

12 LESSONS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH



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SALVATION BY GRACE

KEY TEXT: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: I Peter 1:16; Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23; II Corinthians 5:21; John 14:6; Acts 17:30; John 3:16; Romans 10:9-10

STATEMENT OF BELIEF: I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

CENTRAL AIM OF LESSON: To help an individual understand that salvation cannot be earned, but is a result of responding in genuine repentance and faith to God’s gift provided through the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

LESSON:

I. Why do men need salvation?

- A. God’s standard is perfection (I Peter 1:16; Habakkuk 1:13; Matthew 5:48).
- B. Because all are sinners, we fall short of God’s standard (Romans 3:23; Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:3). Therefore, though some may act better than others, none has always thought, done, or said what God would have in every situation.
- C. The penalty for falling short of God’s standard is death (Romans 6:23).

II. Who met God’s standard of perfection and lived a life without sin?

Jesus is the only one who meets God’s standard (II Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:22). Since Jesus is the only sinless man, He is the only one who can qualify to be a substitute for us. Everyone else would have to die for his own sin (John 14:6).

III. Was the cross absolutely necessary for salvation?

God is holy and He said that the soul that sins shall surely die, the wages of sin is death. For Him to forgive us without requiring the penalty for sin would be for Him to violate His holiness. For one who had met the standard of perfection to die in the sinner’s place was the only way. I John 2:2 shows that Jesus is the final sacrifice for sin. Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. His death is a payment in full for the sin debt we owe God and allows God to forgive us and declare us not guilty or justified without violating His holiness.

IV. How must a man respond to God’s provision in order to be saved?

Repentance – (Acts 17:30; II Peter 3:9; Luke 13:3)

Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ. *Metanoia* is the Greek word for repentance that literally means “to change one’s mind; therefore, it is a change of mind which results in a change of action.

Faith – (John 3:16; Romans 10:9-10; Acts 16:31)

Faith is not only believing the truth concerning Jesus, God in sinless flesh who died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, but it is also transferring our trust to Him and committing to Him as Lord of our lives.

V. What does grace have to do with it?

In response to a person's genuine repentance and faith in Christ alone, God reckons to His account the righteousness of Christ (Romans 4:3). Consequently, that individual qualifies for eternal life because he meets God's standard of perfection (I Peter 1:16-17). In this case, Christ's perfect life is superimposed over the sinner's in the context of God's judgment to determine his eternal destiny. From this moment on the individual is forgiven, redeemed, a new creature in Christ. He is told now to live like what he has been declared to be, righteous! Anytime he fails to do so God will discipline him in this life (Hebrews 12), and such behavior could possibly result in loss of reward in heaven, but his eternal destiny is forever sealed. He will spend eternity in heaven with Christ his Savior because of God's grace.

VI. Can a man who has genuinely repented of his sins and trusted Jesus alone for his salvation do anything that would cause him to lose his salvation?

Ephesians 2:8-9 emphasizes that we cannot do anything to earn our salvation, rather it is by grace through faith in Jesus. If we cannot do anything to earn our salvation, then we cannot do anything that would cause us to lose our salvation. John 3:16 and over 30 other verses teach that eternal life is through Jesus. If you have eternal life, by definition it cannot end. Eternal is forever. Also, the Bible describes salvation as beginning at the moment we genuinely repent of our sins and put our trust in Christ. That transferring of trust to Jesus begins the life-long process of becoming more like Him and culminates in the resurrection of our bodies when we shall be like him. Therefore, salvation includes justification, sanctification and glorification. Justification is the moment God declares us not guilty and forgiven of all of our sins (past, present and future) in response to our genuine repentance and faith in Jesus (Romans 5:1). Sanctification is the life-long process of becoming like Jesus (I Thessalonians 4:3). Glorification occurs at the resurrection of believers when each will receive a glorified body (I Corinthians 15:42, 51-53). Those who are genuinely in Christ will complete the process. Jesus said, "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day" (John 6:40). If you are justified, then you will be glorified!

RESOURCES: Graham, Billy. *Peace with God*. Lutzer, Erwin. *How You Can Be Sure That You Will Spend Eternity with God*. Bright, Bill. *Have Your Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws*. Swindoll, Charles. *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*. Sproul, R.C. *Faith Alone*.

WHAT I'LL "TAKE AWAY" FROM THIS LESSON:

THE TRINITY

KEY TEXT: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14).

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 6:4

STATEMENT OF BELIEF OR ATTITUDE: I believe there is but one God manifested in three persons, each being totally and equally God.

CENTRAL AIM OF LESSON: To understand that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is my Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter Who is transforming me.

LESSON:

I. Is the term *Trinity* found in the Bible?

No. The early church developed the word to express the biblical concept of God. The word trinity is a short form of the Latin word “tri-unus,” which means “three-in-one.” However, as we will see throughout this lesson the concept is found repeatedly in scripture.

II. Does Christianity serve one God or three?

The Bible teaches there is but one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; I Corinthians 8:4; Isaiah 44:8). The concept of trinity does not teach three gods in one. There is one God manifested in three separate and distinct persons, each being eternally, totally, and equally God. This is reflected in the use of the compound unity noun, echad (Hebrew for one) in the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4). A compound unity noun shows one thing composed of several parts. For example, one cluster of grapes has many grapes and one congregation has many members. The call to worship used over the centuries by Judaism clearly teaches that the God of the Bible is ONE God manifested in plural personhood. The Trinitarian concept has to do with order and function, not equality.

III. What are the divine characteristics found in each member of the Trinity?

Each is called God: (John 1:1,18; 8:58; 10:30; 14:9; 20:28; Acts 5:3-5; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; II Peter 1:1)

Each is eternally existent:

God Father: Psalm 90:1-2; 93:2

God the Son: Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2; Hebrews 13:8

God the Holy Spirit: Hebrews 9:14

Each is omnipotent:

God the Father: Exodus 7-12

God the Son: John 11:43-44; Luke 7:11-17; 8:41

God the Holy Spirit: Acts 5:1-10

Each is omniscient:

God Father: Acts 15:8; Psalm 147:5

God the Son: John 2:23-25; Luke 6:8-9

God the Holy Spirit: John 16:13; I Corinthians 2:10-11

- IV. How did creation reflect the involvement of Father, Son and Spirit (Genesis 1:1, 2, 26; Colossians 1:15-16)?

God the Father: Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning God” expresses the plurality of the Godhead. The Hebrew word translated God is *Elohim*. The plural suffix *im*, presents a singular God who is expressed as a plurality. The plurality of the Godhead is also evident in creation for God said, “Let US make man in OUR image, according to OUR likeness” (Genesis 1:26). Elsewhere in scripture we find the individual members of the Godhead called creator.

God the Son: Colossians 1:15-16 clearly names Jesus as the creator of all things.

God the Holy Spirit: Genesis 1:2 describes the Holy Spirit as moving over the surface of the water, actively involved in creation.

- V. How are the three persons of the Godhead involved with the Word of God, our owner’s manual for life and liberty? Isaiah 55:11; II Timothy 3:16; John 1:14; I Corinthians 2:12-14

God the Father – The Revelation of the Word of God - Isaiah 55:11

God the Son – The Fleshing out of the Word - John 1:14

God the Spirit – The Illumination of the Word - I Corinthians 2:12-14

- VI. What is the role of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in the plan of redemption for all mankind and in our individual response to that plan (John 16:8; Titus 3:5; Romans 8:9; II Corinthians 5:21; Colossians 1:13-14; II Peter 2:22; Romans 4:3; 5:1)?

