacher had returned and was in the back of the prayer meeting. Mr. Baker writes that he saw the teacher *"for the first time in his life, kneeling down and trying to pray."* It was obvious that the Spirit of God was dealing heavily with the man.

*"It was not long before I noticed the teacher with arms uplifted, tears on his face, pleading with the Lord to forgive his sins, which I heard him say were 'so very, very many.'"*

The man was a proud man and it wasn't easy for him to humble himself in the presence of the children. This was, writes Mr. Baker, "a real Holy Spirit conviction of sin."

The children were worshiping with tears, spontaneous songs and wholehearted surrender to Jesus. The Holy Spirit was touching hearts in ongoing waves of the Spirit, helping them to go deeper than just a mental understanding of Christ's death for them. The Spirit touched the eyes of their hearts, helping them to see God's eternal love in the death of Jesus for them.

Mr. Baker continues,

*The meeting went on hour after hour; the children showing no desire to leave. I had nothing to do or say; the Lord seemed to have complete control; I just tried to keep out of His way.*

This continued over many weeks. Sometimes the children were found in the chapel late into the night, missing their sleep.

Classes were lessened at times by the adult leaders who recognized this was a special move of God. But at times during those weeks

school continued, and the children attended to their chores as usual. The waves of the Spirit continued among them off and on over the weeks ahead. During these times the children were visited with visions, revelations, and various gifts of the Spirit in their midst. Mr. Baker tells that the children were simply seeking Jesus to know him better when these supernatural manifestations came upon them.

Week after week the boys on their own accord went to the prayer meeting (at the scheduled morning time, after school and in the evenings) to seek the Lord, to enjoy communion with Jesus. His presence was so heavy and so satisfying. They were daily drinking of Jesus, who gives rivers of living water (John 7:37,38).

And the revival did not just stay at the orphanage. The children went out into the streets to preach where they once had been thieves. One by one, the boys would step forward and proclaim the gospel of Jesus to adults and other children who would stop to listen. They called the people to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. They spoke with power and authority.

Throughout the history of revivals God has not forgotten the little ones. Charles Spurgeon, the great English preacher said this:

*In the hand of God's Spirit, a child's capacity for faith is, in some respects, greater than that of a grown-up. Children believe the word of God to be the very Truth of God. The Gospel is fact to them and they seem to see it clearly before their very eyes.*

As you pray for the children of your home fellowship and give attention to teaching them God's Word and leading them in worship, you will see God nurture this "*capacity for faith*" that Charles Spurgeon mentions above.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### ***1. How can we help the members of our group to see the importance of teaching the children?***

Sadly, many home groups do not train the children in God's ways; they only train the adults. Adults usually want uninterrupted time to hear the word of God for themselves, and therefore the children are sent into another room to watch a movie or play games. This can happen for months, even years, and the children hear very little of the gospel.

The Bible teaches parents that it is their responsibility to train their children to walk with God. However, most parents don't automatically know how to do this, and therefore they need help. The home fellowship is where they will learn these things. Below are some ideas on how to teach the parents. The singles in your group can also learn!

Begin by studying with the adults what God's word teaches about raising children for God.

In ***50 Life Studies***, you will find study #49: "Teach Children to Love and Serve Jesus." You could do that study in your home fellowship or in small groups during the week. Also, if you haven't done it in your weekly fellowship, you could do the study in this chapter on the young boy Samuel learning to hear God's voice. And you could read in your group the story above about the revival among children in China to help inspire them.

Here are a few others passages to help believers (parents and singles) understand the importance of training the children in the homes and also in the home group:

- Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 6:20-25
- Psalm 78:1-8
- Ephesians 6:1-4

### ***2. We have children from the ages of babies to teenagers in our home fellowship. How can we make sure that all ages are learning from God's Word in ways they can understand?***

First, it's important to know that there are no absolute rules in the Bible on this subject. In the New Testament times, however, it is likely that the whole family participated in the gathering together: the wor-

ship with songs, the prayer times, and the teaching. We don't know for sure, but probably the house fellowship gatherings at first were very informal. They were a family who ate together (and the Lord's Supper was often a part of the meal), and they sat together as a whole family, including the children, to listen to and discuss God's word and to pray together. It was informal, as conversations in homes are.

Children can often be trained to listen and learn with the adults. They will feel welcome when adults ask them to help with the scripture readings, or to act out the Bible story in a drama. When asking the group questions for discussion, leaders can form some of the questions in simple ways so that the children can participate also.

If you choose to send the children into another room during the time in God's word, all parents should be encouraged to help carry the responsibility of training the children. If they take turns with the children week by week, then no one will miss the adult Bible study every time, and they will all have the opportunity to grow in learning how to train their own children in God's ways.

### ***3. What do we teach the children, and how?***

#### **Bible Stories**

In Appendix B you will find a list of stories from God's word that can be read or told as a story or acted out in a drama. Get the children involved in the drama; they will love it! You could also have them each draw a picture of what they are learning. You could pick out a verse or two from the story and have them each memorize it.

#### **Prayer**

Also, teach the children to pray. First, teach them what Jesus taught on prayer. For help with this, see the 5 lessons in the Prayer section of ***50 Life Studies***. Help them learn to talk to God as their loving heavenly Father. Ask the children what makes them sad, or what they are afraid of. They may not think deeply about their problems, but they still have things that concern them.

#### **For example:**

- **When we teach God's word to children, they are convicted of their sins by the Holy Spirit just as adults are.** Teach them to confess their sins, to trust in Jesus for forgiveness and cleansing, to ask for the Holy Spirit to come and change them.

- **Like adults, children have hopes and desires, as well as disappointments. What's on their minds?** Adult believers can help them pray in faith, using Jesus' teachings as a guide.
- **Sometimes children are ridiculed at school by other children or by teachers.** These wounds need healing, and the ministry of prayer is powerful to guide them to Jesus the healer. You can also help them pray for those who persecute them, as Jesus taught.
- **Children sometimes see difficult things, like alcoholism, drug addiction or fighting, up close.** They know it is destroying that person but don't know what to do to help. You can pray with them.
- **What other needs do they see around them? Do they have a friend or relative who is sick or has some other need?** Help them pray also for people they know who need to know Jesus.

**Remember:** Children's faith will grow as they see answers to their prayers!

### Songs

Children love to sing! And this is a great way to help them remember truths about God's love for them. Look in songbooks or on the internet for simple songs you can teach them. (See "Resources," Appendix A.)

Of course, there are many other ways you can teach the truths of God's Word to children: through games; through crafts that they make; through walks in nature; through special projects you do together. As you pray for the children, expect God to give you creative ideas.

### *4. We have very few resources for teaching the Bible to children. What can we do?*

If your language is not a minority language, often you will find that there are more resources available than you think. Even smaller languages are getting more Bible literature in their languages each year.

Ask other believers to help you find resources for training children. Often there are videos, Bible story books for children, etc, that are available. If you need funds, then use some of your weekly offering to buy the supplies. (See chapter 11, "Discovering the Blessing of Giving.") And of course, don't forget to search on the internet. Each year, more and more becomes available to help in this important task of training children. (See Appendix A, "Resources," for suggestions.)

Resources can be helpful, but don't underestimate the power of children's imagination. It is one of their greatest gifts. Review the question above ("What do we teach the children, and how?") for ideas that will cost you nothing, or very little.

### ***5. What is our most important goal in training our children?***

Psalm 78 talks about the great things that God did in former times and how important it is to pass these stories on to our children. **Notice our goal is found in the bold print below:**

*We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done... he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments... (Ps 78:4-7, ESV)*

All adults who work with children should remember this: Every child, like every adult, needs to know that God loves them personally. He knows their name. He knows their hopes and dreams. He cares about the things that make them sad, and he hears their prayers. Most importantly, he came to this world in the form of Jesus Christ, to give his life as a sacrifice for their sin.

Don't think that children do not feel their sin. As we tell the good news of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will work in their hearts to awaken an awareness of sin. The gospel will create faith in their hearts to look to Christ, their sacrifice for sin, and be saved.

Every home fellowship should pray often for their children to understand the gospel and trust in Christ. A good resource to help parents and house fellowships with this is the book, ***Raising Children to Walk with God***. This book can be obtained free in a digital form. (See "Resources," Appendix A.)

### ***6. Is it advisable to give literature to children?***

In countries where this is illegal, you should only give Christian literature (books, videos, etc.) to the parents—not to children. This helps the parents take responsibility to look at the material and decide if they want their children to learn from it. Even parents who are not

believers are often very happy to have such resources. They sometimes will read the material themselves AND read to their children. Don't look at a law that forbids giving literature to children as completely negative. This gives you an opportunity to share the gospel with parents, too! In this way, a whole family may come to Christ.

## *How can your group grow in Christ?*

### *Application and Prayer*

1. Review the first question in the previous section of Frequently Asked Questions.

In your home group, have you taught the importance of parents teaching their children the ways of God?

Look at the Bible studies that are recommended for you to do in that first question. When can you start studying these in your home fellowship time, or in a special meeting during the week?

2. Questions #2, 3 and 4 in the Frequently Asked Questions section were written to help you think about how you will train the children in your home fellowship. Now make plans to do it! Re-read the questions and begin your discussion today.

What needs to be done to start training your children in the home group time? Here are some specific details to decide upon:

- Each week in our fellowship during our time in God's word, will we keep the children with us or will we train them in another room? If we keep them with us, how will we get the children involved so that they feel welcomed and yet it is interesting for everyone?
  - If we train them separately from the adults, who will train them? How will we train them (with resources, with telling stories, acting out dramas, etc.)?
3. Who has taken time in the home fellowship to explain the gospel to the children that come each week? What is the spiritual condition of these children?

Just as with adults, we should not try to force children to believe. Instead, we should help them to see God's love by sharing the good news with them.

Is this being done in your home group? If not, will you begin soon? When and how?

4. Take some time to pray for the children in your home fellowship and for their parents.

## 9. Celebrating the Lord's Supper with Thanksgiving

*For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said,*

*“This is my body which is for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me.”*

*In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying,*

*“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”*

*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

*(1 Cor. 11:23-26, ESV)*

## **Introduction**

### **Believers Around the World Celebrate the New Covenant**

Have you ever thought how strange it must have been for the disciples eating the Passover meal with Jesus the night before he was crucified? He passes out bread and wine for them to eat and drink. He tells them that it is his body and his blood, a new covenant between God and man.

The next day when Jesus was dying on the cross, they didn't know they were seeing the actual event of Jesus' body and blood given for the world. They thought with the death of their leader they were losing everything. Instead, because of what Jesus was doing for them, they were gaining everything.

But at the Passover meal Jesus knew what was about to happen. He had told the disciples earlier,

*"...the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mt. 20:28)*

At the meal, Jesus wanted his disciples (and all future disciples) to understand this. It was as if he was saying to all of us: "I want you to understand what I am about to do for you. Take it in deeply. Do it often. Don't forget my death for you."

For centuries believers from many peoples and languages have taken the Lord's supper together. As they eat the bread and drink the cup, they "proclaim Jesus' death" again, and faith in God's grace grows in every heart. Believers will continue to do this until Jesus comes again.

## **Bible Study**

### **Paul Teaches Believers to Value the Lord's Supper**

**Opening Discussion:** Tell the group how it affects you when you take the Lord's Supper.

#### **Read together 1 Corinthians 11:17-34**

1. What did Paul say about the Corinthian meetings?(v.17-18)
2. In the first century, the church often took the Lord's supper while they were eating a meal together. This custom started when the disciples ate the Passover meal with Jesus on the night he was betrayed. But in Corinth, this special meal had turned into a selfish time. What is Paul rebuking them for? (v. 20-22)
3. According to Paul, what happened on the same night Jesus gave us the Lord's Supper?(v.23)

Since Jesus knew that he was going to be betrayed and go to the cross, how do you think he felt the night he ate the bread and wine with his disciples?

4. What did Jesus call the bread? What did he call the cup of wine? When they ate and drank them, what were they proclaiming?(v. 26) What does it mean to "proclaim the death of Jesus until he comes?"

Do you think the Lord's Supper in your home fellowship is a time of proclaiming the death of Jesus?

5. Read verses 27-34 again. What do you think Paul was talking about when he spoke of taking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner? (Remember the improper actions of the Corinthians, v 21-22.)
6. What does he mean by this in verse 29: "without recognizing the body of the Lord?" How did the Corinthian church during the Lord's Supper not recognize the body of the Lord? Did they exhibit the humble attitude toward each other that Jesus showed on the night he was betrayed?
7. According to Paul, is it proper to examine and judge ourselves? (v. 28-31) In this passage, what happens when we judge ourselves? (v. 31) What happens when the Lord judges us? (v. 32)

Because of a fear of eating “in an unworthy manner” (v. 27), some believers don’t take the Lord’s Supper, and sometimes this continues for months or even years. They don’t want to “bring judgment on themselves.” (v. 29) They think that Paul was saying that if they have sinned they should not take the Lord’s Supper. Is this correct thinking? Why did Jesus give his body and blood for us?

If we have sinned, what should we do as we take the Lord’s Supper? (1 John 1:9)

8. Read again Paul’s summary statements in verses 33 and 34. What attitude was he trying to cultivate in that body of believers? Whose attitude was he trying to display as worthy of imitating?

**End in Prayer:** How can you as a home fellowship leader teach others to “recognize the body of Christ” (v. 29) when you serve the Lord’s Supper? Will you strive for unity in the body of Christ? Will your attitude toward other believers be one of humility and servanthood? Close this study by taking time to pray for these things.

*A story from Christian history*  
*19<sup>th</sup> Century, England*

**A British General Humbles Himself at the Cross**

The Lord's Supper is a sign that we are all paupers standing together, hand in hand, partaking of the grace of Christ together. Communion is where we consider others more significant than ourselves, because we know our own failings so deeply, and we experience the grace of Christ so freely. His mercy teaches us to love people who also look to him for grace.

The Duke of Wellington was a famous military leader in England who had led the British armies to victory against Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo in 1815. He regularly attended his church when he was in town.

Whenever he entered the church, the church members whispered to each other about his coming. They were proud to have this military hero as a part of their church.

The time came for the Lord's Supper. To receive the bread and wine in this church, small groups of people went to the front to kneel. The Duke also went forward, knelt and was quietly praying as he waited for the bread and wine. The church members, in respect for the great leader, let him go alone to the front.

However, at the church that morning an old peasant man in ragged clothes was also worshipping. He came to the front and knelt beside the famous leader. All in the church gasped to see the peasant kneel right beside the honored Englishman. Quickly a deacon rose, went to the peasant and tapped him on the shoulder. He whispered for the man to rise, move away from the Duke and wait until he returned to his seat.

The Duke heard the deacon's word and quickly grabbed the old man's hand, stopping him from rising. The Duke said to the man: "Don't get up. We are all equal here."

\*\*\*

The good news of Jesus Christ helps us all to see our great value in the eyes of God. It also helps us to see that the ground is level when we kneel as sinners at the cross of Jesus. No man is higher than another. No one should look down on another person. The scripture teaches us, "*...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" (Romans 3:23)

This beautiful truth can be felt each time believers eat the Lord's supper, remembering the death of Jesus together. No one is boasting about who they are. Rather, we are humbling ourselves before God. We thank him for saving us. We know we are not worthy of such sacrificial love.

The apostle Paul said about himself, that he was the worst of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). He was once the proud, self-righteous Saul of Tarsus, but when he understood what Jesus did for him on the cross, it produced in him a deep humility. It is that beautiful character quality that Jesus talked about when he said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 5:3).

Each time we eat at the Lord's table, we review the truth about ourselves. We are lost without Jesus Christ. But his great mercy raises us up to walk with God. And we don't walk alone. We walk together, hand in hand, with all believers from around the world, rich or poor, famous or common. As the Duke of Wellington said, "We are all equal here."

*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:23,24)*

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### ***1. How is the Old Testament Feast of Passover related to the Lord's Supper in the New Testament?***

The first time the disciples ate what we now call the Lord's Supper, it was on the Jewish holiday of the Passover. They were celebrating an ancient, yearly tradition of the Jews, begun during Moses' leadership.

This feast looked back to when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. The night before they left Egypt, they sacrificed and ate a lamb. Its blood was painted on the doorframes of their home, and they were saved from the angel of death, who saw the blood and passed over their homes. This was God's last judgment on Pharaoh and the Egyptians, for not releasing them from slavery. Every firstborn son in Egypt died.

The Israelites also ate unleavened bread that night, symbolizing that they were to leave Egypt quickly. The bread did not have time to rise. (You can read the story in Exodus 12.)

It was while celebrating this feast on the night Jesus was betrayed, that Jesus told his disciples that the bread had new meaning: it was his body given for them, and the wine was his blood, poured out for them. They ate and drank together.

He also told them that every time in the future when they ate the bread and drank the wine they should remember him. That same evening, he was arrested. The next day he went to the cross. After his resurrection, the disciples remembered his death often with the bread and the wine. The tradition has continued through the centuries among Christians all over the world.

The above history helps us understand that the first Lord's Supper was during a time of celebration, around a meal. It was in a home not a church building. The Jews were celebrating their freedom from slavery and death. It came through the sacrificed lamb. The parallel truth is that we are also delivered, not from Egyptian slavemasters, but from a more powerful slavemaster—SIN and DEATH. We remember that our Sacrificed Lamb, Jesus Christ, died that we might live!

### ***2. When we serve the Lord's Supper in our home fellowship, is there a formal way to do it?***

Through the centuries, churches have developed different ways to take the Lord's Supper. However, Jesus gave no rules on how to do it. The important thing is to remember him in a humble and reverent way. He gave his life for us. Therefore, home group leaders should plan the time of taking the Lord's Supper prayerfully. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Choose worship songs that speak of his sacrifice for us. Read appropriate scriptures (see the list below). Some may want to read a poem they have written about their love for Jesus. With happy hearts, thank the Lord for his body and blood, his sacrifice for our sins.