God the Holy Spirit: Convicts us of sin and helps us to realize that there is a consequence for sin (John 16:8). He regenerates us (Titus 3:5). He comes to live within us (Romans 8:9).

God the Son: Lived the perfect life, keeping the standard of perfection required by God for entrance into heaven (II Corinthians 5:21). He paid our sin debt in full by dying on the cross (Colossians 1:13-14; II Peter 2:22).

God the Father: Originator of the plan, Giver of the Son, in response to genuine repentance and faith in Christ and Christ alone for salvation, declares the repentant sinner not guilty of all of his sins (past, present and future). The term used in scripture to describe this act of grace is justification (Romans 4:3; 5:1).

VII. Is believing in the Trinity an essential of the Christian faith? YES

Jesus must be God to be sinless and qualify to be our substitute; otherwise, he would be dying for His own sins.

The Holy Spirit who indwells a believer at conversion is meant to be his internal compass pointing him toward transformation into Christ-likeness. Believers are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:17), to be under His influence. If a believer is going to yield control of his life and become under the influence of the Holy Spirit, he is going to have to be convinced that the Holy Spirit is worthy of that position of authority in his life. Those quiet whispers into the believer's conscious will carry much more weight if he knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that it is God Almighty who is whispering, and that He who loves with an everlasting love and sees the future as well as the past, has a perfect plan that is for good and not for evil.

VIII. What is the importance of believing in the Trinity for the life and walk of an individual Christian – for you and me?

In the REVEAL study polling believers across America in churches of all sizes and denominations, a belief in the Trinity was the second most important spiritual belief impacting their growth. A belief in the Trinity will impact you by:

- A. Changing the way you view God. God is not somewhere far away, God the Spirit lives within you wooing you into a love relationship with the Trinity, to praise and worship, to participate in the sacred romance that ever occurs between Father, Son, and Spirit.
- B. Changing the way you pray. Instead of struggling to get the words right and feeling great pressure when you pray, the knowledge that the Trinity is already praying for you should encourage and give you boldness. Jesus is interceding for you (Hebrews 7:24-25) and the Holy Spirit is interceding for you (Romans 8:25) as the Father listens to the deep groanings of our heart.
- C. Changing the way you love. God is love and He manifested His great love for us by sending His only Son to die for us. Jesus could show no greater love for us than to lay down his life in excruciating pain and suffering. The Holy Spirit, if you will be sensitive to Him, will help you to comprehend the height and depth and length and breath of the love of God and will cause the love of God to abound more and more in you until it spills over into the lives of those around you.

- D. Changing the way you read the Bible. It is the only book you will ever read that the author, the Holy Spirit, is living within you and can help you understand what He meant when He wrote it. God the Father, because of His great love for us chose to reveal Himself to us first through the prophets and the Word. Then the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. That Word, Jesus, is now interceding for us as we study the Bible.
- E. Changing your view of spiritual growth. Some view growth as having the proper “do not” list. But we cannot keep a standard any more than we could save ourselves. That is why Paul told us that as we were saved by grace so we must grow by grace (Colossians 2:7). The love of the Father will constrain us to do right, the power of the Spirit will enable us to do right, and the example of the Son will show us what is right to do. The Trinity has begun a transformation process in us that one day will be complete.

RESOURCES: Muncaster, Ralph. *What is the Trinity?* Rosenthal, Stanley. *One God or Three.* Rose Publishing. *The Trinity Pamphlet.*

WHAT I’LL “TAKE AWAY” FROM THIS LESSON:

SERVING OTHERS

KEY TEXT: "...through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13).

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: I Thess. 5:18; II Cor. 5:14; I Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 2:8-10, 4:11-16; Rev. 5:10; Matt. 4:10, 25:14-30; Rom. 12:1-8

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY: A person is saved to serve. Jesus expects every believer to be engaged in meaningful service to others. Whatever we do and wherever we are we should be serving others. Our service not only blesses others but is a pathway to blessing for us.

CENTRAL AIM OF LESSON: To help an individual understand that salvation is the beginning of a life of service for which God has uniquely equipped us. A life of meaningful service is our destiny and fulfills our longing for meaning and purpose in life.

LESSON:

I. WHY SHOULD EVERY BELIEVER BE SERVING OTHERS?

- A. To express *thanks* to God for what He has done for you (1 Thess. 5:18; 2 Cor. 5:14). God is more concerned about our thankfulness than almost anything else. A life of serving others is one way of expressing gratitude to God.
- B. To become *obedient* to God's Word (Gal. 5:13). God commands us to serve others.
- C. To fulfill your *part* as a member of Christ's body, the church (1 Cor. 12:12-27).
 - 1. Every believer is to be a functioning *part* of the body of Christ (vv. 12-14).
 - 2. Though our roles will be unique, every part is *important* (vv. 15-17).
 - 3. *God* Himself assigns each part his role in serving (vv. 18-20).
 - 4. We need each part to *function* as designed for the body to be strong and healthy (vv. 21-27). We need each other.

Every believer should serve because each is needed. Do you know your part? Is it functioning? Rick Warren writes, "*Every believer isn't a pastor, but every believer is called into ministry. God calls all believers to minister to the world and the church. Service in the body isn't optional for Christians. In God's army, there are no volunteers—he's drafted all of us into service.*"

II. WHY DON'T SOME BELIEVERS VOLUNTEER TO SERVE OTHERS?

- A. "*I'm too busy. I don't have the time.*" We are all busy, probably too busy. Life can easily get overcrowded with the urgent and less important. Serving is about priorities. Sometimes we allow the urgent to crowd out the important. We would all be better if we gave more of ourselves to fewer commitments. God made (and makes) time for us (Matt. 6:33). We should return the favor. Do you need to adjust your priorities so you can serve others?

- B. *"I'm afraid."* Fear is very real and it has many sources when it comes to serving others. Maybe we had a bad experience serving and fear another one. Perhaps we fear we will fail. That is possible. But, the reward is worth the risk. If you don't believe that, then ask someone who serves. If God calls you to do something, He'll enable you to do it.
- C. *"I'm not needed."* This IS a big church with many people — and everyone is important and needed. As a unique part of the body, everyone has something to give. Real needs exist in almost every ministry area of the church. God has entrusted valuable resources for you to use in His service. This means you are not only needed, but also qualified to do something for Him. Everyone is needed. Melvin Steinbron said, *"It takes all the people of God to do all the work of God."*

III. HOW CAN I FIND MY PLACE TO SERVE OTHERS (Rom. 12:1-8)?

Albert Schweitzer said, *"I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the only ones among you who will be happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."*

- A. *SURRENDER* comes first (12:1-2). Say "yes" even before you know where you will serve and exactly what you will be doing (providing it is in your design zone). Romans 12:1-2 comes before vv. 3-8! Surrender should precede service.
- B. *IDENTIFY* your God-given resources (12:3-8). God has uniquely designed you to serve Him. What do the following passages tell us about our unique design? We were designed with purpose in mind (Psalm 139:13-16; Jer. 1:4-5; Eph. 2:8-10). What you can do, no one can do like you could! There are two key resources for you to identify if you are to match yourself to your best places for service. Ask yourself (and answer) the following questions:
 1. What and/or who are my *interests* or passions? What person or group do I have as an interest? What issues or causes deeply concern me?
 2. What are my talents, *abilities* and spiritual gifts? What are the things that I do consistently well?

NOTE: The place where the answers to these two questions intersect is probably where you need to be serving!
- C. *CONTACT* the possible ministry area as soon as possible. Set up a meeting. Discuss your interests and abilities and the needs of the ministry.
- D. *GET STARTED!* Find your niche. Get in the game. Function as part of the body.

IV. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BLESSINGS OF EVERY BELIEVER SERVING OTHERS (Eph. 4:11-16)?

- A. Leaders are *equipping* believers to serve others (Eph. 4:11-12a).
- B. The church is *built up* and strengthened (v. 12b).
- C. The body becomes more *unified* (v. 13).

- D. We enjoy a growing *knowledge* of God's Son (v. 13). What an example of servanthood He was (Mark 10:45).
- E. We become more *mature* in Christlike character (v. 13).
- F. We become more *stable* and consistent in our walk with Christ (vv. 14-15).
- G. We partner with God in His *plan* to grow a loving and serving church (v. 16).

Albert Einstein said, "*Only a life lived in the service to others is worth living.*"

Edward Haley said, "*I am only one, but I am one. I can't do everything, but I can do something. What I can do I ought to do, and what I ought to do, by the grace of God, I SHALL DO!*"

RESOURCES: Lucado, Max. *Cure for the Common Life*.

WHAT I'LL "TAKE AWAY" FROM THIS LESSON:

PRAYER FOR CLEANSING AND GUIDANCE

KEY TEXT: “Call to me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3).

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Psalm 51:10; Isaiah 59:2; Jeremiah 29:11; Matthew 7:7; John 7:17; Philippians 4:4; Hebrews 4:14-16; James 1:5-6; I John 1:9

STATEMENT OF BELIEF OR ATTITUDE: I believe God desires His children to confess their sins and to ask Him when they are in need of guidance.

CENTRAL AIM OF LESSON: To help believers understand the importance of dealing with sin in their lives, and to be encouraged that their Heavenly Father wants to guide and direct them in their daily affairs.

LESSON:

INTRODUCTION— E. M. Bounds said, “Prayer is a dialogue between man and God, whereby I come to know Him better.” In prayer, we should come into God’s presence and worship Him, open our lives to His inspection and confess wherein our lives do not line up with His holiness, and thank Him for His blessings already poured out upon us. We are then prepared to intercede for others, and to petition God for guidance and the meeting of our needs. While praising God and thanking Him are essential in a balanced prayer life, for this lesson the emphasis will be upon confession of our sins and praying for guidance.

I. According to Psalm 51:10, what is the goal of confession of sin?

In this Psalm of repentance after his adultery with Bathsheba, David cries out, “Create in me a clean heart, O God and renew a right spirit within me.” Confessing our sin is agreeing with God that our action or attitude is indeed sin. Sin separates us from intimacy with God and hinders the impact that we can have upon our world for Christ. We want God to change our circumstances, while God most often wants to change our character.

II. According to Isaiah 59:2 and I John 1:9, why would it be important that you spend some time in confession before asking God for anything?

Although all of our sins are forgiven (past, present and future) at the moment of our salvation, sin in the life of a believer hinders him from hearing from God and enjoying intimacy with God. Charles Spurgeon said, “A prayer without penitence is prayer without acceptance.”

III. What are some practical suggestions for this time of confession?

Start your prayer time with some praise using praise songs or reading aloud some verses praising God, such as Psalm 103. This focus upon the majesty and glory of God reminds us that we fall far from His example of holiness. Ask God to show you any unconfessed sin that he wants you to deal with. Often a quick mental trip through the previous twenty-four

hours reveals the need for confession. Ask yourself, “Did I fail God in any areas of personal conduct? Was I honest in my dealings with others? Were my thoughts pleasing to God? This honest evaluation of ourselves prepares us to hear from God and to intercede for others on their behalf. Throughout the day we should continue in confession of sin as the Holy Spirit reveals areas of disobedience.

- IV. According to Jeremiah 29:11, God has plans for us that are best; therefore, seeking His guidance in the decisions of life is of paramount importance. How do Matthew 7:7, Hebrews 4:14-16, and Jeremiah 33:3 encourage us to bring our requests before God?

These verses tell us to ask confidently so that God can answer us and meet our needs.

- V. James also tells us to call on God when we need wisdom to make a decision. He includes some specific instructions for how we are to ask in James 1:5-6. What are the instructions?

We are to ask in faith without any doubting.

- VI. Are there other guidelines to follow in seeking guidance?
- A. God will not reveal a direction in prayer that conflicts with His Word. Psalm 119:105 says that God’s word is a “lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” Therefore, search scripture to see if there is a Biblical principle which will give guidance to your situation.
 - B. God expects obedience to His revealed will (I Samuel 15:22-23 and James 1:22). Ask yourself if there is anything that God has asked you to do in the past that you have not done? Concerning your current request, are you willing to do whatever God asks of you? John 7:17 says, “If any is willing to do His will, he shall know...”
 - C. Do you honestly have peace about the decision? Philippians 4:7

RESOURCES: Eastman, Dick. *The Hour that Changes the World*.

WHAT I’LL “TAKE AWAY” FROM THIS LESSON:

REFLECTION ON SCRIPTURE

KEY TEXT: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2).

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Joshua 1:8; Psalm 19:14; 13:6; 119:15, 78, 97, 99, 148

DESCRIPTION OF PERSONAL SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: Reflection on Scripture is the intentional effort to consistently read, deliberately meditate, and willingly apply God’s Word to life.

CENTRAL AIM OF LESSON: To instruct believers how to reflect on Scripture as it applies to their daily lives.

LESSON:

INTRODUCTION— The Bible is a believer’s most powerful resource for spiritual growth and transformation into Christlikeness. To take full advantage of this powerful resource a believer must commit to consistently read, reflect, and apply all that is learned.

I. What do the following passages indicate concerning the sufficiency of God’s Word?

- 2 Timothy 3:16, Scripture is profitable for:
 - Teaching – What am I to do?
 - Reproof – What am I not to do?
 - Correction – How do I stay on path?
 - Training in righteousness – What must I continue to do?
- Hebrews 4:12, powerful enough to accurately discern the intents of our heart
- Psalm 19:7-11

II. The following passages instruct a believer to “meditate” on God’s Word.

- Joshua 1:8 “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall *meditate on it day and night*, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”
- Psalm 1:1-2 “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he *meditates day and night*.”
- Also read Psalm 119:15, 78, 97, 99, 148

What does it mean to “meditate”? Meditation can be compared to a ruminating animal chewing the cud, drawing nourishment from the food and transferring it to the bloodstream. When we meditate on the Word of God—thoughtfully and prayerfully reflecting on what we read—we receive the life of Jesus Christ and it is transferred into our spiritual bloodstream for transformed living. Reflection on Scripture drives a biblical passage home, fixes it in our mind, and allows us to formulate the needed application that changes us into Christlikeness.

III. Is there a plan to assist in reflection on Scripture?

- A. Find a quiet and private *place* free from distractions (Mark 1:35).
- B. *Plan* what you’re going to read. There are so many options: read through a Bible book, select the proverb for the day of the month, read five psalms a day, etc.
- C. *Prayerfully* and thoughtfully read the passages you have selected (Psalm 119:18; Ephesians 1:18). Select a section of Scripture that allows you the time to read it repeatedly, at least three times. Maybe read it in different translations. Repetitive reading helps you develop a mental picture of the passage.
- D. Ask *questions* to aid in the reflection process. Here are a few to get you started. As you reflect, ask if there is any:
 - Sin to forsake?
 - Truth, promise, or assurance to believe?
 - Action or error to avoid?
 - Command to obey?
 - Example to imitate or avoid?