So that the time be reverent and orderly, explain beforehand how they are to take the bread and wine. There are many different ways it can be served. Most importantly it is a time of confession of sins, thinking of Jesus' death for them personally, and trusting completely in his forgiveness and grace. Remember that it is a time of worship. Help people meet quietly with Jesus. His presence is very near.

### ***3. How often should we take the Lord's Supper in our fellowship?***

It seems that the churches in the New Testament took it every week (and perhaps daily), often when they were eating a meal together. (See Acts 2:42-47). They took it at a meal as the twelve disciples did when Jesus told them that He was establishing a New Covenant (at the Passover meal). But remember, Jesus gave no rules on how often it must be done. 1 Cor. 11:25 tells us that whenever we drink it we should remember Jesus.

In many churches, the Lord's Supper is the central part of the worship time every week. Some people take it every day, a fresh reminder of God's grace to them. Other groups do it once a month. Whenever you do it, make it a time full of worship and thanksgiving, with a time of quiet so that each person may spend time alone with God and review the beauty of the gospel.

### ***4. Can only a pastor serve the Lord's Supper?***

Nowhere in the New Testament does it say that only pastors can serve the Lord's Supper. Christ commanded us to eat and drink it to remember him. He did not say only certain people could serve it. The Bible teaches that all Christians are now priests (1 Peter 2:5, Revelation

1:6). We serve the Lord's Supper to each other in humility. Christ has shown his grace to us all.

However, it is important that the people who lead this special time in the home fellowship understand its meaning. If we lead in a right spirit, we will help the people in the home fellowship worship in spirit and truth.

### ***5. Is baptism required for someone to take the Lord's Supper?***

It's important for us to know that the New Testament does not give a command that only baptized believers can take part in the Lord's Supper. However, the book of Acts does show that first century Christians entered fellowship in the Church through repentance, faith and baptism. Baptism was a sign that their journey with Christ was beginning. It was the first command of Christ that they obeyed as new believers (joined with repentance and faith, of course). Taking the Lord's Supper was then also obeyed when the Church took it together.

Over the centuries, churches have usually required that baptism occur first before a believer takes the Lord's Supper. Because the New Testament does not give a clear command on this issue, each church leadership must make their own decision on this. Perhaps your house church is part of a network of churches. If you are not sure which way your church should go on this issue, you should consult the leaders of the network.

Whatever decision your group makes regarding baptism and the Lord's Supper, consider this: Christ taught us to make disciples and to teach them to obey all of his commandments (Matthew 28:18-20). If there are people who are coming to your fellowship who claim to be followers of Jesus and who want to take the Lord's Supper but don't want to be baptized, you as leaders should meet with them to find out why this is. You could take them to some of the scriptures in the chapter in this book on baptism (chapter 5) to help them understand its meaning and importance. If they are afraid of persecution, refer to that chapter (chapter 15). Your gentle guidance as leaders can help this believer find joy in following Jesus in all he taught us to do.

### ***6. Some groups serve wine and other groups serve red juice. Which is the correct way?***

Because some of your members may struggle with temptations to drunkenness and may be fighting addictions, your group may decide to

not tempt such church members. Serving juice instead of wine may be a loving choice for all. Other groups may not have anyone with such temptations and wine may be the choice of the leaders. In either case, let us remember that the ceremony is not for arguing, it is for humility. It is meant to help us in confession of sin and in thanksgiving that Jesus poured out his blood for us all: sinners who need God's grace.

***7. Should we read scripture before we take the Lord's Supper? If so, what should we read?***

It is common in churches for 1 Cor. 11:17-34 to be read every time the bread and cup are served, but you don't have to always read those verses. There are *many* other scriptures that can help your group to meditate on repentance and faith in God's mercy. Variety is helpful to keep us alert and familiar with other passages. The New Testament passages below help us best to understand the death of Jesus for our sins, but the Old Testament passages below also help us to understand the seriousness of our sin and the grace of God to those who look to him humbly. The psalms below are prayers of repentance that have helped believers for centuries express to God their need for cleansing. The leader of this time should always remind the members of the church that we look to Christ alone for full forgiveness.

**Suggested Old Testament scriptures to read as you serve the Lord's Supper:**

- Isaiah 52:13—Isaiah 53:1-12 (This prophesy of Christ's crucifixion was written 700 years before Jesus!)
- Psalm 32
- Psalm 51
- Psalm 103

**New Testament scriptures:**

- Luke 23:26-56 (or any of the other gospel accounts of Christ's crucifixion: Matthew 27:32-66; Mark 15; John 19)
- John 6:25-71 (Jesus teaches that he is the bread of life.)
- Romans 3: 21-31
- 1 Corinthians 11:17-34
- Ephesians 2
- Philippians 2:1-11
- 1 John 1:5—2:2
- Revelation 5

## *How can your group grow in Christ?*

### *Application and Prayer*

1. Have you ever studied the meaning of the Lord's Supper with all who attend your home fellowship?

**NOTE:** Besides the Bible study in this chapter, there are three studies in *50 Life Studies* on the Lord's Supper. Each study looks at a different aspect of this meaningful time.

2. Take time with other leaders in your group to read the frequently asked questions on the previous pages. Use those questions as discussion questions to help you decide what to do in your group regarding the following:
  - How often will you serve communion in your group?
  - Which scriptures will you read? (See the Old Testament and New Testament suggestions.)
  - What special worship songs that help people meditate on the sacrifice of Jesus will you sing before (or during) the service?
  - Other discussions related to the frequently asked questions
3. Take time to pray that the celebration of the Lord's Supper in your group may always bring the people to a deeper appreciation of the sacrifice Jesus gave for us all.

## **10. Growing in Faith through Prayer**

*“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; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

*(Matthew 7:7-8)*

## **Introduction**

### **The Power of Prayer**

Wherever churches are growing and multiplying, you will find the people praying earnestly. Your home fellowship will be making true disciples of Jesus if you teach them **to pray to their Father in heaven, and to pray with faith that their heavenly Father truly cares for them and answers their prayers.** This is what Jesus taught his first disciples to do.

Faith grows when we pray regularly together, especially when we take time to talk about how the Lord has answered our prayers.

If we want to see the gospel spread throughout our villages, cities and country, we need to be people of prayer. And we need to learn to pray together.

This chapter will help you grow in prayer as a home fellowship. And as you pray, expect the gospel of Jesus Christ to spread to others through your home fellowship!

## **Bible Study**

### **Learning How to Pray from the Apostle Paul**

**Opening Discussion:** “Are there any prayer requests today?” This is a common way home groups start their prayer time. Such requests often include very important needs:

“I need a job.” “My aunt has cancer.” “My son is taking exams at the university next week.”

These are all important to the Lord who wants us to “*bear one another’s burdens...*” We become like Christ when we do this. (Galatians 6:2).

This lesson shows us an aspect of prayer for one another that is not so common when we pray together. However, this type of prayer was very important to Paul. As you study, think about adding this type of prayer in your corporate prayer times.

#### **Read together Ephesians 3:14-21**

1. Read verse 14 again.

Paul starts with “For this reason...” That means that he is referring to something he said before. The previous verses of Ephesians 3 are about what Christ has done for us and the riches we have in Him. Then he tells us something very important in verse 12. What does he tell us?

Because Paul knows he can approach God with freedom and confidence, what does he do in verse 14?

Would you say that your home group approaches God with freedom and confidence because of what Jesus has done on the cross for us?

2. Read verses 16-19 again. Name five things that Paul asks the Father for in these verses.
3. Once more, slowly, read verse 16. Discuss what this verse means. If you prayed this prayer often, how could this help your group to grow stronger?
4. Now slowly read verse 17. Discuss this question: How much are we aware that we believers have Christ living in us? How might

this awareness make a difference in finding daily peace and joy in all the problems we face in life?

5. Read again verses 17-19. As we grow in our faith, we go deeper into knowing and experiencing God's great love. We come to understand this amazing love by thinking about the love of Christ who gave his life for the sins of the world.

Paul knows God wants believers to know him and so Paul prays earnestly for the Ephesians "to know this love that surpasses knowledge." Do you desire this for your home group, also? Can you think of anything more important to pray for another believer?

In verse 19, Paul says the result is that we will be "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." How much do you want to be filled with the fullness of God?

If we include this type of prayer with the other prayers mentioned in the introduction (for a job, for a sick person, etc.), how will that affect the maturity of our home fellowship?

How important to you is the spiritual maturity of each member of your house church?

6. Paul reminds the believers of an amazing truth in verse 20. What is it? Do you believe it?

Then, in verse 21, he talks about God's glory. Read verse 21 again. Where is that glory to be seen?

7. As you quietly look over verses 16-19, take some time now (and in future meetings together with your group) to pray for yourselves to be filled with God's love, for his glory to be seen in you.

**End in Prayer:** You may want to return to this prayer often, using it as a model when you pray for your home fellowship. You can pray these verses, putting in the names of your group members. And teach the members of your group to do the same, praying for themselves and for others.

**Go Deeper in this Subject:** The apostle Paul prayed other prayers for the spiritual maturity of his disciples. Below are a few examples. Take time often both alone and in your fellowship meetings to pray these prayers for yourself, your fellowship, and also for other believers in your country and worldwide.

Ephesians 1:17-19; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12

**A Story from Christian history**  
**20<sup>th</sup> Century, The Philippines**

**The Balangao People Learn to Pray**

You have probably never heard of the Balangao people, have you? Deep in the jungle mountains of the Philippines, this head-hunting tribe was changed dramatically when the gospel of Jesus Christ was brought to them in the mid-twentieth century. This amazing story is told in the book, ***And the Word Came with Power*** by Joanne Shetler and Patricia Purvis.

Joanne Shetler was in her mid-twenties when she and another single woman went to live with this tribe at the tribe's invitation. The Balangao people had been told about God's word written in a book. Surprisingly, they welcomed these two American women to come and live with them. Joanne (being helped by other partners throughout the years) took on the task of learning the Balangao language and translating the scriptures for them.

As the translation work continued over the years, Joanne taught the people about Jesus Christ, his life and death, and how, at the cross, he took their shame and guilt upon himself. Also, she told them about his resurrection from the dead, which gave them great hope. Life was very hard for these people who lived in darkness and fear of the evil spirits to whom they offered sacrifices. They began to listen closely when Joanne taught them that Jesus has more power than the spirits which tormented them and that he could defeat them and set them free. The book tells of dramatic victories over the demonic forces.

The following story is on another important subject from the same book. Here Joanne tells how the Balangao people learned to pray to God from the heart.

*"I had diligently prayed that Balangaos would turn from the spirits and trust the God of heaven. God answered... they started to believe. Then I'd begun waking up in the night, pleading with God to defeat the spirits. And God, who had awakened me to pray, answered my prayers.*

*"Now, I was praying through the day and waking up at night again. 'God, teach these new believers how to pray. How to really pray. Do something, Lord.' They knew how to pray for birth into God's family. But they didn't understand about asking for God's help with the everyday issues of life. They liked it when I prayed, but they wouldn't pray themselves.*

*"Desperate, I had carefully told God, 'I don't care what you have to do; make these people pray!'*

Joanne did not know the sacrifice she would give so that her prayers for the Balangao people would be answered. One month later she was traveling into the mountains in a huge helicopter that was carrying building materials—tons of cement, nails, etc.—to build a small hospital for the Balangao people. As the helicopter neared the landing strip, it hit a tree and the helicopter crashed to the ground. The doctor was killed and Joanne and a few others were buried under tons of cement.

After putting out the fire of the crash, the Balangao people climbed inside the broken helicopter and started digging. They threw off kegs of nails and bags of cement to find Joanne underneath, almost dead. Pulling her out of the helicopter, they discovered that cement powder had poured into her eyes from the broken bags. Her ribs had broken and one lung had collapsed. She could barely talk.

All night long the Balangao people tried to help her, as Joanne gave whispered instructions to them of what she needed most. Here she continues the story...

*“... I slowly gave instructions: ‘You must wash my eyes out. Get a pitcher of water, hold my eyes open, and pour the water in. Do it again and again.’*

*“The water felt like live coals pressing against my eyeballs. I insisted in a hoarse whisper, ‘Continue.’ When the pain literally took my breath away, they stopped. I breathed, then I whispered again, urgently, ‘Keep pouring the water in!’*

*“In my heart, I cried throughout the night: ‘God, I can’t go blind—I won’t be able to finish this translation if I’m blind.’*

*“It was hours and hours of torture. The night was long, the pain intense.*

*“But something else was going on. Something new for Balangaos. One by one, throughout the night, Balangao Christians worked their way through the throng, touched my hand, and prayed. I’ll never forget it—they actually started to pray! Their prayers for me were unsolicited and so fervent, deep from the heart.*

*“Three months earlier I’d written home asking friends to pray:*

*The believers need to learn to pray about everything, and with intensity. They need to understand that their own powers are useless, even in doing ‘godly’ things, and that only what God performs will be real in people’s lives... If there is a longing in my*

*heart, it is that God would make these Balangaos a people of effective, powerful prayer.'*

*"That night, as I lay on the floor, more dead than alive, the Balangaos were praying—really praying. One after another, they prayed the same prayer; 'Don't let her die, the Book's not done yet. Please, just let her live; the Book's not done yet...'*

*"It was the worst and best night of my life all wrapped up in one. The worst pain I'd ever known was eclipsed by moments of indescribable awe over their prayers.*

*"The next day I was airlifted to a hospital far away from the Balangaos. It took me six weeks, with many pain-filled and sleepless nights, to recover. I couldn't see God anywhere. I couldn't feel him. I couldn't hear him; there were no waves of glory, just wave after wave of pain.*

*"After six more weeks of resting and mending, I returned to Balangao to carry on with the translation. I was astounded to find Balangaos still praying. At last they had learned that they could pray about everything, big or small. Fervent prayer had become a part of their lives. They've never been the same since the helicopter crash. And neither have I."<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> From the book *And the Word Came With Power* by Joanne Shetler and Patricia Purvis, Wycliffe, 2002. Used with permission from Joanne Shetler.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

***1. In our home group, our prayer time is often a long list of requests. Everyone has problems: illness in the family, financial problems, and worries of all sorts. Some people in our group go on and on in prayer, going through their lists of problems. It sometimes makes us tired (and fall asleep!) Can you give us some suggestions on how to bring new life and faith into our prayer time each week?***

Most people know that they don't pray very well. That is why the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. Jesus helped them with his model prayer, and in the verses before that he gave instructions on how not to pray. (See Matthew 6:5-15). He also taught on prayer and faith in other places. We need to study what Jesus said about prayer in order to pray with confidence, faith and joy.

There are 5 studies on prayer from the teachings of Jesus in the book ***50 Life Studies*** which your house fellowship may want to study together.

Also, it could be helpful to your group to understand that "prayer" in God's word is not simply bringing personal requests to God. It involves much more. If we look at the Psalms we see that God has given us many examples of prayer. A well-balanced prayer time should include the following elements:

### **PRAISE**

Remember that prayer is entering the throne room of the Creator of the universe. He is also the one who died for you and for the whole world. To enter his presence with only a list of wants and needs ignores his majesty. Take time to think about his greatness, read a psalm about his power, and worship in awe. Your faith is built on taking time to think about his greatness. Worship may include a song of praise, dancing for joy, or it may mean kneeling silently.

Here are a few examples from scripture on praise:

Psalm 33:1-11 and Psalm 59:16-17.

## **THANKSGIVING**

The Lord gives us breath each moment, food and clothing, family, friends, work, and many wonderful things to enjoy. Whenever we take time to give thanks for all the blessings of God, we often see sadness and depression leave us. Thanksgiving is a weapon to use against the discouragement that Satan brings to us.

Meditate as a group on the importance of thanksgiving in our prayers:  
1 Thessalonians 5:18; Ephesians 5:20; Psalm 118:21

## **CONFESSION OF SIN**

If we try to hide sin in our lives, we are wearing a mask, pretending to have fellowship with the Lord. But the Lord is light, and his light searches our hearts. That is why the Holy Spirit often reveals sin to us when we bow our heads in prayer. Jesus taught that we should ask the Lord's forgiveness when we have sinned, and we should also forgive others. Leaders do well when they teach these truths in their groups.

Here are some scriptures on confession of sin. Your group can meditate on them together:

I Jn 1:8-2:2; Matt 6:12; Ps 32:3-5; Ps 38:18; Prov 28:13

## **PRAYING FOR YOURSELF**

These are our personal prayers, the needs in our lives, like daily bread, a place to live, more patience, wisdom, etc.

See Phil 4:6-7; James 5:13; Matt 6:11&13; Matt 26:41; Matt 7:7-11

## **PRAYING FOR OTHERS**

We show Christ's love by taking time to pray for other people, as Christ does for us. This includes praying for the lost to come to know Christ and praying for our brothers' and sisters' needs and for their growth in Christ.

See Eph 6:18-20; Col. 1:9-12; Col 4:12; James 5:16; 1 Tim 2:1-2; Matt 5:44-45

***2. I want to see my fellowship pray more with Jesus' authority. I know that Jesus told us to pray in faith, but sometimes our prayers seem very weak. How can we strengthen our faith as we pray?***

The Bible teaches that faith comes to us when we hear God's word (Rom 10:17). During our prayer times we need to read stories from the Old and New Testaments where people of faith prayed and saw mighty miracles.

- When praying for the sick, you may want to read a story of how Jesus healed people. (Luke 4:38-40; Luke 5:12-13; Luke 7:1-10)
- When praying for power to share the gospel with unbelievers, you may want to read the story from Acts 4:1-31 when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers and they preached the word boldly.
- When struggling with demonic powers, read about Jesus' authority over the evil spirits. (Luke 4:31-37; Mark 5:1-20)
- If you need to confess sin, use Psalm 51 or Psalm 32 to help you be honest with God about your sin, and trust him to forgive you (1 John 1:9).
- If you are praying for your daily needs, read what Jesus said about the Father's care of the birds in Matthew 6: 25-34.

Use these Bible verses to help strengthen your faith that Jesus cares about you and has power to help you as you pray.

## *How can your group grow in Christ?*

### *Application and Prayer*

1. In the following weeks when your home fellowship gathers (or in small groups during the week), do the 5 lessons on prayer in **50 Life Studies**. These are lessons from Jesus' teachings that help you learn to pray in His way.

OR...

2. Take time in your gatherings to study the scriptures under the different aspects of prayer that are mentioned above: Praise, Thanksgiving, Confession of sin, Praying for yourself, Praying for others. As you study together, pause to apply these different ways to pray, and remember to include these aspects regularly in your weekly prayer times.
3. Consider planning special days or evenings for your home group to pray together, and perhaps include fasting. Use this time for more intensive prayer for your families, for the lost of your nation, for your government, etc. Pray for power to grow in Christ and to share the gospel with those who don't know the Lord.

## 11. Discovering the Blessing of Giving

*In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35)*

## **Introduction**

### **Building God's Kingdom through Giving**

No one knows more about giving than God himself. No more costly gift was ever given than the gift of God's Son to the world. (See John 3:16) Jesus gave his life for us, and he taught us to give also.

*"You cannot serve both God and money,"* he taught us. (Luke 16:13) When we give generously, we take positive steps to trust God with our future... and we grow in love.

There are two kinds of giving that we learn from God's Word:

First, in our daily tasks we all encounter people who need help: the beggar on the street, the person who cannot pay for a needed surgery, the widow who needs a bag of groceries. We give from our pockets as individuals.

But there is a second way we give which can have a more far-reaching impact. This happens when believers learn to give into group offerings. Our study in God's word on the next page will show one example of this.

Throughout the centuries, much good has been done in the world because believers gave through their churches. It's not just big churches that do this. This happens in house fellowships around the world. House fellowships buy Christian literature to give to others. They give to the poor who worship with them, and they give to people outside of the house group, too. They also support teams to take the gospel to other places.

This chapter will help you consider how the gifts from your house church can build God's kingdom in your city and country, and in other parts of the world.

## **Bible Study**

### **The Apostle Paul Teaches Churches to Give Generously**

**Opening Discussion:** Imagine a world where the kindness and generosity of our Lord rules in every heart. What would that world be like?

**Read Acts 11:27-30 together.**

1. What did Agabus prophesy (v. 28)? What did the disciples in Antioch decide to do? (v. 29) Who did they choose to take the gifts to Judea? (v. 30)

At some point, Paul decided to collect from churches in other cities to help the Judean churches. Today's study will look at how Paul encouraged the Corinthians to give to this need.

**Read 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 together.**

2. What was his instruction to the Corinthian and Galatian churches? (v. 1-2)
3. Who will take the gift to Jerusalem? (v. 3-4)

**Read 2 Corinthians 8 together.**

4. In verses 1-5, Paul describes the attitude in which the Macedonian churches gave. Read together verses 1-5, then discuss their difficult situation and their amazing attitude in this trial.
5. Paul then begins to urge the Corinthians to have the same generous attitude as the Macedonians. Who does Paul use as an example of generous giving in verse 9?
6. In verses 10-12, what does Paul advise the Corinthians?

What makes a gift acceptable? (v. 12)

7. What was Paul trying to do in verses 20-21?

Read again verses 16-19. What was he doing in these verses to avoid criticism?

In the offerings we take in our home fellowships, why is it important that we are very careful in the way the money is collected, kept and then distributed?

**Read 2 Corinthians 9 together.**

8. What does Paul mean in verse 6? Why is it important for leaders to teach this principle in the home fellowship? Why is faith in this truth necessary as we give?
9. Read verse 7 again. If we compel believers to give, what does that destroy in their hearts? What does it mean that “God loves a cheerful giver?”
10. In verses 12-15, Paul talks about the most important result of our giving. What is it?

**End in Prayer:** We have learned today about generous giving and the wise handling of the offerings. If all of the house groups in this country learn to give with the same generosity and wisdom, how will it build the kingdom of God here? Pray for this to happen!

## *A story from Christian history*

### *20<sup>th</sup> Century, Ethiopia*

#### **Sacrificial Giving in the African Church Spreads the Gospel**

*Sometimes we quietly tell ourselves that when we get rich, then we will begin to give generously. Here's a story of how churches among a very poor people in Ethiopia obeyed Jesus' command to give. Their giving is a beautiful example for all of us. It reminds us of the widow who gave her last coins (Mark 12:41-44).*

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From 1937 to 1942, the Wallamo church in Ethiopia experienced rapid growth. Because of the Italian government occupation during World War II, the missionaries had been forced to leave the country. The missionaries had been teaching the gospel to the Wallamo people, but they had seen only 48 Wallamos come to faith in Christ. When the missionaries left, only the gospel of Mark and a few other portions of scripture had been translated into the Wallamo language.

In the five years that the missionaries were gone, the Wallamo church grew to 10,000 believers! All of this happened under severe persecution. Wallamo evangelists were beaten severely and placed in prisons. They suffered much for their faith as they spread the gospel everywhere.

The Wallamos were committed to obeying all that Jesus taught, including Jesus' command to give. They had no foreign funds to help them. In their suffering, they gained God's heart for the spread of the gospel, and for helping the poor. Though they all were very poor, they still learned to give to those who had greater needs, both physical and spiritual needs. When the missionaries returned, they saw that these people of childlike faith took Jesus' words seriously. They gave generously and they gave with joy.

And the Wallamo offerings were not just money. Because they often had no money, they would take off articles of clothing and give it in the offering, such as shoes or sweaters. These items were later sold in the market places. This money was used to spread the gospel.

The Wallamos rejoiced that their offerings were supporting more evangelists each year. A tradition soon started at their yearly conferences. Each person would, according to their faith, promise to ask God for help to bring a generous offering to the next year's conference.

Even though they told the leaders the amount they were asking for, they made their promises with no pressure from man. The promise was between each person and God, and during the year they prayed, worked and saved the money to give their gifts at the next yearly gathering.

At one conference there was a woman who wanted to give a gift at the end of the gathering, which was just a few days away. She had a few, very tiny coins in her country's currency, but she wanted to give a bigger offering than that.

After the classes one day, she took those few cents and bought some cotton in the market. Because she was busy in classes during the day, late at night she stayed awake to spin the cotton into thread. It took her several nights to finish the thread. Long before daylight came, she walked nearly 5 hours to the market. There she sold her thread and returned to the conference.

When she arrived, she placed her sacrificial offering in the hands of a leader. She was so happy that she could give such a large gift. It had grown from her two tiny coins to the equivalent of eight U.S. cents!<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This story is adapted from the book *Fire on the Mountains* by Raymond Davis, Zondervan, 1966.

## **Frequently Asked Questions:**

### ***1. Why is giving important to the life of the believer and to the health of the fellowship?***

The Bible teaches that we need to give for many reasons. Here are a few of them. Read the scriptures in each section:

- Giving helps us guard against becoming greedy and self-centered (1 Tim. 6:6-10 and 17-19).
- Giving builds unity in the Body of Christ. If you have not read the Bible study in this chapter, please take time to study it. In that study we see that as the churches gave to help each other, they grew in love for each other.
- Giving shows God's love and compassion to the poor, including to nonbelievers (Leviticus 23:22; Deuteronomy 15:7-11).
- Giving to needy people is one way that we seek God's kingdom first. It helps us, as Jesus taught, to keep our focus on God as our provider (Matt 6:25-33).
- Giving is a way that God allows us to participate with him in spreading the Good News to others. This is one way we have treasure in heaven. For example, think about the joy we can receive when we contribute to offerings to buy Bibles or other spiritual literature to give to those who don't have God's word, or in sending someone to another town or to another country to teach or preach about Jesus! (Matthew 6:19-21)

### ***2. Are Christians supposed to tithe (that is, give 10% of their income) like the Jewish people were commanded to do?***

Some Christians practice tithing; some do not. Some churches teach that it still applies to Christians and that the tithe should go to the church. Others say we should learn to give generously but that the tithe itself is from the Old Testament and not something that the New Testament teaches as part of Christian doctrine.

In the New Testament, there are only two places that the tithe is mentioned. One is in a parable about a religious leader who reminded God that he fasted and tithed and didn't do bad things. Jesus, however, said he was not righteous in God's eyes (Luke 18:9-14). The other place is where Jesus gives strong warnings to the Pharisees because they

neglect justice, mercy and faithfulness but rather focus on tiny aspects of tithing, like the mint in their gardens. Jesus said tithing was important, but they were blind in missing the most important things (Matthew 23:23-24).

In the rest of the New Testament, there is no mention of the tithe and no command for Christians to continue the Old Testament practice.. However, generous giving is taught repeatedly by Jesus and the apostles, and those who give sacrificially are praised. If under the Old Covenant God taught the Jews to give a tenth of their income, could that perhaps be a minimum for followers of Jesus, who gave everything for them? Can we give less? Should we not give more—not because of the Law, but because of love? But in all of our giving, house groups should remember Paul’s instruction:

*Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Cor. 9:7)*

Let’s not forget that in both the Old and New Testaments God’s commands to give often come with promises of blessing! The Lord assures us that he will certainly take care of those who honor him in giving.

In the Old Testament, God spoke through the prophet Malachi:

*“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.” (Malachi 3:10)*

In the New Testament, Jesus taught us:

*Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (Luke 6:38)*

### **3. As leaders, how can we help believers learn to give?**

Jesus clearly taught his disciples to be generous in giving: *“Freely you have received, freely give. (Matthew 10:8)* The New Testament even teaches us to care for enemies who are in need! (Romans 12:20) That is how we show God’s amazing love to all people.

Here are 3 ways we can encourage believers in our house churches to give:

- 1) **We teach them first by our example.** Are we people who share with those in need? Our example is watched by all. We should share not only our money, but our time, our home and food (hospitality), and our spiritual gifts, to help people grow.
- 2) **We study together what the Bible teaches about giving.** The members of our home fellowships need to know what the Bible has to say about giving because the Bible is our guide for life. God told his people in the Old Testament to give; that was part of the Law. In the New Testament, Jesus taught his disciples to give freely and joyously. At the end of this chapter are some scriptures you can study on this subject.
- 3) **We tell testimonies of how God is faithful to his people.** Our heavenly Father is the same today as in Bible times. He takes care of those who seek first his kingdom. Do you have stories of his faithfulness to tell in your home fellowship?

#### ***4. What should the offerings of the home fellowship be used for?***

Here are a few common examples:

- to purchase Bibles, Christian books, Christian media, etc, to spread the gospel
- to help needy believers
- to help needy unbelievers (Throughout the centuries Christians have given not just to believers, but to all needy people, regardless of their religion.)
- to send relief gifts to those in natural disasters (victims of earthquakes, famines, floods, etc.)
- to help pay for conferences and seminars
- to provide the home fellowship each week with basic blessings (tea, simple refreshments).
- to help evangelists and teachers as they travel (In 1 Corinthians 9:13-14 Paul says that those whose work is preaching and teaching should be supported by other believers.)

***5. Who counts the offering and records it? Who keeps the money? Who decides what the offerings will be used for?***

The Holy Book teaches that when we walk in the light with each other and with God, we have true fellowship. When house church members give to an offering, they are trusting the leaders to handle it well and not to hide information.

The three questions above are very important. It is best that at least 2 leaders or respected members count the offering and keep good records of what is received and how the money is spent. Take special care in deciding where the offering is stored. Remember the money is God's money, so it should be given out prayerfully and in the fear of the Lord. The leaders should let the members know how the money has been spent.

Also, it is recommended you not collect money for many weeks without spending anything. Make decisions often on how the money should be used and then use it for God's work. It is not wise to keep large amounts of money, unless it is being saved for a specific large need.

## **How can your group grow in Christ?**

### ***Application and Prayer***

1. Look back over the previous pages of this chapter. As you studied those pages, how did the Holy Spirit speak to you about your home fellowship growing in giving?

Some house fellowships give their members opportunity to give weekly. Others only take offerings occasionally, for specific needs. The Bible does not give specific instructions. How often does your group take offerings? Is this the way you want to continue in the future?

2. Look over the list below. What passages on giving could your group study together?
3. Pray for yourself and your group to grow as generous givers. Ask the Lord for ways that you can spread the good news through your gifts of love.

#### **A few passages to study on giving:**

- The widow's coins: Mark 12:41-44
- Seek God's kingdom first: Matthew 6:19-34
- Show kindness to your enemies: Luke 6:27-36
- Don't give to be seen by men: Matthew 6: 1-4
- The sheep and the goats: Matthew 25:31-46
- Bless the poor with kindness: Luke 14:12-14
- Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Holy Spirit: Acts 4: 32 – 5:11
- The apostle Paul teaches on giving: 2 Corinthians 8 and 9
- Paul teaches on contentment: 1 Timothy 6:6-10
- Paul's command to the rich: 1 Timothy 6: 17-19
- Command to thieves: Ephesians 4:28

Also, in the book ***50 Life Studies***, there is a section on giving with 3 lessons under that topic.

## 12. Becoming Mature Disciples

*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

*(John 8:31-32)*

*He [Christ] is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. (Col. 1:28)*

## **Introduction**

### **Disciples of Jesus Make Disciples of Others**

If you have answered Jesus' call to you to follow him, then you are a disciple of Jesus. But what does it mean to daily be a disciple of Jesus?

First of all, disciples learn and obey all that Jesus taught. They study together the words of Jesus as found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and the teachings of Jesus' apostles found in the rest of the New Testament, and they apply these things to their lives. Jesus made it clear: *"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching."* (John 14:23)

Because they understand Jesus love for them as seen at the cross, they gladly give themselves to him, to serve him and to become like him. They make Jesus Lord of their lives. And they help others to also become disciples.

Making disciples, however, is not an easy task. Just as we ourselves must learn to have the heart and attitude of Christ in our thoughts and deeds, we must help our disciples to do the same. We must walk with them as they take little steps in learning to live by faith, trusting God in difficult times, and submitting to the Holy Spirit as he works to change them to be more like Jesus.

We cannot solve all of the problems of our disciples, but as we help them learn from God's Word, pray with them and show them true friendship, we are encouraging them to grow in trusting Jesus. Of course, the only way we can do this is by spending time with them—not only on the day we worship together, but also at other times throughout the week. It is through relationships of sincere love that we all grow.

This chapter will give you scriptures to study, as well as suggestions to help you grow as a disciple of Christ yourself and to help you encourage others to do the same.

## **Bible Study**

### **Jesus Starts a Worldwide Movement by Teaching Disciples to Follow Him**

**Opening discussion:** What have you learned in the last few weeks from Jesus, either from his teachings in the Bible, or from His Holy Spirit speaking to your heart?

Jesus said that disciples become like their teacher (Luke 6:40). How has Jesus worked in your life so that you are more like him this year than last year?

**Read Mark 1:14-20 together.**

1. What did Jesus say to the people when he preached (verses 14-15)?

What do you think it meant to the people who heard him?

2. Jesus told the fisherman to “follow me.” Religious teachers of that day would have students follow them and learn from them. Imagine yourself living in the first century. You hear Jesus call you. If you answer his call, you will spend your days with this new teacher. Your goal is to listen, watch, and learn from his wisdom and become like him.

Imagine you become one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. How important will it be for you to be fully attentive, to learn all that Jesus teaches you? Explain your thoughts.

3. Jesus told the fishermen that if they followed him he would make them fishers of men (verse 17). What does it mean to “fish for men?” Have you ever asked Jesus to make you a fisher of men?
4. When Jesus called these men, they left their nets (their job) and their father (family) (verses 18 & 20). Do you think this was a big sacrifice for them? Why?

Do you think sacrifice is needed to reach this country with the good news? What kinds of sacrifices are needed?

NOTE: Although there are believers who leave their jobs to give their entire day to the spread of the gospel, there are many more believers who remain in jobs but are faithful witnesses and disciplinarians wherever and whenever they have opportunity. They see themselves as

people who bring God's light and love into their workplace. What do you think Jesus is calling you to do?

**Read Matthew 28:16-20**

5. Jesus spoke these words after the resurrection, at the end of his time on earth. Jesus told his disciples that something had been given to him. What was it (verse 18)?

Do you believe Jesus' words about his authority? Because of this, how important is it that we obey Jesus' words? If we know that Jesus has all authority, how will this help us to be confident when we face opposition to the gospel?

6. The first disciples of Jesus were told to make more disciples after Jesus left the earth. Where were they to go to do this (verse 19)?
7. In whose name were they to baptize people (verse 19)?
8. What were they to teach the new disciples (verse 20)?

When you study the teachings of Jesus, do you think about how you can pass his teachings on to other people?

Do you see yourself as one who could fish for men, using Jesus' teachings?

9. What promise did Jesus give his disciples (verse 20)?

Do you believe that for yourself, too?

**End in prayer:** Pray for your fellowship to become true disciples of Jesus who disciple others.

**Go deeper in this subject:** The last four studies in *50 Life Studies* (#47-50) are specifically about making disciples.

*A story from Christian History*  
*Central Asia, 20<sup>th</sup> century*

### **The Power of Discipleship**

*But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. (Matt. 13:23)*

The English teacher had just finished his conversation class at the university in the Muslim country he had brought his family to only a few months earlier. After all of the other students had left the classroom, one young man stayed behind and approached the teacher's desk. The teacher did not know him yet, as the new semester had just begun.

"Can we talk for a few minutes?" he asked.

"Of course," the teacher replied.

The student introduced himself as Hasan and explained that he was from another Muslim country. They spoke small talk for a few minutes and then the student overcame his fears: "Sir... I'm fascinated with Jesus. Can you teach me about him? My friend Ibrahim also wants to hear about Jesus." Ibrahim, a student in the same class, was also from Hassan's country.