You may want to keep a journal to record what God is saying to you.

- E. *Apply* your reflections to life as soon as possible. Reflection on Scripture is less about gaining information and more about our lives being transformed into a greater likeness to Christ.
- F. *Throughout the day and night* remember to reflect on what you read and applied. As Paul challenged, “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16).

CONCLUSION— Reflection on Scripture is the most critical personal spiritual practice. When we sit down and reflect, God is speaking to us—so unbelievable to imagine! Don’t be in a hurry. Like the cow chewing its cud, just keep going over it and over it and over it.

RESOURCES: Downing, Jim. *Meditation—The Bible Tells You How*.

WHAT I’LL “TAKE AWAY” FROM THIS LESSON:

GOD IS PERSONAL

KEY TEXT: “You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it” (Psalm 139:2-6).

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Psalm 139:13-16; Matthew 10:30; Psalm 56:8; Jeremiah 29:11-12; Romans 8:9; I Peter 5:8; John 10:27-30; Matthew 6:25-33

STATEMENT OF BELIEF OR ATTITUDE: God personally cares for me and is intimately involved in all my ways.

CENTRAL AIM OF LESSON: To help an individual understand that the God of the Bible is not a distant entity, but loves with an everlasting love that shows forth in provision, counsel, and comfort.

LESSON:

I. How do these verses indicate God’s personal interest in you?

Psalm 139:13-16

Matthew 10:30

Psalm 56:8

Psalm 139:2-6

II. Beyond knowing you and loving you, God has a unique and personal plan for your life.

What does your future hold according to Jeremiah 29:11-12? Plans for good. Define good: God is good. Be in His plan, be in His provision.

In what way does Psalm 32:8 reflect God’s commitment to personally help you to know the plan? “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.”

HOW?

- The Word of God
- The Witness of Godly Counselors
- The Way of Provision and Circumstances
- The Whisper of the Holy Spirit

What would hinder you in the process of knowing and doing the will of God?

- III. God is personally committed to those who through repentance and genuine faith in Christ have become His children. What promises from our loving, personally involved God can we depend upon:

“I will *dwell* in you” (Romans 8:9).

“I will *care* for you” (I Peter 5:7).

“I will *lead* you” (John 10:27-30).

“I will *provide* for you” (Matthew 6:25-33).

- IV. Do all of these promises from God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and who loves you with an everlasting love mean that your life will be void of pain and trouble? Why or why not?

Jesus said that in the world we will have trouble (John 16:33). The Holy Spirit said through Peter that Jesus left us an example of suffering and that we should follow in His footsteps (I Peter 2:21).

But, He goes through trouble with us (I Corinthians 10:13; Isaiah 43:1-2). Therefore, I choose to say with Habakkuk (3:17-19):

¹⁷Though the fig tree should not blossom
And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail
And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold
And there be no cattle in the stalls,
¹⁸Yet I will exult in the LORD,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.
¹⁹The Lord GOD is my strength,
And He has made my feet like hinds' feet,
And makes me walk on my high places.

I also say with Florence White Willett:
I thank You for the bitter things
They've been a friend to grace
They've driven me from the paths of ease
To storm the secret place

Like David, may we choose not to want because we know that on the mountaintop or in the valley we have God (God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit); therefore, we have GOD and we have all we need.

V. I have experienced the comfort of tracing God's loving Hand through my sorrow and grief.

Psalms 18:28 (New International Version)

²⁸ You, O LORD, keep my lamp burning;
my God turns my darkness into light.

Isaiah 41:13 (New American Standard Bible)

¹³ "For I am the LORD your God, who upholds your right hand,
Who says to you, 'Do not fear, I will help you.'

Psalms 119:76 (New International Version)

⁷⁶ May your unfailing love be my comfort,
according to your promise to your servant.

Deuteronomy 33:27 (New American Standard Bible)

²⁷ "The eternal God is a dwelling place,
And underneath are the everlasting arms;
And He drove out the enemy from before you,
And said, 'Destroy!'

Isaiah 61:1-3 (New American Standard Bible)

¹ The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captive
And freedom to prisoners;
² To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
³ To grant those who mourn in Zion,
Giving them a garland instead of ashes,
The oil of gladness instead of mourning,
The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting
So they will be called oaks of righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.

Psalms 91:4 (New American Standard Bible)

⁴ He will cover you with His pinions,
And under His wings you may seek refuge;
His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.

Psalm 73:26 (New American Standard Bible)

²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever

Psalm 28:7 (New American Standard Bible)

⁷The LORD is my strength and my shield;
My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped;
Therefore my heart exults,
And with my song I shall thank Him.

Psalm 66:12 (New American Standard Bible)

¹²You made men ride over our heads;
We went through fire and through water,
Yet You brought us out into a place of abundance.

Psalm 55:22 (New American Standard Bible)

²²Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you;
He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.

Psalm 34:18 (New American Standard Bible)

¹⁸The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
And saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Zephaniah 3:17 (New American Standard Bible)

¹⁷"The LORD your God is in your midst,
A victorious warrior
He will exult over you with joy,
He will be quiet in His love,
He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.

RESOURCES: Keller, Phillip. *A Shepherd Looks at the 23rd Psalm*. Bridges, Jerry. *Trusting God*.

WHAT I'LL "TAKE AWAY" FROM THIS LESSON:

SOLITUDE

KEY TEXT: “Cease striving and know that I am God” (Psalm 45:10a).

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Mark 1:33-37; Luke 5:15-16; 6:11-12; Galatians 1:11-18; Exodus 3:2-4; 33:8-11; II Samuel 7:18-29

DESCRIPTION OF PERSONAL SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: Drawing aside from the rush of life to spend time in solitude with God is important to spiritual growth.

CENTRAL AIM OF LESSON: To help an individual understand the importance of solitude as seen in the life of Jesus, Paul, Moses, and David; thus being motivated to set aside time to be alone with God.

LESSON:

- I. What can be learned from Jesus’ example set in Mark 1:33-37; Luke 5:15-16; 6:11-12?

Due to the multiple Scriptures, solitude with the Father was obviously a pattern for Jesus. He felt that such times were so important that he did so even after extremely demanding days of ministry. His time was not rushed as he spent an entire night there. If Jesus, God in flesh, felt this necessary, how much more important should it be for us?

- II. Galatians 1:11-18 describes Paul’s extended time with the LORD. Why do you think God would have drawn him aside for such a long period?

- III. The Prince of Egypt was put on the back side of the desert alone to hear from God. When did God begin to speak to Moses in Exodus 3:2-4? In response to Moses’ decision to take time out of his shepherding duties to turn aside. Could it be that Moses would have never heard God call him out to be the great deliverer had he chosen to be too busy that day to draw aside?

- IV. According to Exodus 33:9-11, how did God speak to Moses?

God spoke to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. If you take time to draw aside and become a friend of God, do you believe that He will communicate with you? James 4:8 should encourage us in this matter: Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

- V. Best friends are good listeners.

If we truly desire to be friends with God we must learn the secret of listening. The world screams, but God often speaks in a still small voice. Only as we learn to hear the voice of the Father can we dispel the voices of the world. To listen in prayer is to mentally absorb divine instruction from God concerning specific matters for the day. We must be silent and have faith that God truly desires to speak to us. Remember the goal of prayer is not to tell God what we want Him to do but to discover what He wants us to do. It is during this listening phase of prayer that God’s instructions may come. During your listening time keep a note pad

on hand to record these impressions concerning your day. Remember God does not contradict; therefore, He will never guide us contrary to His Word. Therefore, anything that we hear must be measured by Scripture.

VI. II Samuel 7:18-29 tells us that David sat before the LORD. When you picture this do you imagine a hurried king throwing up a quick prayer or a man spending time with his friend who happens to be the Creator, Redeemer, Lover of His soul?

VII. How did David spend his time alone with God?

- A. He remembered the things God had done for him in the past – Gave thanks (II Samuel 7:18-21).
- B. He reviewed God's majesty – Worship (II Samuel 7:22-24).
- C. He remembered God's promises – Meditate on scriptural promises (II Samuel 7:25-28).
- D. He requested of God concerning his needs – Ask (II Samuel 7:29).

VIII. What is meditation?

Meditation is another word for deep thinking and reflection. Psalm 1:1-2 and Joshua 1:8 tells us that we should meditate upon the word day and night. This principle should be the basis for our thinking. During a time of meditation in prayer, we take a particular Scripture passage and ponder it. Asking the Holy Spirit to help us discern its meaning, we analyze our lives in light of its truth. Are there adjustments that we need to make to please God based upon the truth we are pondering? Another approach would be to consider an attribute of God such as His love, mercy, faithfulness, omnipotence, etc. His wonderful promises to us and his blessings in our lives could be other subjects for meditation. Chuck Swindoll comments concerning solitude and meditation, "I am desperately concerned that we slow down and quiet down and gear down our lives so that ...we carve out time for quietness, solitude, thought, prayer, meditation, and soul searching. Oh, how much agitation will begin to fade away...how insignificant petty differences will seem...how big God will become and how small our troubles will appear! Security, peace, and confidence will move right on in."

IX. Think about the time you spend alone with God.

Are you rested physically enough to concentrate? Is your time with God distraction-free? Is it long enough? How could you improve the environment of your time alone with God or your attitude towards it?

RESOURCES: Eastman, Dick. *The Hour that Changes the World*.

WHAT I'LL "TAKE AWAY" FROM THIS LESSON:

EVANGELISM

KEY TEXT: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Matthew 5:13-16; 28:19-20; Colossians 4:5-6; 1 Peter 3:15; Philippians 2:14-16

SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY WITH OTHERS: Evangelism largely occurs outside the church. As we share our faith our spiritual growth is reenergized and our faith is reinforced.

CENTRAL AIM OF LESSON: To challenge believers to more publically activate their faith and be winsome witness for Jesus Christ.

LESSON:

INTRODUCTION— What comes to your mind when you hear the word “evangelism”? In one of his books, S.D. Gordon pictures the Archangel Gabriel engaged in the dialogue with Christ shortly after His ascension. He is asking Christ about His plans for evangelism and missions. Jesus said, “Well, I asked Peter, James, John, Andrew and a few others to make it the business of their lives to tell people and then they will tell others and finally all will know.” Then Gabriel said, “Suppose they don’t tell others, what then?” Jesus answered, “I have no other plans.” “But that was the disciples!” That’s the point—we are just like them at times: we lack spiritual understanding (dull, thick); lack humility (proud, envious, jealous); lack faith; lack commitment (slept in prayer meeting, deserted) – yet, God used. This means there’s hope for all of us! The only disciple that failed to become a witness became a traitor (Judas)!

Questions: Why don’t we go? Ignorance, indifference, intimidation, etc. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 is highest), how is your commitment to Christ’s commission? Is it as alive as it used to be? Why not?

I. COMMON ATTITUDES TOWARD CHRIST’S MANDATE

- A. “IT’S NOT MY JOB.” This reflects an attitude of *specialization*. Specialization betrays a belief that evangelism and missions are done only by a specifically trained and gifted few. Granted, we do live in a day of specialists: medical, legal, financial, etc. It seems logical that something as critical as the Great Commission be left to the professionals. But, Christ’s mandate is a command to every Christian, not just a few. Evangelism and missions is our job as followers of Christ. We are all His witnesses. The only question is, “What kind?”
- B. “AM I MY BROTHER’S KEEPER?” This response can be labeled *isolationism*. When we respond with this question, we are trying to hide from the world and its problems. Considering the masses of our world who need to hear the gospel can be overwhelming—because we are so few in comparison. So, an attitude of isolationism is easy to adopt, so we can more easily remove ourselves from our responsibility.

- B. THE GOSPEL MESSAGE WE SHARE IS FOR THE WORLD (Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:27; Acts 1:8). God's heart beats for a lost world (Jn. 3:16). God loves "the world," not just people like us. And "whoever" believes in His crucified Son—regardless of nationality, race, or creed—will receive eternal life.
- C. CHRIST USES ORDINARY PEOPLE WHO KNOW HIM TO GET HIS MESSAGE OUT (Matt. 28:16-18a; Mk. 16:14a; Acts 1:6a). When Jesus gave His mandate, He was addressing common and ordinary people. They were people just like us. He was giving them what has become known as the "Great Commission" and they were totally unaware. He was simply talking to them as ordinary folks. They were not heroes of the faith. "Some were doubtful" (Matt. 28:17). Mark cited Jesus need to reproach some for their "unbelief and hardness of heart (16:14b). According to Luke, they had many questions up to the very end (Acts 1:6a). Yet, into these unsure lives He passed the baton. He gave them no magic pill or do-it-yourself miracle kits to transform them into super-Christians. They were just common people who knew, loved, and obeyed Him—that is all He ever needs!
- D. JESUS IS RESOLUTE ABOUT OUR INVOLVEMENT BUT FLEXIBLE ABOUT OUR METHOD. If you note the action verbs in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it comes down to one imperative: "GO!" He meant what He said. Going is not an option. We cannot sit in church and wait for a lost world to come to us. He commands us to be active participants—each personally involved in reaching others.
- E. CHRIST PROMISES US HIS POWER AND HIS PRESENCE AS WE OBEY HIS MANDATE (Matt. 28:20; Lk. 24:49; Jn. 20:22; Acts 1:8). We can never accomplish His commission on our own or alone. He must go before us. He must be with us. He does and He is.

III. EVANGELISM REQUIRES A CARING HEART FOR A LOST WORLD

A. GOD HIMSELF CARES (2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16)

God loves all people enough to provide salvation and to postpone judgment. The three parables in Luke 15 further show how much God cares. All lost people matter to God. As His children, what matters to God should also matter to His people.

B. CHRIST CARES enough to come and die for us (Luke 19:10; 41-42; Matthew 9:35-38)

C. THE HOLY SPIRIT CARES

He is concerned enough to show someone their need for salvation because of sin, to convince them Christ is the only way to true righteousness, and then to draw them to Himself before judgment comes.

D. THE EARLY CHURCH CARED

The entire book of Acts records the work of the radical church to reach out to a lost world. In spite of great persecution, financial difficulties, and much more those early believers went because they cared. The drive to reach a lost world continually energized that early church.

E. THE APOSTLE PAUL CARED

Paul's three journeys recorded in the book of Acts (13:1-21:16) are referred to as "missionary journeys." Read his words and feel His compassion in these passages (Romans 1:14-16; 9:1-3; 10:1; 1 Corinthians 9:20-22).