This conversation was the beginning of many discussions Hasan and Ibrahim had with the teacher outside of class. The teacher was a follower of Jesus and was happy to share his faith with these two students. He invited them to his home to meet his wife and young children, and the two young men came often. They laughed and played with the children, ate meals with the family, and spent many hours with open Bibles, learning about Jesus and the gospel from the teacher. It wasn't long before they asked to be baptized. They truly believed Jesus was their Savior.

Soon after this, the teacher and his wife invited these new brothers and other new believers to a house fellowship. They worshiped in song and shared their needs with each other for prayer. They read the teachings of Jesus together and talked about ways they could follow Him in all that He commanded. They also took the Lord's Supper together, remembering the death of Jesus for their sins. And they baptized other new believers.

One day Hasan explained to the teacher that he had decided not to continue at the university. He would return to his own country.

“I want to share Jesus Christ with people in my country. I especially want to take the gospel to the minority peoples who live as shepherds in the mountains near my city. How should I do this?”

“Hasan,” the teacher replied, “you do it just like I did with you. Go to those people in love. Tell them about Jesus and teach them to repent and turn to him in faith for forgiveness of sins and salvation. Remember, Jesus died for all people. You may want to take the *Jesus* film and show it. As they believe in him, baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Then, use the Bible studies I gave you to help you teach them to obey everything that Jesus commanded.”

Hasan paused for a moment as he thought about the teacher’s words. He felt inadequate and wondered if he could actually do the same things that the teacher had done with him. Now he himself was going out with the gospel, crossing a culture just like the teacher and his family had done.

Hasan looked at the teacher uncertainly. “I’ll try.”

The teacher reminded Hasan that he was not going alone; Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, was with him.

Over the months and years ahead, the teacher received letters from Hasan. He explained that he had stepped out in faith and taken the gospel to these people who had never heard it before. He had taught them to obey Jesus, just as the teacher had done with him. People were repenting of their sins and believing in Jesus. Soon he was baptizing them and forming little fellowships of believers in different towns and villages.

Years later, the teacher put Hasan’s latest letter on the desk and remembered their times together eating around the table. He could picture in his mind Hasan’s baptism and his hunger to learn God’s Word. “I never imagined,” the teacher said to himself, “that the gospel could go so far through one man. And God gave me the honor and privilege of being a part of discipling this precious brother who took the teachings of Jesus seriously. Thanks be to God for the power of the gospel!”

**NOTE:** Hasan disciplined people with some of the lessons from *50 Life Studies*. (See “Resources,” Appendix A)

## Frequently Asked Questions

***1. We study God's Word together each week in our home fellowship, but the people in our group don't read it during the week. How can we help them to develop habits of reading (or listening to) God's Word when they are alone?***

Your desire to help them learn the discipline of daily meditation on God's Word and prayer is very good. This habit, developed over a lifetime, gives believers strength and wisdom for the challenges they face in life. It is also through these times alone with God that they will come to know him and be changed to be more like him. The home fellowship can help them to develop this habit.

When we study the Psalms we see that David and the other writers found help and joy in God's Word as they meditated on it continually. Here are some examples from Psalm 119:

- **Verse 11:** *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."*
- **Verse 28:** *"My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word."*
- **Verse 72:** *"The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold."*
- **Verse 97:** *"Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long."*
- **Verse 105:** *"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."*

Here are a few practical suggestions to help your members stay in God's word daily:

- 1) Try reading a short portion of Psalm 119 in your meetings each week. This does not need to be the main Bible study; just take a few minutes for this for 4 weeks, for example. Pray each time for the Holy Spirit to put a hunger in every heart for God and his Word.
- 2) Audio scriptures are available on the internet in many languages. If people don't like to read, help them download the audio format to listen to. (See Appendix A, "Resources.")
- 3) Suggest a book from the Bible for them to start reading. The four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), Genesis, Psalms and Proverbs are good books for young believers to start with. Then

they can move on to the rest of the New Testament. You could decide as a group to all read or listen to the same book on your own during the week. Then take time in your meetings together for them to share what they are learning.

***2. We are concerned about ongoing conflict and quarreling in our home fellowship. Some are gossiping and are harsh in judgment of each other. Some come to meet on Sunday but avoid relationships or conversations with others in the group. We know it is not healthy for a home fellowship to continue in this way. How can we help them grow to be more like Christ?***

When Jesus saw problems between the disciples, he took time to talk with them about it. (See Mark 9:33-37). This is discipleship that deals not just in theoretical problems, but in practical things, such as poor relationships in our groups. In this situation, Jesus helped his disciples see that their arguing was rooted in pride, and in not understanding that God values humility and servanthood, not a person's position in the kingdom.

James wrote this:

*What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? (James 4:1, NLT)*

The apostle Paul wrote this to the Corinthians:

*For I am afraid that when I come I won't like what I find, and you won't like my response. I am afraid that I will find quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorderly behavior. (2 Cor. 12:20, NLT)*

All of these attitudes can be very harmful in your home fellowship also. Whenever you see these problems, begin with prayer. We know that Jesus prayed for his disciples as he saw their weaknesses. (See Luke 22:31,32) In the same way, we must pray for individuals in our group when we see character weaknesses or sin in them.

Here are some verses to help you study in your group what God has to say about these things:

**Slander and Gossip:**

Proverbs 16:28

Proverbs 20:19

Proverbs 26:20-22

Ephesians 4:29

James 1:2

Galatians 5:14-15

**Jealousy, envy and selfish ambition:**

Ecclesiastes 4:4  
James 3:14-16

1 Cor. 13:4-5  
Philippians 2:1-11

**Judging others in a hypocritical or self-righteous way:**

Matthew 7:1-5  
Romans 2:1-3

Romans 14:1-13

**Note:** Sometimes judgment is necessary. Look also at these verses to understand when it is important for the Church to judge sin in its midst:

1 Cor. 5  
Matt. 18:15-17

Romans 16:17-18)

**Showing favoritism:**

Genesis 37 (especially verses 3-4)

James 2:1-9  
1 Tim. 5:21

**Anger:**

James 1:19-20  
Ephesians 4:26-27 & 31  
Prov. 14:29

Proverbs 15:1  
Matt. 5:21-22

**Pride:**

Proverbs 8:13  
Proverbs 16:18

Romans 12:3 & 16  
Philippians 2:1-8

Besides studying God's Word as a group, you may need to have conversations with individuals. Use the above scriptures to help them see where they are not applying the teaching of the Bible to their lives. They may need encouragement to grow in Christ's love for others. As you go to have these private talks, ask God to help you do it with humility and grace. (See Galatians 6:1,2) Ask him also for wisdom and spiritual insight to know what they need most.

***3. Some people in our fellowship want to leave the work of discipling others to the leaders. How can we encourage everyone to be involved?***

Ephesians says that Christian leaders help the members of Christ's body to do the work of serving in God's kingdom (See Ephesians 4:11-12). Here are some ways to encourage all group members to build God's kingdom in their relationships.

- **Each week at the end of your study in God's word, ask this question:** "During this next week, with whom will you share what

*you have learned today?”* The following week, ask: *“Who of you told a friend or family member what God is teaching you?”* Take a few minutes to pray for the people they have shared with.

- **Encourage the people in your group to form small groups to meet during the week for prayer and Bible study.**
- **During the week, go in groups of two or three to visit people in their homes, in the hospital, or in coffee or tea houses.** Think about whom you could bless with a visit: to pray for the sick and for those burdened with problems, to give practical help and encouragement, and to share the gospel with unbelievers.

**An important rule to remember as you go to visit:** Men should visit men and women should visit women, unless you are going as a husband and wife or are visiting a husband and wife. This will protect you from gossip and from temptation.

See Chapters 4 (“Understanding God’s Wonderful Gift of Salvation”) and 7 (“God’s Word: Our Daily Bread”) and also Appendix A, “Resources” for more suggestions of things your group members can use to disciple others.

***4. Some of us go to small towns and cities of our country to share the gospel where there are no believers. People are beginning to turn to Christ. We know they need to meet together for worship and to strengthen one another, but we have no leaders to be with them to guide them each week. Can you give us some advice?***

If your house fellowship can send believers to guide the new groups, that will certainly help them grow. This is why the apostle Paul said that God gives gifted people to build up the body of Christ. (See Ephesians 4:11-13) But even if it is not possible to send someone every week, a small group of believers can still start to meet.

Remember this: All over the world new believers are in situations where they must learn to trust in the Holy Spirit to be their teacher. Your groups can also, with the Spirit’s help, worship in simple ways, read or listen to God’s Word, pray and serve one another in Jesus’ name. The Lord himself will help them grow.

Jesus said:

*For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. (Matthew 18:20)*

Even if the group is small, they can gather often and grow together. This book has been written as a guide to help such groups. Give them a copy of this book, or help them download it to their device. (See “Resources,” Appendix A, for information.) If possible, read and discuss chapters one and two together with them. Then, look at the Table of Contents and help them decide which chapters are most important for them to study on their own until you can be with them again.

Also, show them how they can use **50 Life Studies** for weekly study. Encourage them to obey Jesus in all of his teachings. Visit them as often as possible, and call or message them frequently between visits. Most importantly, don’t forget to pray for them. The Apostle Paul tells repeatedly throughout his letters how he prays “without ceasing” for the churches he established (Rom. 1:9; Col. 1:9; Eph. 1:15; 2 Thess. 1:11).

Take time also to think and pray about a long term plan for reaching into new areas and establishing new fellowships. Ask the Lord to help you train traveling teams that have the vision of planting and strengthening new fellowships. Discuss in your group who can be on these teams. Teams like this are important for the multiplication of churches in a nation. You may find it helpful to join together with other home fellowships to accomplish this.

The Apostle Paul said this about the church in Corinth that he started and Apollos later strengthened:

*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. (1 Corinthians 3:6-7)*

Jesus said this to his disciples:

*I will build my Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. (Matt 16:18, ESV)*

Jesus is committed to seeing His Church grow. Our job is to make disciples who are faithful to his teachings.

## **How can your group grow in Christ?**

### **Application and Prayer:**

1. Are the members of your fellowship learning to read or listen to God's word regularly on their own? Are they daily spending time with the Lord in prayer? From the question and answer section above, reread the first question. Plan ways to teach about this. (See the study: "Make Time to Get to Know God" in *50 Life Studies* as a possible resource to use.)
2. Think about each of the members of your group. Are they growing to be more like Christ? Are they learning to obey all that Jesus taught? All of the chapters of this book are designed to help you disciple others. Look through the book, taking time to think and pray about which topics you most need to focus on in your group.
3. Reread question and answer #2 in Frequently Asked Questions, thinking specifically about people in your group. Are there things from the list in that question that you need to teach in your group? Are there individuals you need to talk with?
4. Are the members of your fellowship discipling others? How can you help them to grow in this? See question 3 above, and discuss how you might use those suggestions.
5. Pray often as leaders and in your group meetings that you would all become true disciples of Jesus, according to John 8:31-32. Here is a prayer that the apostle Paul prayed for the Colossian believers. You can pray this prayer for the people in your group:

*"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."* (Col. 1:9-14)

## **13. Forgiveness in the Home Fellowship**

*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.  
(Ephesians 4:31-32, ESV)*

## **Introduction**

### **As We Forgive, We Become Like Christ**

Have you ever seen a perfect family? Perhaps you think you have when you look at certain families from a distance. But when you get up close you discover that they have relationship problems, just like all families do.

Every family needs to learn to live together in love. If they don't, their relationships will slowly die. The same is true of a house fellowship. Some house fellowships gather each week for months, even for years, but members harbor resentment, bitterness and hatred toward one another. Deep inside the tree is rotting, even though it may look good on the outside.

Confession of sin and forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian faith. Our Savior went to the cross so that we would be forgiven completely of our sins. We take the Lord's Supper often to remind us of this. For that reason, the gospel teaches us over and over that the Church of Jesus Christ must learn to ask forgiveness of one another when they have hurt each other, and also to forgive each other from the heart. We are children of the King who taught forgiveness was something we are to learn throughout our lives.

If your group learns to practice the things that are taught in this chapter, your house fellowship will gain the heart of Jesus. You will become bright lights in this dark world.

## **Bible Study**

### **The Power of Forgiving and Asking Forgiveness**

**Opening Discussion:** Do you know of situations where people have stopped going to a fellowship because of broken relationships? If so, how did that affect the fellowship?

In our study today we want to look at how we can walk in an attitude of forgiveness and love and encourage the people in our fellowships to do the same.

#### **Read Matt. 6:12-15.**

1. How did Jesus teach us to ask for forgiveness? (v. 12) What does Jesus say about what happens when we forgive other people's sins against us? What happens when we do not forgive other people's sins against us? (v. 14-15)

This is a serious statement that we must not ignore! Do you believe it? Are there people in your life that you need to forgive? Are there people in your fellowship who need to know how dangerous it is to refuse to forgive?

#### **Read Col. 3:12-14.**

2. According to these verses, what are God's chosen people supposed to be like? What a beautiful family we've been privileged to join! If we live according to these verses, how will these attitudes and actions affect our relationships?
3. Read verse 13 again. This verse talks about "bearing with" each other and "forgiving" each other. Discuss what you think is the difference between these two things.

When we "bear with" each other, we are patient with the weaknesses of others. Forgiveness is only necessary when someone sins against us. We don't need to forgive them for their weaknesses, but we do need to bear with them, that is, love them anyway. Can you give examples of these two situations?

4. Verse 12 says that we are chosen by God, holy, and dearly loved and verse 13 says that we are forgiven by Christ. How should these things help us to be forgiving?

5. What will happen to our beautiful family of believers if we are not forgiving?

**Read Mark 11:24-25.**

6. Do you think there is a connection between verse 24 on asking God for something in faith, and verse 25 on learning to forgive people whom we hold bitterness toward?

Why is forgiveness of others so important when we pray to God?

**Read Matt. 5:23-24.**

7. What does Jesus say you should do if you're offering a gift to God and then remember that someone has something against you?

Does it surprise you that Jesus would want you to interrupt your worship of God to go be reconciled to your brother? Why are human relationships so important to God?

Are you aware of anyone in your life who has something against you because of some way you have hurt them or sinned against them? If so, are you willing to humble yourself and go ask forgiveness? Jesus says even to interrupt your worship time to do it. It's the most important gift you can give to God!

Why is obeying the Holy Spirit quickly so important in keeping relationships healthy?

**LET'S REVIEW WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED:**

- **Mark 11:25** tells us that it is important to recognize when we are holding something against someone and *to forgive them*.
- **Matt. 5:23-24** talks about the importance of recognizing that someone else has something against us. We must then *go to them and ask forgiveness from them*.

**Both** directions are important—forgiving others and seeking forgiveness from others. Rom. 12:18 says, *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”*

**End in Prayer:** Take time now to consider how you can grow in forgiveness *and* how you can encourage other members of your group to grow both in forgiving and seeking forgiveness. And then pray for a healthy family of faith!

*A Story from Christian History*  
*20th Century, Germany*

**Forgiving an Enemy from the Heart**

Corrie ten Boom was a Dutch woman in her early fifties when the Nazis invaded Holland in 1940. As thousands of Dutch Jews were being cruelly arrested and carried off to concentration camps in Germany (also known as death camps), Corrie's family knew they must do something to help save as many Jews as possible from certain death. They built a secret room in their home and hid many from the Nazi soldiers until they were able to safely escape to places in the countryside or other countries.

Eventually, they were caught by the German secret police. Corrie, her older sister Betsie and their elderly father were sent to a prison camp. Ten days later, her father was dead. Betsie, who was ill, also died after several months of cruel treatment in the death camp in Germany. Through a "mistake" (of man, but not of God!) Corrie was released from prison shortly before the end of the war. Nearly all of the other women in her prison camp were killed.

During the time they were prisoners together, Corrie's sister Betsie often said to Corrie, "When the war is over, we must take the message of forgiveness to the world." Corrie struggled greatly within herself, but finally surrendered to God. She would obey him and forgive, and she would follow God wherever he would lead.

In 1947 (two years after the war ended) she traveled back to the now-devastated country of Germany to bring the good news of God's love and forgiveness to a broken and desperate people. After speaking in a church in Munich on the topic of learning to love our enemies, Corrie was faced with one of the greatest challenges of her life: could she truly forgive her enemy when face to face with him?

The meeting was over and nearly everyone had left when she saw a German man making his way toward her. Immediately she recognized him! In her mind she could see him again in his prison guard uniform. He had been so cruel and had so humiliated her and Betsie. Now he stood in front of Corrie with his hand outstretched toward her. Would he remember her?

“A fine message, Fraulein! How good it is to know that as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!” He explained that since the war, he had become a Christian. He knew that God had forgiven his sins, but now he was asking her, as a representative of those he had treated so terribly, to also forgive him.

Of course he did not recognize her, Corrie realized. There had been thousands of women in the camp.

Corrie tells what happened as the man waited with his hand outstretched toward her:

*I stood there—I whose sins had again and again been forgiven—and now I could not forgive him. Betsie had died in that horrible place—could this guard erase her slow and terrible death simply for the asking?*

Yet Corrie knew she had to do it. God’s Word says that if we will not forgive those who have sinned against us, neither will our heavenly Father forgive our sins. She had also seen for herself that those who were able to forgive their enemies after the war were able to go on and live healthy lives. But those who did not forgive were forever held back. They remained prisoners of their past suffering.

Corrie continues the story:

*And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that, too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. ‘Jesus help me!’ I prayed silently. ‘I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.’*

*And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.*

*“I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart.”*

As they stood there together—former prisoner and former guard—God poured out His love into her heart in a way that she had never experienced before.

Corrie ten Boom traveled the world for over 30 years carrying this message of God’s love which overcomes all hatred and hurts. Over the

years, she faced other tests of forgiveness, but God was always patient and gracious to teach her his ways.

Corrie's message—the message of the gospel—brought freedom and life to thousands around the world. It can bring healing and new life to us, also. Most of us will never face the kind of test to forgive our torturers as Corrie ten Boom did, but will we forgive the much smaller hurts and offenses that come to us? If God can pour his love into the heart of one who experienced such terrible pain, can he not also give us his love for one another?

This story is retold from the book *The Hiding Place*,<sup>5</sup> and also from chapter 7 of the book *Tramp for the Lord*.<sup>6</sup> The quotes are from *Tramp for the Lord*.

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<sup>5</sup>ten Boom, Corrie, and John and Elizabeth Sherrill. (1971) *The Hiding Place*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books.

<sup>6</sup>ten Boom, Corrie, and Jamie Buckingham. (2011) *Tramp for the Lord*. Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications.

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### *1. How should we as leaders respond when we are wronged?*

Most people will respond in one of three ways: **silence**—they refuse to speak to the person who hurt them; **screaming**—they blow up in anger and look for ways to get revenge; or **denial**—they bury the incident deep inside and pretend that nothing happened. With all of these what will be the end result? Can there be unity and harmony in the body if we respond in any of these ways?

The enemy especially likes to attack leaders because they are the doorway to destroy the group. Frequently, he uses a member of the fellowship. Every leader can expect that, sooner or later, someone will become upset with him or her and speak out their feelings in a hurtful way, or perhaps try to get others on their side against the leader. Will you quit if someone wrongs or offends you, or are you committed to work through difficulties?

As a leader, it is your job to set an example in forgiving and loving those who wrong you. You must make a choice to keep your heart soft, allowing the grace of Christ to heal your hurt and enable you to reach out in love to those who have hurt you. Ask God to help you to forgive, even if you must forgive the same person over and over again. (See Jesus' words to Peter in Matt. 18:21-22.)

Here are some other Scriptures to help you in learning forgiveness. Have you looked at these scriptures together in your group?

- **Romans 12:17-21:** Do not repay evil for evil; leave room for God's wrath. Overcome evil with good.
- **Matt. 5:43-48:** Love your enemies.
- **Matt 6:12-15:** If we do not forgive, neither will God forgive us.
- **Matt. 18:21-35:** The parable of the unforgiving servant
- **Isaiah 53:7-9 and Matt. 27:11-14 and Luke 23:33-34:** Jesus is our example. Though He suffered unjustly, He did not take revenge, but instead He forgave.

### *2. How can we help those in our home fellowship to forgive one another?*

Besides setting an example and teaching about forgiveness, sometimes it will be necessary to go to an individual in your group and talk with

them privately about the importance of forgiving their brother or sister. Perhaps you may need to bring together the two people who are having a problem with each other and help them listen to and forgive each other. Always pray and ask for the help and fullness of the Holy Spirit before you go.

The following are some important Scriptures you can share with them. (Also, use the verses listed above.)

- **John 13:34-35:** We must love one another as Jesus loved us. His love includes complete forgiveness of all our sin.
- **Colossians 3:12-15:** *“Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility... forgive as Christ forgave you.”*
- **I John 4:7-12 and 19-21:** We cannot love God and hate our brother.
- **I Peter 3:8-12:** *“Live in harmony...”* We should repay evil with blessing.

***3. When someone has sinned against us, are there times when we should just forgive them from our heart and not mention it to them? When should we confront them in love about what they have done?***

Sometimes people hurt us and are not aware of what they have done. If it is a small thing that was done unintentionally, often it is best to forgive them and keep it between us and God, saying nothing to them. At other times, it is important for them to realize that what they have done is wrong, especially if we see that they are continuing in sin and continuing to hurt us and others.

If they are being divisive in the group, there is the potential for the home group to be destroyed. If we care about that person and their relationship with God and others, we must go to them and speak with them about their actions.

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus gives us some helpful guidelines for what to do when someone sins against us. Although every situation is different, there are some important principles that we can follow that are found in this passage. Lesson 37 (“In Love, Help One Another Overcome Sin”) in the book ***50 Life Studies*** can help you know how to apply this passage.

More on confronting relationship problems within the home group can be found in chapter 12, “Becoming Mature Disciples.” (See question #2 in Frequently Asked Questions.)

**See also Appendix C for helpful principles in forgiving and asking forgiveness.**

## **How can your group grow in Christ?**

### ***Application and Prayer***

1. Read Matthew 5:23-24. Do you know of anyone whom you have offended or hurt in some way? When will you go to them? What will you do or say? Take time to pray about this. Make a plan now and follow through by doing it as soon as possible.
2. Is there anyone who has offended you whom you have not forgiven? With God's help and grace, pray now and forgive them from your heart. (Read again Colossians 3:12-14.)
3. Are you aware of anyone in your fellowship who needs to forgive someone else in the fellowship or someone outside the fellowship? If so, how can you help them to forgive? Take some time to pray for them.

Look back over the scriptures in this section, and ask God to show you how to talk with them using some of these scriptures. Ask God to soften their heart to obey him.

4. Pray for all the members of your fellowship to grow in applying Colossians 3:12-14 in their relationships with one another.

## 14. Becoming Salt and Light in the World

*“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.*

*“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matt. 5:13-16)*

(Before he went to the cross, Jesus prayed to the Father for His disciples)—

*“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” (John 17:18)*

*Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? (James 2:15-16)*

## **Introduction**

### **Jesus Sends Us into the World**

It's very comfortable for house churches to gather together for a few hours each week, say goodbye to each other at the end, and then return a week later to sing a few songs and listen to a teaching again. But, as we've said in other places in this book, the Christian faith is much more than just a worship service that we go to every week.

Let's remember what happened in the gospels.

The disciples watched Jesus for three years. They saw that he didn't hide behind the walls of a religious building. He didn't tell the people to come to him; he was out among the people! He went from village to village. He ate with sinners, called them to repentance and showed them God's grace. He fed thousands. He went out to touch the lepers, heal the sick and set the demonized free. He courageously challenged religious hypocrisy. He taught about God's kingdom everywhere—in homes, on the streets, and beside the lake—not just in synagogues.

Today we are called the body of Christ. In other words, we are now the voice, the hands and feet of Jesus. We go out into the world, too! We shine his light in dark places. We feed the hungry and visit the sick. We care for those who are in prison. We touch people in the world with his grace. We pray for them in his name. And as we meet their needs, we also share the reality of Christ's coming as the Savior of the world. And in love we warn people to turn from sin and trust in him.

This sounds good in theory, doesn't it? But we all know that it's much easier to just stay in our Christian circles and not enter the world's needs.

This chapter will help your group guard against hiding your light under a basket. As you go, remember: Jesus is with you! Go out to serve the world in his name.

## **Bible Study**

### **Serve Jesus By Helping Needy People**

(This is study #41 in *50 Life Studies*)

**Opening Discussion:** Do you think God cares about the poor? Do you think we have a responsibility to help the poor? Why or why not?

#### **Read Matt. 25:31-46.**

1. In these verses Jesus is telling a story to teach a truth. Read again verses 31-32. When does this story take place? Describe the scene. Who is present? (v. 32)

What is the Son of Man (Jesus) doing? (v. 31)

2. Read again verses 34-36. What do those on Jesus' right receive? (v. 34) Why? What have they done?

List the things Jesus says in verses 35-36 that they have done for him.

3. What do those on the right (the righteous) answer in response to Jesus words? Do you think they are surprised at his words? (vs. 37-39)

4. Read Jesus' answer to them in verse 40. What do you think he means by this? How do we serve Jesus when we help those in need?

Mother Teresa was a well-known Catholic nun who served the very poor and dying who lived on the streets in India. She was inspired by this parable. She said that she saw the face of Jesus in each person that she helped. When you care for needy people, do you consider that you are helping Jesus himself?

5. Jesus now turns to speak to those on his left. What does he say to them? Why do they receive this punishment? (vs. 42-43)

6. How is their answer in verse 44 similar to the answer of the righteous in verse 37-39? How does Jesus answer them? (v. 45)

7. Read Ephesians 2:8-10. Read these verses through several times. What does verse 8 tell us about our salvation?

According to verse 9, are we saved by our works? Can any believer boast that he has earned his salvation through something he has done?

8. Now read again verse 10. Because of our faith, God has made us new creatures in Christ Jesus. As new creatures, what does it say we are created to do?

What do you think these good works might include?

9. Turn back to Matthew 25, and read verse 40 again. When you see or hear of someone in need, do you think to yourself, “How can I be Jesus’ hands reaching out to this person?” No one can meet all of the needs they see around them. But we can each reach out to the needy people that God brings across our path.

**End in Prayer:** Think about people that God may want you to help. Ask him to give you his heart of compassion for them. Then obey him by doing what he shows you to do.

**A Story from Christian History**  
***Central Asia, 21<sup>st</sup> century***

**Prison Doors Open for a House Fellowship**

“Ruslan, since you’ll be getting out of the prison soon,” Tofiq pleaded, “let me have your Bible. You can get another one once you get released. But I have no opportunity to learn God’s ways.”

Tofiq, a former thief in a Central Asian Muslim nation, had come to Christ through some other believers in prison, but he had no Bible. His prison friend, Ruslan, was a young believer when he entered prison and had been allowed to take a Bible in with him. Ruslan had often lent the Bible to Tofiq to read. The message of Christ was truly changing both of these men.

The day finally came for Ruslan to be released. As he was leaving, he embraced Tofiq and placed the Bible in his hands. The prison doors opened for him and he entered the free world. Tofiq hugged the Bible to his heart, and thanked God for this amazing gift.

Immediately he began reading the Bible for hours each day. The more he read, the more he changed. God’s Word, day by day, was shining light and hope into his mind and heart. He saw that the good news of Jesus Christ was not just a one time change when we are born again. Day by day change was happening in Tofiq: He was growing in his trust in God’s goodness. He grew more assured that through Christ’s death his sins were completely forgiven.

He now treated other prisoners with respect, and he even began to care about the guards. His little world within the prison walls was now full of light, even joy, as the truths of the gospel were planted deeper and deeper into his soul. He was actually living the miracle that the Bible talks about—a deep peace that can be experienced even in hard places. Prison was depressing, for sure. But because of Christ, Tofiq’s heart was full of hope.

He found the power of the Holy Spirit deep within and could not keep his faith to himself. He began to share his faith with other prisoners, some of whom also came to believe in Christ. Before long, the prison officials began to let him and other believers have a special room to meet in. They had seen the amazing change in Tofiq and they saw how he was influencing other prisoners, whose attitudes, words and actions

were changing for good! The officials saw the power of the gospel being lived out in these men.

Soon the officials let them meet 4 times a week, for over 2 hours each time! Tofiq was thrilled. Meeting often with these new believers (and some unbelievers also) was wonderful, but Tofiq knew he could not teach well unless he himself was taught more. Was this possible? How could he learn more of the Bible when he was in prison?

Then a miracle happened. Ruslan, who had put the Bible in Tofiq's hands, helped Tofiq by sending his friend Reshad, a house group leader, to visit him in the prison.

Before going into the prison, Reshad prayed for wisdom to know how to help Tofiq. He knew the prison officials would limit what he could give Tofiq. He decided to take in another Bible and also the Bible study resource, **50 Life Studies**. It would provide the group many hours of study and discussion in the life and teachings of Jesus.

Reshad asked 3 house fellowships to pray that doors would open for him to get into the prison. He took one brother with him who stayed in the car outside the prison and prayed. And God answered their prayers! Reshad was able to get in to see Tofiq, and the prison guards allowed both of the books in also. They even surprised Reshad by asking him for Bibles for themselves! "I have some in my car and will give them to you after I finish my visit with Tofiq," he told them.

Reshad was allowed to talk with Tofiq for several hours. He helped Tofiq understand the gospel more clearly and he encouraged him in teaching the class of prisoners. He told Tofiq,

*God has given you a wonderful opportunity to disciple these men. We will try to help you as much as we can. But don't forget, the Holy Spirit will help you. The word of God is powerful and will work in men's hearts. It's God's work, not yours!*

Reshad showed Tofiq how to use **50 Life Studies**, and how to get everyone involved in discussion during the Bible study time. They spent time praying together for the Lord to use these weekly meetings to expand his kingdom in the prison and beyond the prison walls. As they talked, Reshad saw that Tofiq was on fire for Jesus. He later told others, "Tofiq is more alive in Christ than we are who live outside the prison!"

After Reshad left, Tofiq began to use the resources in his new class. These Muslim-background men were growing together and Tofiq was learning the Bible more deeply each time he taught.

At Christmas time, Reshad, along with a few other men from the fellowships, took in a lot of food for the small group to cook in the kitchen provided for them. This small group of believers decided to invite other prisoners to join them, those who had no family to bring them tasty food. Tofiq and his brothers in Christ wanted to share the blessings they had been given.

Reshad had also brought in a lot of candy. Tofiq and the other believers wrote Bible verses of hope on small pieces of paper which they inserted into the candy wrappers and passed out to unbelievers as a Christmas present.

But the blessing doesn't just go one direction—that is, from the house fellowships to the prisoners. Recently, when Reshad visited the prison, Tofiq handed him a bag of gifts the prisoners had handmade for the home groups that had shown them such love. They were beautiful crocheted shawls for the fellowships to give to little girls!

At Easter the believers wanted to celebrate the Lord's Supper together but they had no juice or wine to represent the blood of Christ. And so they made dark tea. As they ate the bread and drank the tea, they celebrated together that Jesus gave his life for them—forgiven prisoners!

The home groups now call Tofiq's group their "house church that meets in the prison"! They feel responsible to help them grow in Christ. As this story is being written (in spring of 2020), Tofiq is still in prison and the Bible study group is still meeting. Reshad continues to visit Tofiq, sometimes going with other men from the home fellowships.

The house fellowship is also helping Ruslan now that he is out of prison. They know that released prisoners need help as they leave an environment where there is no freedom, and enter an environment where they are not restricted in what they do each day. That can be an emotional shock! These released prisoners often need practical things, like a job, clothes to wear, winter coats and shoes, and sometimes a place to stay. They also need friendships with believers, so they don't start meeting with old friends who might pull them back into their old ways.

The house fellowship prays for Ruslan and men of the house group meet with him regularly to encourage him and help him with his problems. They realize that they may have ministry to released prisoners in the future, because Tofiq's ministry in the prison is growing. Eventually those believers will be released. They will need God's love shown to them in practical ways.

*“And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’” (Matt. 25:39-40, ESV)*

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### ***1. What did Jesus mean when he said that his disciples are the salt of the earth and the light of the world?***

Jesus often used illustrations from everyday life to help us understand what God's kingdom is like. First, Jesus compares his disciples to salt. What does salt do? The most common use of salt is to bring out the flavor of food. Sometimes life is tasteless, that is, it is difficult and feels meaningless. Believers who live in God's love bring meaning and hope wherever they go. Life begins to "taste good" to those around them when believers step in and change the atmosphere of a home, a work place, a school, or other place.

Salt was also used to keep meat from decaying before there were refrigerators. We believers work in a world that is dying. Like the salt, our righteous deeds, even acts of kindness shown toward ungodly people, have a life-giving effect. They restrain sin and bring God's beauty. The early Christians served the corrupt Roman world in such a powerful way that unbelievers began to believe that things could actually change for the better.

Jesus also said that his disciples are light in a dark world. In the Bible, light is often a synonym for truth. When we turn on the light in a dark room everything suddenly is clearly seen. In the same way, the life of a believer should reveal Jesus, the light of the world, to those around them. People should see God's great love for the world in the way Jesus' followers treat others with gentleness and compassion.

They should also see God's love of righteousness and hatred of evil in the way his people live their lives. Believers should be known for their integrity and trustworthiness. True disciples also will speak up in support of what is right and against what is wrong in society. They are like a city on a hill that can be seen from afar. Both their lives and their words help others find the way to God

### ***2. We don't want to be a group that just meets on Sundays for worship times; we want to have the heart of Christ for the world. Can you give us practical suggestions on how we can begin to care for other people?***

Don't try to create a ministry without prayer and listening to the Holy Spirit. Read again the Bible study of the parable of the sheep and the

goats that is on the previous pages. Discuss the questions and think about the needs that the Lord puts before you in every day life.

We have all lived in blindness to the needs of people around us. Pray together for each member of your group to have the eyes and heart of Christ. Ask him to give you his heart of compassion for people with all kinds of needs—physical (for food, clothing, shelter, health care), emotional (those hurting from abuse or difficult life circumstances), or spiritual (those who don't know Christ or may be suffering from depression, discouragement, doubt, etc).

As the Holy Spirit opens your eyes to see these needs, ask him to also show you what you can do to help. Your serving will almost always involve a sacrifice of your time, your money or your reputation in the eyes of others. See the parable of the Good Samaritan, who sacrificed all of these, in Luke 10:25-37. For a study on this parable, see #18 in *50 Life Studies*.

### ***3. Our group is small. We have limited money and limited time. How can we take on more responsibilities?***

It is okay that you are small. As you pray and seek God, as discussed in question #2 above, He will open your eyes and your heart to what he has for you to do. And he will provide the resources that you need for the work he puts before you.

Many acts of service are small and don't need organization and lots of money. Read about Tabitha in Acts 9:36-42. Notice that her serving was in simple acts of sewing for needy people. Somehow she found time to use her gifts to help people.

Each week your church members will see needs that they can help with. It may be helping a mom with a very sick child, or visiting a widow who has no family, taking a bag of food to someone in need or going with a cancer patient to the doctor. Some may decide to pick up the trash around their apartment building.

Remember, Jesus said this:

*One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much... (Luke 16:10, ESV)*

Also, think about this: when the Lord opens a door for one member (like in the story above where Reshad went into the prison to help Tofiq), it could provide an opportunity for your whole group to serve

through giving, praying, and showing love in ways both big and small. Simply serve God that he may be glorified through your love.