F. THOSE PEOPLE ALREADY IN HEAVEN CARE

According to the parable Jesus told in Luke 15:3-10, every time someone who is lost comes to Christ there is rejoicing in heaven.

G. EVEN THOSE CURRENTLY IN HELL CARE.

In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus tells a dramatic story. The punch line occurs in vv. 26-28. All these really care about lost people. Genuine care is hard to ignore. We need to care until people want to know why we care so much.

CONCLUSION— As S.D. Gordon portrayed, Christ has no other plan. He uses us to share His message of mercy, grace, love, forgiveness, and hope. Christ's mandate was never meant to simply be studied. It is a call to responsibility. God may not be summoning you to become a full-time missionary in some distant land, but He is summoning you to participate in His Great Commission. There is but one script: "Go and make disciples." He has no other plan. His mandate IS our responsibility! Will you play your part? Will you leave the building? What are some ways you can fulfill the Great Commission where you live and work?

RESOURCES:

WHAT I'LL "TAKE AWAY" FROM THIS LESSON:

GIVING AWAY MY LIFE

KEY TEXTS: “The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1). “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (I Peter 4:10).

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Matthew 25:14-30; I Corinthians 4:2; Luke 16:10-13

STATEMENT OF BELIEF OR ATTITUDE: I believe every ability I have and all of my resources are gifts from God, and as a steward of these I am required to be found faithful.

CENTRAL AIM OF LESSON: To understand that nothing I have belongs to me. God as owner wants me to use what He has entrusted to me to bring glory to Him.

LESSON:

I. Who owns it all?

God owns it all. “The earth is the LORD’s and all it contains” (Psalm 24:1). “For you have been bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body” (I Corinthians 6:20; Deuteronomy 10:14; Job 41:11).

II. What is our responsibility?

We are stewards. Paul said in I Corinthians 9:17, “I have a stewardship entrusted to me.” Was that true just for Paul or is that true for every believer? “As each one has received a special gift employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (I Peter 4:10). This verse clarifies that each believer is a steward of the various gifts that God has given him. Manifold literally means variegated or multicolored. Each of us has differing spiritual gifts, natural talents, and resources but all are stewards of those gifts from God. The most common New Testament word for steward is “oikonomos,” a term that described an individual as a house manager. God owns all; we merely serve as “house managers” of God’s gifts.

III. What does our stewardship encompass?

To sum it up in one word – everything. Your body, your mind, your natural talents, your supernatural spiritual gifts, your family, and all your stuff are gifts from your loving heavenly Father (James 1:17; I Chronicles 29:12,14).

Your body and your mind: Romans 12:1-2 tells us that we should consider our bodies a willing and acceptable sacrifice to God and to determine to transform our minds so that we think like Jesus instead of being squeezed into the mold of the world around us.

Your family: God wants us to be responsible and meet the needs of our family (I Timothy 5:8). However, love and provision for our families should not usurp our love and servitude to God (Matthew 10:37). Abraham had to struggle with who was on the throne of his heart

when he was asked to sacrifice Isaac. Fortunately, he made the right choice (Genesis 22:9-14). Our children do not belong to us, but to God and we are stewards to train them in the ways of righteousness and to launch them into a lifetime of kingdom service. On the other hand, the would-be disciples of Jesus in Luke 9:59-62 did not choose Jesus as a priority over family and wealth.

Your talents, spiritual gifts, and resources: Talents are natural abilities given at birth such as athletic, musical, intellectual, artistic, etc. These inborn talents are part of God's design to make each of us unique. There is no one like you and God has a very special plan for this special creation of His – you. Spiritual gifts are those described in Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and I Peter 4. At the moment of salvation every believer receives one or more spiritual gifts uniquely chosen and endowed by the Holy Spirit as He comes to indwell the believer (I Corinthians 12:7-11). It is important to discover your spiritual gifts and to utilize them in serving the body of Christ. Some have more resources than others, but the underlying principle is the same – it is God's stuff not ours and it is to be utilized as He directs for His glory.

Consider the parable of the talents from Matthew 25 which teaches that all we have been given belongs to God, and it is in our best interest to use it wisely.

Truths:

1. Everybody had something (v. 15).
2. Some got more than others (v. 15).
3. The first two men went to work immediately, while the third did nothing (vv. 16-18).
4. The master returned and they each had to give an account of their stewardship (v. 19). We each stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of our stewardship (II Corinthians 5:10; I Corinthians 3:10-15).
5. There was reward for the two faithful servants. Each received the same verbal praise, "Well done, good and faithful servant, you were faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master." Each faithful servant received a promotion, and each was invited to celebrate and have joy. It is not our job to worry about what we don't have, it is our job to make the most of what we do have. When it comes to how we spend our lives we need to take an inventory of what God has given us and ask ourselves, "Am I investing it or am I burying it?"
6. The unfaithful servant was condemned and lost what he had. The only real failure in life is giving up and doing nothing with the gifts and abilities God has given us. Use it or lose it!

IV. How are we to fulfill our responsibility as stewards?

We are to fulfill our stewardship with joy (II Corinthians 9:7). How can we be cheerful givers monetarily and be motivated to want to serve with our talents and abilities? At the heart of the issue is our view of God. The unfaithful servant who buried his talent did so because he was afraid of the Master, viewing Him as harsh and unfair (Matthew 25:24-25). Compulsion because we "ought to" becomes burdensome. Paul gives us the key as he spoke in II Corinthians 9:7 (NIV), "See that you also excel in this grace of giving." Giving and service that is a response to a love relationship with God will be done cheerfully and will be rewarded by the Father. God is good, loves us with an everlasting love, and simply wants

what is best for us. Too often we think we have to decide between what is best for us and what is in the best interest of God, the kingdom of God and the needs of the people of God. When in actuality what is good for the kingdom is best for us. Every perceived sacrifice has great eternal payoff. When we serve God, spend time in the Word, pray, share our faith, self-sacrificially serve our family, we are truly doing what ultimately is in our own best interest, as well as everybody else's. God is not asking us to change from doing something that is in our best interest to doing His will. If it is right and honoring to God and the best interest for others, it is the best model for our family and will infuse our lives with joy that cannot be obtained by pursuing our own path apart from the will of God. Also, we lay up treasure in heaven as we live out this principle of grace service and giving. Timothy spurs us on in the pursuit as he states, "Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age" (NIV). If we store up treasures on earth, every day moves us closer to death and further from our treasures. However, if we store up treasures in heaven, each day moves us closer to our treasures. You can't take your treasures with you but you can send them on ahead.

V. What is the primary requirement of a steward?

The primary requirement of a steward is that he be "found faithful" (I Corinthians 4:2, Luke 16:10). Whether you have been given little or much, are you using what you have for the glory of God? Little is much in the hands of God. If all you have in your hand is a cup of cold water, then give it in Jesus' name. Moses had a stick, a simple shepherd's staff, but when he was willing to throw it down it became the staff of God. Whatever you have and whatever you presently do on a day-to-day basis, you have the ability to be a blessing which in God's time makes you the recipient of blessing. Whatever you do for God will come back to you (Mark 14:3-9).

VI. What is the greatest treasure we have as believers that we should be giving away?

Our greatest treasure is an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Our mandate to share the gospel as we are going, is a stewardship in which we must be found faithful (Matthew 28:18-20). Again, out of a growing relationship with Jesus he will provide opportunities to share and give us the boldness so that sharing our faith becomes an adventure rather than a burden.

RESOURCES: Lucado, Max. *The Applause of Heaven*. Wilkerson, David. *The Life that God Rewards*. Alcorn, Randy. *The Treasure Principle*. Guinness, Os. *The Call*.

WHAT I'LL "TAKE AWAY" FROM THIS LESSON:

CHRIST IS FIRST

KEY TEXT: “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Romans 12:1-2; Luke 9:23-24

STATEMENT OF BELIEF OR ATTITUDE: I believe Jesus calls us to put Him first place in our lives.

CENTRAL AIM OF LESSON: To help an individual understand that his life is not his own for he has been bought with a price and his new master is worthy of first place allegiance.

LESSON:

I. A PRIORITY TO CONSIDER (Seek first the kingdom of God)

A. *WHAT is our priority in life?* In Matt 6:33, Jesus doesn’t say, “If you seek,” “But seek,” because all are seeking something — knowledge, possessions, control, pleasure, revenge, peace, etc. What does the Lord of the universe tell us to seek?

1. “The Kingdom of God” was referred to often by Jesus. What is it? Kingdom refers to “rule, reign, and authority” and not to a specific realm or place. Kingdom implies a king. The Kingdom of God refers to the rule, reign, and authority of God in a person’s life. It includes conversion and surrender. Your heart is a throne and someone (something) is going to sit in authority on it. There are no empty thrones. Next, we are also to seek...
2. “...and His righteousness.” We not only are to give Him control of our lives, we are to develop His character (righteousness) in our lives. We do have a choice of priorities. What is first word in our text? “But,” which implies a contrast. What Jesus is telling you to seek is in contrast to what others may seek (vv. 25-32).

How can I be sure my priorities are right? Honestly answer:

(1) Is God in total *control* of my life? If not, why not?

(2) Am I intentionally and earnestly seeking to become more like Christ in my *character* (honesty, integrity, etc.)?

(3) Does my *life mission* support this priority? Life is like a coin...you can spend it any way you wish, but you can only spend it once.

B. *WHEN are we to seek His control and character in our life’s priorities?* Jesus doesn’t say “only,” but “first.” It means first in a line of more than one option. Of all the priorities in life (marriage, children, work, etc. — all good), this is number one.

C. *HOW are we to seek this?* This is a command, not a suggestion. It is a present imperative, meaning it is the pattern of my life (not just now and then). I am to keep on seeking first His control and character in my life as my #1 priority. Anything less is disobedience. Most have not settled what their priorities are and some who have, often do not live by them. Priorities are only as good as they are kept.

Will this be easy? Probably not. The enemy is after us and the world does all it can to distract us from our focus.

II. A PROMISE TO CLAIM (...and all these things will be added to you)

- A. CONTRAST: The promise is not that you will have all you want and that you will have no problems.
- B. CONTEXT: What things then will be added to you? The things that God feels you need, largely addressed in vv. 25-32 (food, clothes, drink).
- C. CONDITIONAL: To enjoy this great promise, you must own up to the first part, “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” Are you? Sadly, too many reverse the order and chase worldly things as their priority and life comes up empty. The sad mentality of many, even Christians, is to get all these things and if you have time then seek God.

CONCLUSION— C.S. LEWIS said, “Put first things first and we get second things thrown in; put second things first and we lose both first and second things.”

RESOURCES: Munger, Robert Boyd. *My Heart—Christ’s Home*.

WHAT I’LL “TAKE AWAY” FROM THIS LESSON:

IDENTITY IN CHRIST

KEY TEXT: “According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (I Peter 1:2-3).

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: II Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:4-6; Phil.3:20; Romans 8:37; Jeremiah 31:3; I John 3:1-3; Deuteronomy 32:9-10; Psalm 17:18; Isaiah 42:6; Isaiah 49:16; Zephaniah 3:17; Colossians 2:9-10

STATEMENT OF BELIEF OR ATTITUDE: I believe God has declared me to be a uniquely created and specifically gifted child of His on assignment as part of His plan to impact my world for the kingdom.

CENTRAL AIM OF LESSON: To comprehend that God through Christ so loved me that He would die for me and so gifted me that I have all I need in Him.

LESSON:

- I. After genuine repentance and faith in Christ, what does God say is positionally true of every believer?

We are justified, forgiven of all of our sins...past, present and future (Romans 4:25, 5:1). We are new creatures in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). We are seated in the heavenlies with Christ (Ephesians 2:4-6). We are citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20) and more than conquerors through Christ who loves us (Romans 8:37). We are empowered by the same power that raised Christ from the dead (internally), resourced by the One greater than Satan and all his demons (I John 4:4, Ephesians 1:18-20).

- II. How do we practically live out the truths declared above and what prevents us from doing so?

We must act like who God has declared us to be. We must reckon the old man to be dead (Romans 6:5-11) and allow the Holy Spirit to fill us, affecting our thoughts and actions. We must put off our old thinking and fleshy habits and put on Christ-like thoughts and actions (Colossians 3:1-17; Romans 6:6,11-13). We must control our thoughts by taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (II Corinthians 10:5). God has set us free (Gal. 5:1). We must reject the lies concerning ourselves that Satan has logged in our minds and begin to live as God sees us. Truth must reign and it, no HE, will set you free.

- III. Paul prayed that the Ephesians would comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of God (Ephesians 3:18-19). What verses reveal God's great love for us?

We are loved with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3; I John 3:1-3). We are the apple of God's eye (Deuteronomy 32:9-10; Psalm 17:8). We are held by God's hand (Isaiah 42:6).

We are inscribed in the palms of God's hand (Isaiah 49:16). God rejoices over us and will quiet us with His love (Zephaniah 3:17).

IV. According to II Peter 1:2-3, what has God given us? Everything pertaining to life and godliness?

V. How do you explain the needs in your life in light of II Peter 1:2-3? Romans 8:16-18?

VI. Colossians 2:9-10 says that you have been made complete in Christ. How should that affect your daily life?

VII. Colossians 1:13 states that He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son. I John 4:4 says, "Greater is he that is in you than he who is in the world." How should this encourage us as we stand against the god of this world who seeks to discourage and defeat us?

VIII. Jesus is our advocate. In times of need, what does He encourage us to do because of who we are in Him? Hebrews 4:14-16

Because of our identity in Christ we are invited to drink of the river of God's delight and in His light to see light (Psalm 36:7-9). Then, as his ambassadors, we are to spread that light in a dark world and bear much fruit for the kingdom as we abide in Jesus, the true vine.

RESOURCES: McGee, Robert. *Search for Significance*.

WHAT I'LL "TAKE AWAY" FROM THIS LESSON:

AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

KEY TEXT: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (II Timothy 3:16).

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: II Peter 1:20-21; Revelation 22:18-19; I Corinthians 2:9-13; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 119

STATEMENT OF BELIEF OR ATTITUDE: I believe that the Word of God is divinely inspired, without error, and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.

CENTRAL AIM OF LESSON: To show that the Word of God is more than a piece of literature because it's Author is alive and will bring the Word alive to those who yield to His authority.

LESSON:

INTRODUCTION— Familiarity breeds contempt, or perhaps simply a lack of appreciation or sense of preciousness. Millions of people throughout the world have never seen a copy of the Scriptures, some because the Bible has not even been translated into their native tongue. In the English-speaking world, we have unlimited access to the Bible for it has been in our language for more than 500 years, along with study helps and commentaries. Too many treat it as any other piece of literature and yet of all the written works of all the ages it stands in a class all its own. Martyrs have died to defend it and their blood bears testimony upon its pages and yet that is not the major reason it stands in a class all its own. This is a living Book (Hebrews 4:12) whose Author, God the Holy Spirit, is alive and active in its impact upon our lives. We have a treasure in its pages that surpasses rubies and gold (Proverbs 3:13-14). It is the master plan for our lives and gives us the blueprint for successful living. It promises us growth, godly living, guidance, peace, encouragement, and is an offense weapon against demonic attack.