You could also consider joining together with other groups to start a ministry. The church in Jerusalem started a daily ministry of feeding widows. (See Acts 6:1) Their resources were large because it was a joint project of many new believers in the city. Don't try to create alone a ministry that is bigger than you can handle. When the apostle Paul encouraged people to give, he wrote this:

*For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. (2 Cor. 8:12, NIV)*

## *How can your group grow in Christ?*

### *Application and Prayer*

1. Look back at questions 2 & 3 above. Take time as a fellowship to pray together as suggested there. Give opportunity for those in your fellowship to tell about any ways they are currently being salt and light among the people they live and work with. Are there ways that your group as a whole can strengthen and perhaps enlarge this ministry of service?

Also, as you pray expect God to show you other ways that you as individuals or as a group can show his love.

2. Take time in your group to discuss any challenges that group members may be facing as they seek to be salt and light in their world. For example, is anyone being pressured to be dishonest at work or at school? Is there anyone who is seeking to show God's love to a difficult person? Take time to pray for anyone who is facing any kind of persecution for doing what is right according to God's Word.
3. Discuss in your fellowship: What holds you back, either as individuals or as a group, from helping needy people? If it is a lack of time, ask God to show you any ways you may be wasting time. Some people truly may not have free time, but others could give up watching television or time on the internet to serve someone in need.

If you are concerned that people will take advantage of you, pray together that God would give you wisdom. Do you know others who help the poor? Ask them what they have learned in their ministry.

Are you afraid of gossip? Some people in your group may be held back by the fear of man. It's easy for us to worry about what other people will think or say about us if we do certain undesirable jobs or if we help people who are seen as outcasts. Here are some verses you can read together to see what God says about the fear of man and the fear of God:

Psalm 27:1

Psalm 56:10-11

Proverbs 29:25

Galatians 1:10

Ask the Lord to help you to not be afraid to serve humbly and sacrificially, like the Good Samaritan. Ask him to help you to keep your eyes on him as you serve and not worry about what people think. Remember the parable of the sheep and the goats. When you serve people in need, you are really serving Jesus!

## 15. Remaining Steadfast in Persecution

*“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

*(Jesus, Matt. 5:10-12, ESV)*

*Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed... (The Apostle Paul, 2 Tim. 3:12-14, ESV)*

## **Introduction**

### **Jesus Strengthens Those Who Suffer for the Gospel**

Persecution of the Church of Jesus is not a new thing. Jesus was persecuted and so were his disciples. Persecution has been a reality in all 21 centuries since Jesus was crucified. Your house fellowship may already know these hardships. You may be in persecution now.

Peter said,

*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. (1 Peter 4:12)*

When trouble comes because of our faith, we may wish we could retire from serving Christ. But we remember how much we have been helped by others who brought him to us. God asks us to give freely, just as we have received. Jesus gave everything for us. We know also that many unnamed believers over the centuries have sacrificed for us to receive the gospel. Some even gave up their lives. And so we learn to sacrifice daily.

*And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23, ESV)*

We let our light shine wherever we go, especially in dark places. And it is in dark places where we are opposed by angry people blinded by Satan. Jesus knew this opposition well (John 15:18-25).

In times of persecution, we discover our weaknesses and run back to Jesus, asking him for the strength and grace we need. In poverty of spirit, we call out for him to empower us to not be ashamed of him, and to continue to love those who hate the light.

We could run from the pain of persecution as the disciples did when Jesus was arrested (Mark 14:50). But if we focus on saving our lives, we will be denying all that Jesus has done in us so far. As we experience Jesus' healing in our lives, we find power to choose hardship, loss or pain when it lies in the path of righteousness. We've grown to love God's kingdom and we keep our

eyes on Jesus in the suffering. In losing our own kingdoms, we enter fully into his (1 Peter 4:1-2)<sup>7</sup>.

This chapter will help strengthen the hearts of your group members to follow Jesus when others stand against you.

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<sup>7</sup> These paragraphs are taken from Day 27 in the devotional book, ***Growing Strong in Christ through the Beatitudes***. See “Resources” Appendix for how to get a copy of this book.

## **Bible Study**

### **Jesus Prepares His Disciples for Persecution**

**Opening Discussion:** Do you know anyone who has gone through persecution because of their faith? Or have you read testimonies of believers who have suffered for Jesus? Before you start the lesson below, briefly tell a story about yourself or others who have suffered persecution.

In the beginning of Matthew 10, Jesus sends his 12 disciples throughout the land of Israel to teach about the kingdom of God, to heal the sick, and to cast out demons. In the next verses, he gives further instructions and tells what they can expect to happen. These are important truths for all believers in every generation.

#### **Read Matthew 10:16-42**

1. Read verse 16 again. Jesus' followers who go out into the world to share the good news are compared to what? Think about this picture; sheep are helpless and harmless; wolves are out to destroy the sheep. According to this verse, how are they to behave in this situation?

What do you think it would mean for your home group to become "wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove"? As you share the good news, are there some ways in which you are not wise? Are there some ways in which you are not harmless as doves?

2. Read verses 17-20. What can Jesus' disciples expect to happen to them? When they are brought before governors and kings, what opportunity will this give them? (verse 18) How will the Holy Spirit help them (v.19-20)?
3. Read verses 21-22. You may have heard of instances in our modern day where family members have killed another family member because they became a follower of Jesus. Oftentimes they are not killed, but they may be rejected by the family; they may be beaten or slandered and cursed. According to verse 22, what will be the end result for those who do not give up their faith in the face of persecution?

Is there anyone in your home fellowship who has faced persecution by family members because of their faith in Jesus? Discuss in your group what happened. If they have been rejected by their

family, discuss ways in which the home fellowship can be a true family for them.

4. Read verses 24-25. Jesus was called Beelzebul in Luke 11:14-15 . People said Jesus' good deeds came from the prince of demons. According to v. 25, if we are truly Jesus' followers, what can we expect from godless people? Do you think you are prepared in your heart to be attacked by such hateful speech? Explain your thoughts.

5. Read verses 26-28. Why should it encourage believers that everything that is hidden will be revealed?

Read verse 28 several times slowly. This is a very important truth for us to know. Who can destroy only the body, but not the soul? Who can destroy both body and soul for eternity? (Think about it: Who is our Judge who will ultimately decide where we spend eternity? See also James 4:12.)

Even though Jesus taught us that we should not fear what men can say or do to us, we know that the pressures of people around us are hard to ignore.

How can this verse help us to prepare our hearts and overcome fear during times of persecution?

6. How do verses 29-31 encourage you?
7. Read verses 32-33. All of us can be tempted to live our lives as secret believers. In our hearts we believe that Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life," but when we are under pressure from unbelievers, it is easy to stay silent about our faith. Fear of persecution from government or people at work, or fears of rejection from family members pressure us to hide our light under a basket (Read 5:14-16).

What does Matthew 10:32-33 have to say to us when we are tempted to be secret believers?

8. Jesus now returns to talking about family relationships. Read verses 34-39. What does Jesus say his coming has brought to the world? (verse 34)

We call Jesus the Prince of Peace. (See Isaiah 9:6) How can the Prince of Peace cause family members to be enemies with each other? (Reread verses 35-37)

Note: Romans 12:18 says, *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”* This should always be our goal. But sometimes, even when we do everything possible on our part to be at peace with others, they reject us or demand that we deny our faith in Jesus. If that is the case, we must decide who we will love most and who we will follow.

9. Read verses 37-39. What place does Jesus say that he must occupy in our hearts? (verse 37)

What do you think Jesus meant when he said we must take up our cross and follow him? (Verse 38)

Note: Think about the purpose of a cross. The person who was carrying a cross in Jesus’ day was going to his death. In Luke 9:23 Jesus says we must deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow him. In Luke 9:25, Jesus continues with this thought, “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?”

10. Read Matthew 10:39 again. This same verse is found 4 other times in the gospels: Matthew 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24, and Luke 17:33.

As you look over verses 38 and 39, think about your every day life as a follower of Jesus. What do these verses mean for you as an individual? What do they mean for you as a leader?

11. Three times in this passage, as well as in other places in the gospels, Jesus tells his followers to have no fear. How can you help your group members to overcome their fears?

**End in Prayer:** How can you help those in your fellowship to find the joy of laying down their lives daily to follow Jesus, in good times and in days of trouble? Take some time to pray about this now.

**Go Deeper in this Subject:** There is a list of other Scriptures on this topic to study with your fellowship at the end of this chapter.

**A Story from Christian History**  
**20<sup>th</sup>—21<sup>st</sup> century, China**

**The Chinese Church Grows Strong  
in the Fires of Persecution**

The growth of the Church in China in the last 70 years is an amazing story. Around 1950, there were only about 1 million Christians in the country. At that time, China had a population of over 500 million people, which means the Church had only 1 believer for every 500 persons.

Today the government of China estimates say that the Christian Church in China may be as much as 10 percent of the population – 1 believer for every 10 persons. There are over 100 million believers in China today! How did this happen? The largest growth has come from the multiplication of house churches, which have spread rapidly in spite of intense persecution.

In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some house church leaders in China suffered as much as 20 to 30 years in prison because of their faith. Imagine going into prison when your children were very young and then being released when they were grown.

These Chinese leaders suffered emotional and physical anguish. But they did it for Christ's sake and for the growth of the Church in China. Because of this they are honored deeply by Chinese believers today, though many of them are unknown to the world outside of China.

One man who helped the house church movement grow in China was Liu Zhenying, more commonly known as Brother Yun. After his father was healed miraculously, Brother Yun's entire family gave their lives to Jesus, along with many relatives and friends. His mother became an evangelist who planted house churches throughout their region.

No one could find a Bible during those days because of the intense persecution of the Church. For over three months, the teenager Yun fasted daily and prayed earnestly for a Bible. Finally, late one night, he heard a quiet knock at his door. Two strangers had been sent by God to deliver a Bible to his home! The Bible had been buried underground for years, hidden from the government's eyes. Brother Yun tells what happened to him after that miraculous answer to prayer:

*From that moment on I prayed to Jesus with faith-filled prayer. I fully trusted that the words in the Bible were God's words to me... Every day from morning to late evening I read the Word of God. When I had to work in the fields I wrapped my Bible inside my clothing and took every opportunity to sit down and read. At night-time I took my Bible with me to bed and laid it on my chest.*

Yun's parents were poor farmers. Yun had only finished the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and so he read very slowly. Still, he memorized entire books of the Bible, starting with the book of Matthew.

He traveled to new house churches which had no Bibles. He didn't know how to preach, so from memory he quoted the miraculous stories and teachings of Jesus. The listeners found faith rising in their hearts. With simple songs they worshiped Jesus who saved them from their sins and eternal darkness.

Yun also told them stories from the book of Acts, which tells of the growth of the Church after Jesus went to heaven. Faith grew in believers' hearts to share the gospel boldly.

But persecution was fierce. The police continually searched for believers, raided meetings, and arrested many. They beat them mercilessly, took them to courts and gave them heavy fines. Many leaders were sent to prison. The police and courts called the believers "enemies of the Chinese government," even though the Christians were law abiding citizens who did no harm in society. This was just as Jesus and the apostles said would happen in the New Testament.

In his book *The Heavenly Man*, Yun tells that the persecution years were also filled with many miracles. Jesus was with them and confirmed their preaching with powerful signs and wonders. God was using those dark years in China to bring millions into the kingdom of God. The believers prayed often and earnestly, and they wrote worship songs about staying faithful to Jesus in difficult times.

Xu Yongze, Chairman of the Sinim Fellowship of House Church Leaders in China wrote this about those years in which Mao Zedong was President:

*In 1949 persecution of God's people commenced and the churches have suffered from all kinds of attacks since. By 1958 the government had closed all visible churches. Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, told foreign visitors, 'Christianity in China has been confined to the history section of the museum. It is dead and*

*buried.” In the 1970’s a visiting Christian delegation from the United States reported, “There is not a single Christian left in China.”*

Of course there were still Christians there, but the Church was meeting secretly in house fellowships. Later, in trying to control the growth of the church and control what leaders preached, the government said believers could gather legally, but in only a few registered church buildings.

Church leaders saw that this would limit the growth of the church, and they did not believe the Church of Jesus should be told by the government how to serve Christ. Like the disciples of Jesus, they knew they must follow God not man. (Acts 5:28-29) As a result, new house churches were starting everywhere.

More and more people were hearing the gospel for the first time. The gospel even spread throughout the prisons, since imprisoned believers had many hours to share their faith. Criminals listened and found hope. They knew they needed freedom from shame and demonic oppression even more than freedom from a prison cell. They trusted in Christ and were washed clean. They became truly free!

Many believers were willing to suffer in prison so that the gospel might spread. Even though their prison times were full of loneliness and fears, the believers trusted that God had reasons for their being there. Brother Yun expressed this confidence in a message he wrote from prison in 2001:

*God has sent me to be his witness in this place. There are many people here who need Jesus. I will be in this prison for exactly the length of time God has determined. I won’t leave one moment early and I won’t stay one moment too long. When God determines my ministry in prison is complete, I will come out.*

Because of such confidence, Yun was able to endure the terrible conditions. He also saw a miraculous release from prison, like the apostles saw in the book of Acts.

Zhang Rongliang, a leader of the Fangcheng House Church network of China, was a friend of Brother Yun. He summed up his thoughts about Yun in the following words:

*In the Chinese church I have seen many of God’s servants come with great power and authority, but with brother Yun I saw a*

*servant of Jesus who always came in humility and meekness, reflecting the heart of the Son of Man, who did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life.*<sup>8</sup>

Since the time of Jesus, many such believers around the world have faithfully spread the gospel at great personal sacrifice, sometimes laying down their lives. Through very dark times they held on in faith that their labor in Christ was never in vain, and by their humble service they brought honor and glory to the name of Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews tells us the world is not worthy of such people. (Hebrews 11:38)

**Jesus said their reward in heaven is great!**

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<sup>8</sup> Quotes in this story are taken from *The Heavenly Man* by Brother Yun with Paul Hattaway. Monarch Books, Oxford, England, 2002.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

***1. Recently we have had persecution from the government. Some believers tell us that we are experiencing this because we have sinned. Others tell us that if we had enough faith, we wouldn't be going through these trials. Is this true?***

The Bible clearly teaches that there are consequences for sin, and we should have responsive hearts to God when he corrects us. But persecution for spreading the gospel is something different. Consider what the apostle Peter said concerning this in 1 Peter 4:

*If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name... Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (1 Peter 4:14-16 & 19, ESV)*

It's important for believers to realize that persecution for living godly lives and for sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with others is something that believers have suffered since the time of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself said:

*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. (John 15:18-21, ESV)*

See also Romans 8:31-39. These verses encourage us that God is for us and not against us. He is with us even in the darkest of trials, famine, deep poverty or violent persecutions that may come against us.

***2. We are confused about what we should do when persecution comes to us. Should we try to hide? Should we run somewhere else, maybe to another country? Should we stand up and***

***protest against what is being done to us? Or should we quietly accept what is happening and continue to be bold witnesses?***

There are different degrees of persecution, from a family member tearing up your Bible, to radical, angry people bombing church buildings. Every situation is different, and therefore we must be led by the Spirit of God. We must learn to seek the Lord's wisdom in Scripture, and also listen to his Spirit guiding us in what to do in each situation. Here are some scriptures to help us.

As Jesus was sending out his disciples to preach from town to town, he told them this:

*When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. (Matt. 10:23)*

Notice what Saul (later called Paul) did when his life was threatened:

*When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. (Acts 9:23-25, ESV)*

Later, Paul went to Jerusalem, knowing that he would be arrested there. He told the elders in Ephesus:

*And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. (Acts 20:22-24)*

Jesus told his disciples ahead of time that they could expect to be arrested. He gave them these instructions:

*Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matt. 10:17-20)*

Peter and John, full of the Holy Spirit, boldly said this to the authorities who had arrested them:

*But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20, ESV)*

One thing to remember when we are brought in to police stations or before courts is that we have been instructed as followers of Jesus to show honor to all those in authority.

*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men... (1 Peter 2:13)*

*Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. (Titus 3:1-2)*

*Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. (Rom. 13:7)*

Those in authority should see our respect for them and our desire for peace in society, but they should also see that we are committed to obeying God, as Peter and John were in Acts 4 above. If we are full of God's Spirit, he will give us strength to overcome fear. Then we will be able to speak confidently to them about Jesus, praying that they also may find salvation in him.

There are occasions when it is right to resist peaceably. If your country has laws that support the rights of all people to freedom of religion, then sometimes standing up for your rights is the right thing to do.

Notice what the Apostle Paul did in Acts 22:24-29. When he was about to be whipped by Roman soldiers, even though he had not been condemned of a crime, he appealed to Roman law. When they realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and what they were about to do was illegal, they stopped.

***3. Some in our group are struggling with hate and bitterness toward those who persecuted them and toward some who betrayed them. What can we do in our house fellowship to help them overcome their pain and bitterness?***

The power to overcome any darkness always comes from the teaching and preaching of God's word and through prayer. But we must be gracious and understanding toward our brothers and sisters who are struggling.

For all of us, our natural reaction is to respond in the same way that we have been treated—with hate, insults or violence. But Jesus taught his followers a different way, and we must help the members of our fellowship to walk in his way. In Romans 12, the Apostle Paul gives us these instructions:

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:14 &17-21)*

In Matthew 5:44 Jesus tells us to love our enemies and to pray for them. It is difficult to hate someone when you are praying for them. Of course, the most important prayer you can pray for them is that they would know the mercy and grace of Jesus, just like you do. Perhaps there were those in the early church who were praying for Saul of Tarsus when he was persecuting them! (Acts 9)

We must also remember that our real battle is a spiritual one and people are not our real enemy. Ephesians 6:12 tells us

*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.*

Therefore, we must put on the whole armor of God so we can fight against our true enemy. (See Ephesians 6:10-20.)

(See also Chapter 13, "Forgiveness in the Home Fellowship." The story in that chapter from the life of Corrie ten Boom may be especially helpful to share with anyone struggling with bitterness.)

***4. Because of persecution in the past, some believers in our city do not meet anymore. Fear is ruling in their hearts. They can only think about not being persecuted, so the spread of the gospel has been essentially forgotten. How can we restore the courage to live for Jesus that we once had?***

Do you remember what happened when Jesus was arrested? At that dark moment, the disciples were scattered. And Peter even denied that he knew Jesus. Before they saw the resurrected Jesus, they had lost all hope. Jesus found them hiding behind locked doors.

But the reality of the resurrection of Jesus changed everything. Jesus conquered death and nothing could stop him. For that reason, the apostles were willing to trust their lives into God's hands.

As you end this section, look at Acts 4:23-31 with your home group. Notice what the early believers did when religious leaders threatened them. Notice especially their prayer and God's answer in verses 29-31. It is helpful for us to remind each other often of how much Jesus suffered so that we could be free from sin and death. So many people still do not know that! How can we keep this wonderful news from them?

It is not uncommon for believers to stop meeting when persecution comes, but at this time, they need to support one another. The Apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12:26, "*If one part [of the body] suffers, every part suffers with it...*" If individuals in your group are going through troubles with family or with police, it's important for them to know that the fellowship is standing with them; they are not alone. If people are afraid to come to your meetings, you as the leader, or someone else from the group should go to them and share with them some of the scriptures from this chapter. Take time, also, to pray with them, helping them to take their fears to Jesus and exchange them for his courage.

For more encouragement for your group, see the application section below.

## **How can your group grow in Christ?**

### ***Application and Prayer***

1. Look at the following list and talk about what fears you face most when persecuted for following Jesus?
  - fear of rejection by family members
  - fear of losing a job or being unable to enter university
  - fear of what neighbors might say about you
  - fear of government fines, imprisonment, beatings or death for your faith
  - fear of being separated from your spouse or your children
2. If you have faced persecution in the past, or you are in it now, which questions on the previous pages (Frequently Asked Questions) help to describe what your group is facing? Take some time to meditate on the related verses and pray for God's wisdom in your situation.
3. If you have not already done so, study Acts 4:23-31, mentioned at the end of Question 4 above. Use that scripture to help you pray for one another about the fears you face and for emotional healing for those abused by persecution. Pray for boldness and signs and wonders as the apostles did in these verses.
4. There are many scripture passages in this chapter. Look back over the chapter and decide which ones will be most helpful to your group. Choose several passages that you will study together as a fellowship in the coming weeks.

See also other scriptures on the next page.

**Here are other scriptures on this topic to study with your fellowship:**

- **Joshua 1:1-9** (Encouragement to be strong and courageous)
- **Matthew 5:10-12** (Those who are persecuted are blessed.)
- **Matthew 24:9-14 & Luke 21:10-19** (Encouragement to persevere in trials)
- **John 15: 18-21** (Expect the world to hate you as they hated Jesus)
- **John 16:1-4&33** (Warning about persecution; Jesus has overcome!)
- **Acts 4** (Encouragement to grow in courage and boldness)
- **Acts 5:17-42** (Apostles are thrown in prison; they speak boldly.)
- **Romans 8:16-25 & 28** (God's Spirit helps us.)
- **Romans 8:31-39** (Nothing can separate us from God's love.)
- **1 Corinthians 15:58** (Our labor is not in vain.)
- **Philippians 1:27-30** (Stand firm; do not be frightened.)
- **Hebrews 4:14-16** (We can approach God's throne with confidence.)
- **Hebrews 11 & 12:1-3 & 11** (Follow the example of past men and women of faith.)
- **James 1:2-4 & 5:7-11** (Rejoice in suffering; it produces maturity.)
- **1 Peter 1:3-9** (We have a living hope; we are refined by suffering.)
- **1 Peter 2:19-25** (Jesus, who suffered unjustly, is our example.)
- **1 Peter 3:13-4:19** (There is blessing in suffering for Christ's sake.)
- **1 Peter 5:6-11** (Resist the devil; Christ will make you strong.)
- **Revelation 2:8-11** (Do not fear; be faithful and receive the crown of life.)

**Scriptures about God's help in times of trouble:**

- **Psalms 3, 5, 13, 18, 20, 23, 27, 40, 46, 54, 56, 61, 62, 68, 70, 91, 121, 125, 130, 140 & 146**
- **Isaiah 26:3-4; 40:27-31; 41:10; 42:5-9 & 43:1-4**
- **Jeremiah 29:11-14**
- **Matthew 11:28-30**

## **16. The Faithful Home Fellowship Sees God's Kingdom Grow**

*You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others. (The apostle Paul to his disciple, Timothy.  
2 Tim. 2:2, NLT)*

*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.  
(1 Cor. 3:6-7)*

*"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)*

## **Introduction**

### **Growing Together**

Since the time of Jesus, teaching disciples to know and obey Jesus' teachings has been the key to the growth of the true Church around the world.

Growing together is the theme of this book. Wherever believers gather for the purpose of lifting up the name of Jesus and serving him, spiritual power is released for God's kingdom to grow. If you and your group have studied the previous chapters in this book and prayerfully applied them in your group, you are growing in Christ. You also are growing in your influence of others.

This chapter is a review of all the previous chapters of this book. In the following pages we will discuss how growth comes in a natural way when we do what Jesus taught. Here are three ways you should see growth: 1) growth in godliness of your church members; 2) growth in numbers of people coming to Christ; and 3) growth in new fellowships being started to serve the new believers.

Jesus talked often about the growth of God's kingdom. Remain in Jesus and expect the kingdom to grow through you!

## **Bible Study**

### **Spreading the Gospel by Training Faithful Believers**

**Opening Discussion:** How can your house group be more effective in spreading the gospel in your country?

#### **Read 2 Timothy 1:1–2:3**

1. Who is writing the letter and who is he writing to? (v. 1,2)

The elderly apostle Paul has disciplined young Timothy for many years. He was not his real son, but because of their deep friendship, Paul calls him "my dear son."

2. Read verses 3-5 again. What does Paul say that shows us he had deep affection for Timothy?
3. Paul exhorts Timothy in verses 6 and 7. What character qualities does Paul want to see in Timothy? (v. 7) How can Timothy grow in these qualities? (v. 6)

Think about your own life right now. Are you strong in these qualities or weak? Explain your answer and how you want to grow.

4. Paul, who is suffering in prison, writes that Timothy should not be ashamed of the gospel. (Read again v. 8) How does Paul explain what the gospel is in verses 9 and 10?
5. Even though Paul is in prison, why is he not ashamed to keep proclaiming the gospel? (v. 11,12)

When we face trials like Paul did, why is it so important that we have assurance of Jesus the Messiah's keeping power in our lives (v.12)?

6. Read again verses 13 and 14. Paul has sent Timothy out to keep proclaiming the gospel. In these two verses, Paul tells Timothy to guard something. What must Timothy hold onto carefully?

Many false teachers were coming into the early church and were distorting the gospel of grace which all the apostles taught.

How important is it to you to study carefully what the New Testament teaches about Jesus the Messiah? Are you committed to faithfully teach that message so that others may hear and believe in the true gospel?

7. Read again chapter 2:1-3. Here Paul is exhorting Timothy to keep working for the spread of the gospel. As you answer the following questions, look carefully at verse 2.
  - Who taught Timothy?
  - To whom is Timothy to entrust the teaching he has received?
  - What will they do with the teaching?
8. This is a simple picture of how discipleship happens as people are faithful to pass on God's word: Paul teaches Timothy-->Timothy teaches faithful believers--> Those faithful people teach other faithful people --> (and this continues).

What will happen if believers in this country do not train new people to teach the gospel?

2 Tim. 2:2 says that Timothy is to “entrust” what he has received to faithful (trustworthy) people. When you entrust something to someone, you give it to them, trusting that they will be responsible to do with it what you expect them to do.

Paul tells Timothy to look for trustworthy people to pass on the gospel. These would not be people who simply learn the Bible in an academic way and love to talk about what they know, but their lives aren't changed. Faithful people show by their humble obedience that they love Jesus. Their lives exhibit the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). They give themselves to serve others and to teach and train them.

The home fellowship is the place where this training (or discipleship) best takes place. Believers grow in community with other believers, as they learn to love and serve one another. We don't learn these things in isolation, by ourselves. That's why it is important that believers gather together regularly.

**End in Prayer:** Talk about how it could affect your city and nation if every home group trained faithful believers to train others. Take some time now to ask God to help your group to follow Paul's instructions to Timothy.

## *A Story from Christian History*

### *1st Century, Ancient Roman Empire*

#### **The Gospel Explosion in the First Centuries of the Church**

The day Jesus walked out of the tomb was like a huge tsunami wave on the earth. It was the beginning of the end of Satan's kingdom. On the cross Jesus had taken the sin of the world on himself. He took our curse and died our death. The Father raised Jesus up to show the world that nothing can defeat Jesus, even the last enemy—death! Jesus is Lord over everything.

A few weeks later on the day of Pentecost, the dynamite from heaven exploded. Before he ascended to heaven, Jesus had told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the dynamite (Greek “dunamis,” meaning “power”) from heaven came upon them (Acts 1:4-8). In the power of the Holy Spirit they would go everywhere to proclaim the good news of His Lordship over all things.

On the day that the Holy Spirit came in power, 3,000 people became believers in Jesus (Acts 2:41). Very soon after that the number was 5,000 (Acts 4:4). The gospel soon began moving throughout the entire Roman empire and beyond. It is estimated that within 300 years the Christian population was 6 to 10 million people in the empire!

This growth did not happen through military conquest and forced conversions. The gospel spread through simple people spreading their faith during seasons of great persecution. In 313 AD, Rome decreed the Church should no longer be persecuted and soon after that the Christian faith was declared the religion of the empire.

**Why did the gospel spread so rapidly?** Looking especially at the book of Acts but also the letters of the apostles, let's think about some of the factors that influenced that growth. As you read the following paragraphs, we hope you will take time to read each scripture in parentheses. These will help you to see more clearly the power of the Holy Spirit that was moving through the early Church.

**Here are seven reasons why the gospel spread so rapidly through the ministry of the apostles and other evangelists.**

#### **1. Belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead.**

This was the unexpected event that changed everything. The apostles saw it with their own eyes and they were changed forever! No one could convince them that it didn't happen. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all boldly tell the resurrection story in their writings. They do not hide the defeat and fear that the disciples experienced when they saw their leader crucified.

At the trial of Jesus, Peter shamefully denied that he knew Jesus (Matthew 26:69-75). But a few weeks later, Peter preached to thousands and said, "*This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses.*" (Acts 2:32, *ESV*)

Luke tells us that Jesus appeared to them at various times during the 40 days before he ascended to heaven (Acts 1:3). Paul says that Jesus appeared to more than 500 followers at one time! (1 Cor. 15:3-8)

The resurrection was a very clear statement from God about who Jesus was and the disciples knew it. Peter preached at Pentecost:

*Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:36)*

Paul told the Corinthians that because of Jesus' rising, all believers are destined to eternal victory over sin and death (1 Cor. 15:54-58). For this reason, life had purpose and meaning, even during very difficult times.

## **2. Belief in the power of Jesus to save.**

They wholeheartedly believed in the power of Jesus Christ to forgive sin and save from eternal judgment. Because of this, from hearts of love they courageously called people to repentance, faith and baptism.

Peter and John boldly told the Jewish leaders that salvation comes only through Jesus (Acts 4:12). They explained to all people that God sent Jesus to turn them from their wicked ways (Acts 3:26). This was an important theme in the apostles' letters. Because of what Christ had done, his followers were called to leave the darkness and walk in the light of Christ as new people (Ephesians 5:3-15; 1 Peter 2:9-12; 1 John 1:5-10).

## **3. Belief in the power of prayer.**

Following what Jesus had taught them, the apostles taught that believers should pray at all times and for all things (Matthew 7:7-11,

Luke 18:1-8, Acts 1:14; Acts 12:5; Eph 6:18). Prayer was not only a part of their Sunday gatherings; their daily lives were filled with prayer. They especially prayed for God's kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10). Even when threatened by religious authorities, the early believers asked God to make them bold in their preaching and to send signs and wonders to confirm the truth of what was preached. (See Acts 4:29-31.)

#### **4. Belief in God for signs and wonders.**

As they went out and preached to the lost, the apostles had confidence in the power of Jesus to heal and to drive out demons. They did not trust in their own abilities to heal, but they were very confident in the name of Jesus to do so (Acts 3:6-10 & 16). Jesus had taught them to preach that the kingdom of God had come near and to demonstrate it by bringing physical healing and spiritual deliverance to the people (Matt. 10:7-8). The disciples continued this practice after Jesus ascended to heaven.

Extraordinary miracles occurred, resulting in both believers and unbelievers walking in holy fear (Acts 2:43, Acts 5:12-16). Such miracles happened throughout the book of Acts. The apostles expected signs and wonders, not only through their own ministry, but also through new generations of believers that God was raising up. Stephen and Philip were deacons whom the Holy Spirit used mightily in signs and wonders (Acts 6:8 and Acts 8:6-8). Later James told elders to pray for the sick and to expect healings (James 5:14-16).

#### **5. Belief in the guidance of the Holy Spirit.**

As they went out with the gospel, the apostles knew that Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, was always with them as he had promised: "*And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" (Matt. 28:20). They knew that they were participants with Jesus in his mission to redeem the world, and they listened for his guidance.

Sometimes it was miraculous and specific: The Lord led Peter to Cornelius' house (Acts 10), Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40), and Paul and his missionary team to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10), which was the first step of the gospel into Europe. Other times they followed the general command to "Go," trusting that the Spirit would lead them to opportunities and inspire them with what

to say and do as they went. But always they trusted in God's leading, however it would come.

## **6. Belief in the power of God over every enemy, even death.**

The apostles did not fear the mobs of people or the authorities who threatened them, imprisoned them and even killed some of their number. They knew their battle was not really against people, but against Satan's kingdom. They expected the forces of darkness to make war on them (Eph 6:10-12).

Jesus had told the disciples about the dangers that were ahead for them, but he taught them not to be afraid (Matthew 10:28-31). On several occasions the Lord miraculously delivered the apostles from prison (Acts 16:22-40).

But more importantly, Jesus promised that the Spirit of God would give them what to say when they stood before kings (Matthew 10:17-20). The book of Acts tells of amazing opportunities the apostles had to share the gospel before religious leaders *and* government leaders. (See Acts 4 and Acts 26 for a few examples). But in the end, most of the apostles were killed for the sake of Jesus Christ. They were willing to sacrifice and suffer for the gospel because they did not put their hope in this life but in the life to come.

## **7. Belief that the gospel message was from God, not man.**

The apostles were committed to preserve the purity of the gospel message. They did not make up their own version of the gospel in order to build their own ministries or kingdoms (Galatians 1:6-12). Instead, they passed on what they had seen and heard as witnesses. (John 20:30-31, 1 John 1:1-4, 2 Peter 1:16-21).

They knew (as Jesus had warned them) that false teachers and prophets would come to distort the gospel message. In the fear of the Lord, the apostles worked hard to make sure the truth of the gospel was passed on as they had received it (Acts 15:1-11; 1 Cor. 15:1-8; 2 Timothy 2:2; 2 Peter 2:1-3). They did this through their preaching and through their writings, that is, the New Testament, which we have as our standard of truth today.

**Of course, we could mention many other reasons** why the gospel spread so rapidly in the Roman Empire. The love of Christians for one another, as well as for their pagan neighbors was a very important fac-

tor. In those first 300 years, followers of Jesus served both believers and non-believers during times of plagues when thousands were dying. Frequently, the Christians themselves caught the plague, sacrificing their lives as they served the sick day and night.

They took in babies that the pagans commonly abandoned to die on the streets, and they cared for orphans and widows as the scriptures taught. In these ways and more the disciples of Jesus demonstrated that their message was from heaven, sent by a God who loved a lost world and was powerful to save all who looked to him in faith. It was a message that people everywhere were hungry to hear.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### ***How will our small house church's obedience to the teachings of Jesus help to grow God's kingdom in this big world?***

To answer this question, we're going to briefly review each chapter in this book. Sometimes it is important to step back and look at the big picture. And it's important to remember Jesus' parables on the power of small beginnings. (See Matthew 13:31-33.)

No matter how small your church is (even if only two or three people), if you pay attention to what Jesus taught you to do, you are advancing his purposes on this earth. You are faithful to him!

As you read the following summaries of the chapters in this book, think about your home group. Are you applying these teachings?

#### **The Home Fellowship is a Family**

Jesus said he would build his church. His true church, however, may look different than what we think a "church" should look like. The house fellowship that develops true community and learns to sincerely love people with the grace of Christ is going to shine like a city on a hill. In this broken world where so many people are lonely and deeply wounded, God wants to form your church into a family who helps lost people find his way. (Read Acts 2:42-47.)

#### **Love, the Leader's Motivation**

Jesus gave us a completely different example of what leaders should look like in this world. Sadly, in some churches around the world, the leaders don't follow the example of Jesus. Instead they follow worldly examples of leaders who lord it over those under them. When Christian leaders serve with sincere humility and love, the people in their flock never forget it. And they become servant leaders, too. God's true kingdom multiplies! (Read Mark 10:42-45.)

#### **Understanding God's Wonderful Gift of Salvation**

The gospel is a pearl of great price for all sinners. It gives us great joy when we understand it and receive it. Even a simple presentation of the gospel can guide a sinner to repent and believe. But year by year, all believers need to go deeper in understanding salvation. As we do, the Holy Spirit brings life to us like a powerful river inside of us. The

better we understand the gospel, the better we will help the lost to find hope in it. (Read Romans 1:16,17.)

### **Baptism in the Home Fellowship**

Many around the world attend a church and call themselves believers but have never obeyed Jesus' command to be baptized. Baptism calls each person to publicly confess their faith in Christ. They are confessing that they need a Savior and that they truly believe Jesus' death and resurrection was for their salvation. But baptisms are not only for those who enter the water. They renew the faith of all believers who watch as well. (Read Romans 6:1-14.)

### **Worshipping Together in Spirit and Truth**

Worship flows naturally from the hearts of believers whose eyes are opened to how much God has given them—in material things, in friends and family, and, especially, in their union with Christ. A grateful heart is a worshipping heart. And people who are happy in Christ naturally begin to change the world around them. A home group that worships God from the heart is welcoming the Lord's presence among them... And that is power! (Read Psalm 100.)

### **God's Word: our Daily Bread**

Jesus and the apostles warned that many false prophets and teachers would distort God's Word and lead many astray. Your home group takes a strong stand against Satan's deception by studying God's Word carefully each week, and by teaching your people to read (or listen) to the scriptures in their times alone with God. Faith is renewed each week by hearing God's Word! It is our daily bread! (Read Psalm 119:9-16.)

### **Passing the Gospel on to the Children**

Jesus said "*Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them...*" (Matt. 19:14, NIV) But do you hinder them in your home group from coming to him? Do you give careful attention to teaching your children God's ways? In a few years, these children could be leaders of the church in your country. But this will happen only if you make sure to train them now to walk with God. Children need the gospel, too, and they need the loving guidance of believing adults. Don't neglect this treasure that Christ has given you. (Read 2 Tim. 3:14-15.)

## **Celebrating the Lord's Supper with Thanksgiving**

When Jesus gave his disciples the bread and the wine as his body and blood, he was telling them, "I love you so much that I am giving my life for you. Please never forget this." In your group, take the Lord's Supper often. When you do it, don't hurry. Allow people time to quietly confess sins and thank him for the covenant of grace. The Holy Spirit is present in a powerful way when we take it together. We are washed clean again and serve Him with fresh joy. (Read John 6:35 & 51.)

## **Growing in Faith through Prayer**

There is something mysterious about the way prayer works in us and through us. Jesus and the apostles knew how to pray without show or hypocrisy. They prayed in faith! The heart of their prayers was that God's kingdom would come and his will be done on earth. All through the New Testament, when the apostles prayed, God's kingdom grew in power. Does your home group pray together often? The church that learns to pray together grows together! (Read Eph. 6:18.)

## **Discovering the Joy of Giving**

In the gospels, stories on giving often tell us of great sacrifice. Think of the widow and her tiny coins. She gave all she had to live on. And the good Samaritan sacrificed much time, money and reputation to help his country's enemy (a Jewish man lying beaten on the road). The home fellowship that learns to give generously is regularly touching the world with Christ's love. (Read 2 Cor. 8:1-5.)

## **Becoming Mature Disciples**

Every chapter in this book is about making disciples, but in this specific chapter on discipleship, the emphasis is on two things: 1)Is the character of Jesus being formed more deeply in your church members year by year? 2)Are they each taking on the responsibility to pass on what they are learning to others who are younger in the Lord? If each church member takes discipleship seriously, God will use your group mightily. (Read 2 Timothy 2:1-2.)

## **Forgiveness in the Home Fellowship**

Every family in the world needs to learn to live together in harmony. The church of Jesus is no different. Sadly, some churches have fac-

tions that go on for years. Bitterness remains between brothers and sisters and slowly poisons many relationships. But when relationships are healed among church members, hope is restored that Christ's kingdom can truly flourish on this earth. (Read Ephesians 4:32.)

### **Becoming Salt and Light in the World**

Right now around the world in millions of ways, believers are showing the love of Christ to people who don't know him. True believers not only proclaim the truths of the gospel; they live out the gospel in practical ways. Jesus went about doing good (Acts 10:38) and his Church does the same. House church members do more than just meet on Sundays; their acts of kindness and mercy touch the world every day. (Read Matthew 25:31-40.)

### **Remaining Steadfast in Persecution**

Nobody wants persecution. We all hope it will never come to us. But Jesus said his true followers would experience it. When we suffer, should we despair, thinking that God is not in control anymore? Let's never forget Romans 8:28. Though evil men, inspired by evil spiritual forces, do evil things, God is still working out his purposes. Let's trust him to spread the gospel and to refine our faith like gold. (Read Romans 8:28-39.)

## **How can your group grow in Christ?**

### ***Application and Prayer***

Go back to the Frequently Asked Questions section above. Look more carefully there at the summaries of the chapters of this book. Choose a few chapters where you think your group is weak and needs to grow. Study those chapters again in the weeks ahead and pray for growth in those areas.

## Appendix A: Resources

The following websites contain many helpful resources for both children and adults in many languages. You can also find songs and messages in many languages on Youtube.

### WEBSITES:

1) [www.learnhisways.com](http://www.learnhisways.com)

When you visit this website you will see flags for the various languages. Click on the flag for the language you need and you will see the available resources. All are FREE to download to your device or to print as books or as individual studies for your home group. You may also print books to distribute to other groups in your country.

This book, *Following Jesus Together*, is available in several languages from this website.

The following Bible study and devotional books are also available here in many languages. **These books are useful tools to use alongside this book and are referenced throughout the chapters.**

*50 Life Studies*

*Exploring the Ancient Book of Genesis*

*Growing Strong in Christ through the Beatitudes*

*One Flesh-One Heart* (on marriage)

*Raising Children to Walk with God* (for parents)

2) [www.thehopeproject.com](http://www.thehopeproject.com)

The Hope video: the story of the gospel from Genesis through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

3) <https://www.jesusfilm.org/search.html?q=English>

The life of Jesus for adults and for children, the story of Mary Magdalene (*Magdalena*), as well as other films

- 4) <https://www.jesusfilm.org/strategies-and-tools/resources/the-app.html>  
Jesus video app: Here you can download an app that will give you free access to all of the films on the website above in hundreds of languages.
- 5) [olivetree.com](http://olivetree.com)  
Free Bible in many languages
- 6) <https://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/audio-bibles/bible-recordings>  
Audio Bible in many languages
- 7) [bible.com/app](http://bible.com/app)  
Free Bible App in many languages
- 8) [bible.com/kids](http://bible.com/kids)  
Free Bible App for children in many languages
- 9) <https://bibleforchildren.org/>  
Bible stories for children in many languages, with pictures for children to color that can be downloaded and printed
- 10) <http://www.wol-children.net/index.php?n=English.Main>  
Audio Bible stories for children in many languages, with the script for creating your own Bible story dramas
- 11) <https://songs.worshipleaderapp.com/>  
Worship songs in many languages

## **Appendix B: Stories**

### **Bible Stories for Home Fellowships**

#### **And Suggestions for Using Them with Children and Adults**

Below is a list of Bible Stories that both children and adults can enjoy and learn from.

#### **Old Testament**

- Genesis 1&2: Creation
- Genesis 3: The fall of mankind into sin
- Genesis 4: Cain and Abel: the first murder
- Genesis 6:5—Genesis 8:22: Noah and the flood
- Genesis 11:1-9: The Tower of Babel
- Genesis chapters 12—50: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph: These chapters have many stories children will love. Some of the stories will be more appropriate for older children and adults.
- Exodus chapters 1—20:21 & chapters 32—34: God Delivers Israel from Egypt and gives the Ten Commandments. There are many fascinating stories for all ages in these chapters.
- Numbers chapters 13—14: Spies are sent into Canaan; Israel rebels against God
- Joshua chapters 1—4 & 5:10—10:15: Joshua leads Israel into Canaan; the walls of Jericho fall
- Judges chapters 6 and 7: Gideon miraculously defeats the Midianites
- The Book of Ruth: This is a beautiful story of love and faith!
- The Books of 1 & 2 Samuel: Young children will love the story of David defeating the giant, Goliath, in 1 Sam. 17. Many of the other stories in these two books have important lessons for children who are a little older and for adults.
- 1 Kings chapters 16:29—19:21 and 2 Kings chapter 2: Elijah the prophet confronts a wicked king and false gods (Miracle Stories)
- 2 Kings chapters 4—7: Elisha the prophet does many miracles
- 2 Chronicles 20:1-30: Jehoshaphat: God delivers Judah
- The Book of Esther: Esther risks her life to save her people

- Daniel chapters 1—6: Exciting stories of Daniel and his three friends in Babylon and how God delivered them.
- The Book of Jonah: Jonah Runs from God and is swallowed by a fish

## **New Testament**

Below is a list of 25 stories from the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) and the Acts of the Apostles that everyone from young children to adults will enjoy. The Gospels contain many stories from the life and miracles of Jesus. The Book of Acts has many great stories of miracles God did through the Apostles after Jesus went back into heaven. It also tells of trials and suffering that Jesus' followers endured as they took the gospel everywhere. These stories can inspire your fellowship members of all ages to also follow Jesus and take the gospel to others.

- The Birth of Jesus: Luke chapters 1&2 and Matthew 1:18—2:23
- Jesus Is Tempted: Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13
- The Parable of the House on the Rock: Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:46-49
- Miracles of Healing: Matthew 8:1-17
- Jesus Calms a Storm: Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; and Luke 8:22-25
- Jesus Forgives Sins and Heals a Paralyzed Man: Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26
- Jesus Raises a Dead Girl and Heals Others: Matthew 9:18-34; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56
- The Parable of the Sower: Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; and Luke 8:4-15
- Jesus Feeds Five Thousand People: Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; and Luke 9:10-17
- Jesus Walks on Water: Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-21
- Jesus Feeds Four Thousand People: Matthew 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10
- The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant: Matthew 18:21-35
- Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem: Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10 Luke 19:28-40
- Jesus Heals a Blind Man: Mark 8:22-26

- Jesus Says to Let the Children Come to Him: Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17
- The Parable of the Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-32
- Jesus Heals Ten Lepers: Luke 17:11-19
- Jesus Meets Zacchaeus: Luke 19:1-10
- Jesus Is Crucified: Matthew chapters 26&27; Mark chapters 14&15  
Luke chapters 22&23 John chapters 18&19 (These passages are very long. For young children you will need to tell it more briefly or read it from a children's Bible. You could also read a little each day, leading up to Easter Sunday.)
- Jesus Rises from the Dead: Matthew 28:1-10 Mark 16:1-13; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18
- A Lame Beggar Is Healed in Jesus' Name: Acts 3:1-10
- Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch: Acts 8:26-40
- Dorcas Is Raised from the Dead: Acts 9:36-43
- Peter Is Released from Prison: Acts 12:1-19
- Paul and Silas Sing in Prison; The Jailer's Family Believes: Acts 16:16-34

## **Suggestions for Teaching Bible Stories to Children**

### **1. Prepare ahead of time.**

- a) Begin by praying for the Holy Spirit to guide you as you prepare. Then, read the story through several times and practice telling it in your own words. Think about the ages of the children in your group. How can you best present the story so they will understand and remember it? Will you read it from the Bible or from a children's Bible, or will you tell it in your own words?
- b) Take time, also, to think about the main message of the story. What does this story teach the children about God? Does it teach something about people and our relationship to God—perhaps something about obeying God? Is this story a positive example of someone who did what was right, or a negative example of someone who did wrong?

Try to think of how to say the main message of the story in one simple sentence that is appropriate to their ages that they can remember. Write the sentence down. You will want to emphasize this several times throughout the story time.

- c) Write down a few simple questions you can ask the children to see if they understand the story.
- d) Think about what you will do to help them remember the story. Will you have them act it out in a simple drama? Draw a picture of the story? Write out and memorize a verse from the story? You may want to do all of these. Think about how you will do each of these and make sure you have on hand the supplies that you will need for whatever you plan to do.

### **2. Present the story.**

- a) Read or tell the story, whichever you have decided is best for their ages.
- b) Read or tell it again, emphasizing what you wrote down as the main message of the story.
- c) Ask the questions you have prepared. Encourage different ones to answer. If they aren't sure of the answers, read or tell the story—or at least that part of the story—again.

- d) Have the children tell the story back to you. Use questions to help them remember any parts they leave out.

**3. Reinforce the story.**

- a) If you will act out the story, assign the children roles to play and explain to them how they will act out the story. You may want to act it out several times so that all of the children get to play a part.
- b) If they will draw a picture, help them think about what to draw that will best display the main message of the story.
- c) Have them write the verse to remember on their picture or other paper, and encourage them to take it home and practice saying it for their parents throughout the week.
- d) Take time to pray about what they have learned from the story and how they will apply it in their lives.
- e) Encourage them to tell the story to their parents and tell what they learned from the story. They can also tell it to other relatives or friends.
- f) The next time you meet, ask questions to see what they remember from this story. Also, give them a chance to say from memory the verse they memorized, and to tell about anyone they shared the story with.

## **Suggestions for Using Bible Stories with Adults**

To use the above stories in a Bible study with adults, the following storying principles are recommended:

### **1. Prepare ahead of time.**

Begin by praying and asking the Holy Spirit to be the Teacher for you and the group you will lead. Then read the story (or listen to the audio) several times so that you are familiar with it ahead of time. If you will tell the story from memory, make sure you know it well enough that you don't leave out important details.

You may want to also read the surrounding verses or chapters so that you understand the context of the story. Ask God to help you see the main message of the story.

### **2. Present the story to your fellowship.**

As in your preparation, begin with prayer. Then read or tell the story to the home group. Then read or tell it again. Everyone will hear things the second time that they missed the first time. Some people may want to only listen; others may enjoy following along in a printed Bible or on their phone.

### **3. Have them retell the story from memory, Bibles closed.**

Don't rush them; give them time to think and remember. Encourage everyone to participate, adding whatever details they remember. If they are struggling to remember, you may want to read or tell the story a third time, and then have them tell it.

After they have told what they can recall, remind them of the parts they have left out. Make sure they don't miss the main message of the story.

### **4. Ask questions to help them think more deeply about the story.**

Try to get everyone involved in this discussion time. You may think of specific questions to ask to help them see the main message of the passage, or you may want to use these general questions:

- a) What in this story was right, or good? What was wrong, or bad?

- b) What does this story help you to understand about God (or Jesus)?
  - c) What does this story help you to see about yourself? What do you need to repent of or change as a result of what is taught in this story? What, specifically, will you do to obey God?
  - d) Who will you tell this story to this week?
5. **Take time to pray, applying what you have learned**, as the Holy Spirit leads or convicts.

## Appendix C: Forgiving and Asking Forgiveness

### 1. What does it mean to forgive?

Learning to forgive is something we all must do, but many times forgiving is hard because we don't understand what forgiveness is.

- a) **Forgiveness means that you are releasing the wrong and the hurt into God's hands.** When you choose to forgive someone, you are not saying that what they did was not wrong, nor are you saying that they did not hurt you. If there is no hurt or wrong, there is no need to forgive. Forgiveness means you will not seek to hurt them in return. You are trusting God to work in the heart of that person.
- b) **Forgiveness means that you recognize that God has shown great mercy to you and therefore you will be merciful also.** **Think about Jesus' words in Matt. 6:12-15.** Here we see a very serious truth. If we want God to forgive all of the great debt of sin that we have committed against him, we must have an attitude of forgiveness toward those who sin against us.

*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.  
(Matt. 5:7)*

- c) **Forgiveness means that you are refusing to grow cold and bitter in your heart.** Forgiveness is not just something you do for the person who has hurt you, it is also for your own sake. If you hold on to bitterness and anger, it will destroy *you*. They may never ask for your forgiveness. If they don't, then this is only between you and God. Go to God and tell him that you are choosing to forgive them and ask him for his grace to help you release it to him.

### 2. When someone has sinned against me and comes and asks for my forgiveness, how should I respond?

- a) **Listen in an attitude of humility.** When someone comes to you confessing their sin and asking for forgiveness, they are doing a very difficult thing. Give them your full attention and resist thoughts that you are a better person than they are. Remember your own need for God's mercy.

- b) **Speak words of forgiveness.** A good thing to say would be, “Thank you for saying that. I forgive you.” Don’t brush their words aside as if it is not important. They need assurance that you forgive them.
- c) **Ask yourself and God, “Was I partly at fault?”** Are you perhaps also guilty of wrong toward the other person? There may be something for which you need to ask forgiveness from them. Listen to God with a humble and open heart, and then respond by asking their forgiveness for anything he shows you that you have done wrong, even if it seems small.
- d) **Show love and acceptance to them.** While you may not be able to immediately trust a person who has been dishonest or hurt you in some way, you can still open your heart to them in love. Your mercy will encourage them to grow. Pray for God’s blessing on them—together with them, if appropriate, or later, alone.

Give them grace as Christ has given you grace.

*The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:8-12)*

*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:7)*

Once you have forgiven the one who has offended you, you should not continue to talk about what they did wrong, or to let your thoughts dwell on it. Leave it in the past and leave it with God. Trust HIM to change your feelings as you continue to give the past to him every time it comes to your mind.

### 3. **When I realize that I have hurt someone by my words, actions, or attitude, what should I do?**

- a) **Humble yourself.** Admit to yourself and to God that you were wrong in what you said or did. As you confess your sin to God, receive his forgiveness.

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

- b) **Confess your wrong to the person you have offended.** Ask God to help you to see clearly where you have been wrong and then go to that person, naming your sin specifically and taking full responsibility for it. Don't make excuses for your behavior, and don't talk about their wrong. Let God work in their heart if they were also wrong.
- c) **Ask for forgiveness.** When you say, "Will you forgive me for \_\_\_\_\_?" you give the other person something specific they can respond to. If they cannot say "yes" immediately, give them time to think about it and pray for them that God would heal any pain you have caused in their life.
- d) **Change.** Don't keep doing the same sin over and over again; "*Bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance*" (Matt. 3:8). Meditate on Galatians 5:16-25. God is not asking you to change yourself by your own willpower. Instead, trust deeply in Jesus' sacrifice to take away all your sin, and ask God to produce the fruit of the Spirit in your life.