I. Is God still inspiring men to write Scripture?

II Timothy 3:16 states that all scripture is inspired by God which literally means, God-breathed. II Peter 1:20-21 tells us that men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. God super-intended the giving of His Word so that every word written was what He wanted. Such inspiration is finished. God no longer inspires men to write holy scripture (Revelation 22:18-19). God now illuminates His Word (I Corinthians 2:9-13) by helping us to understand and apply the biblical principles He has given us. God has also gifted men to be able to speak forth these truths in such a manner that we can better understand them.

II. How can we be sure that the books that we have in our Bible are the right ones?

Canonization is the term used to describe the recognition and collection of revealed and inspired scripture. Man was simply recognizing which books were divinely inspired. This produced a list of 66 books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. Canon means a measuring stick, thus a stand. The Word of God is the authority or standard by which we are to measure our lives.

Tests of Canonicity: In order for a book to make it into the canon of scripture it had to pass four tests.

Authorship: Was the book written by a prophet, an apostle, or their close associate? Malachi was written about 430-440 B.C. There was no prophet and no inspired writing during the 400 years of silence from the writing of Malachi until the birth of Christ.

Acceptance: Was the Book widely accepted by the synagogue or church as divinely inspired? There were only a few books that were disputed. The rest were widely accepted and used in worship, etc.

Authority: Did the Book have a “thus saith the Lord” ring of authority to it?

Authenticity: Was the book historically accurate and did it agree in doctrine with the other books which were widely accepted as divinely inspired?

In 90 A.D., the list of Old Testament books was issued at the Council of Jamnia, and in 397 A.D. at the Council of Carthage, the New Testament was canonized. It is important to note that the entire church, Catholics included, accepted the 27 books which passed the tests as the only divinely inspired scripture written during the New Testament era. It was not until 1100 years later that the Catholic Church added the Apocrypha to their Bibles. These books failed the test of authorship since they were all written during the 400 years of silence known as the intertestamental period.

III. Is there evidence in the Bible itself for the reader to know that the Bible is divinely authored?

Erwin Lutzer puts it like this: “Imagine various pieces of a cathedral arriving from different countries and cities, converging on a central location. In fact, imagine that investigation proves that forty different sculptors made contributions over a period of many centuries. Yet the pieces fit together to form a single magnificent structure. Would this not be proof that behind the project was a single mind, one designer who used His workmen to sculpt a well-conceived plan? The Bible is that cathedral, assembled by one super-intelligent architect.” The Bible is really a library of 66 books written by 40 different authors over a 1,500 year span. It was written in three different languages and yet its theme is a unified and continuous one. The 40 different human authors came from a variety of occupations: kings, fishermen, tax collectors, shepherds, prophets and even a physician. They came from highly educated families who had royal lines to common uneducated laborers. They wrote at different periods of history and were penned under different circumstances and in different countries: Asia, Africa, and Europe, yet they have one theme and that is Holy God’s redemption plan for sinful man. Of the other matters discussed, there is no contradiction to be found. It would be difficult for 10 men to agree and yet here are 40 writers who were so widely dispersed over time, space, language, and educational qualities converging in unity showing that this is no mere piece of ancient literature, but a unique communication from the almighty God to those He created and desires to fellowship with throughout eternity.

To approach this from a mathematical probability, Peter Stone writes in his book, "Science Speaks," that by using the modern science of probability in reference to just eight Messianic prophecies (there are 60 major prophecies and 270 ramifications, A Ready Defense, pg. 213) being fulfilled by one man is 1 in 10x17. This compares to covering the state of Texas two feet deep with silver dollars, one of which has been marked. A man is blind-folded and allowed to travel as far as he wishes, then pick up the marked silver dollar. The statistical probability of him picking the right one is the same probability as Jesus fulfilling 8 of the prophecies. Consider these 8 prophecies and their fulfillments:

Prophecy	Fulfillment
Micah 5:2	Luke 2:4-7
Isaiah 53:7	Matt 27:13-14
Isaiah 53:9	Matt 27:57-60
Isaiah 53:12	Mark 15:27
Ps 22:16	Matt 27:35
Ps 22:18	Matt 27:35
Ps 16:10	Acts 2:29-31

The sheer fulfillment in scripture of all of the prophecies, not just about Jesus, but every prophecy ever spoken coming true should be enough to convince even the hardest skeptic that this is no mortal book. Yet, men walked with Jesus and saw his miracles and still refused to believe. No amount of proof can make someone believe apart from faith. Faith must engage the facts to give birth to redemption. Therefore, while we want to be able to give an account of the hope within us and to be able to defend the trustworthiness of the Word of God, we must also pray that blinded eyes will be opened and that those we seek to convince concerning the veracity of scripture have the faith to believe. Truth must be applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit who has come to convince the world of truth (John 16:7-8).

What about other Biblical predictions apart from the Messianic ones? What if God predicted who would be president 150 years from now and also revealed what one of his most important foreign policy decisions would be? Do you think that would start a widespread revival in our land? Probably not, He did it in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 1:21-25, God predicted the coming judgment upon Jerusalem. Isaiah delivered God's message of judgment to the people 700-680 B.C. The nation of Babylon did indeed become God's rod of punishment upon his people with the final fall accruing in 586 B.C. But God not only has his servant to deliver the bad news, he encourages the godly remnant that He still has a plan (Isaiah 44:26-28, 45:1-3). Isaiah named Cyrus as the ruler who would allow the Jews to return to their homeland 100 years before he was born and 150 years before he would become king. Many must have thought Isaiah ludicrous since Babylon was the world power and Persia was just barely coming into its own at the time. God knew it all. The test of a true prophecy from God is that every detail comes to pass.

IV. Does the Bible contain errors?

V. The Bible is inerrant (without error) and infallible (incapable of error).

This is true of the original autographs of which we have none. How then can we be sure that copies which we have today are accurate enough for us to base our lives and decisions upon

them? Due to intensive investigation of the existent manuscript fragments in a process called textual criticism, high accuracy of the scripture has been verified. To understand the concept, let's say that the speaker put up a paragraph on the screen and asks everyone in the audience to copy the paragraph. The copied paragraphs are then given to a group of people unaware of the message of the paragraph to study and determine the exact wording of the original message. Could they accurately determine the content of the original message? Yes, because they would have thousands of copies to compare and could with high probability determine the errant renderings. This is the case with scripture. There are by far more manuscript fragments of scripture than of any other ancient writing, and yet no other ancient writing has its integrity challenged like Holy Scripture. There seems to be no debate about the accuracy of Homer's *Illiad*, the ancient piece of literature with the most mass preserved. There are 643 manuscripts of it and the oldest one dates 500 years after the original writing. Whereas, with the New Testament there are over 24,000 manuscript fragments and the oldest dates only 25 years after its original writing. Therefore, know that the attacks rendered against the scriptures concerning errors are very biased since no such attacks are leveled against other ancient literature.

VI. What do these scriptures say is necessary to know the Word of God?

1. II Tim. 2:15 _____
2. Pro. 2:1-5 _____

VII. What are the results of knowing and obeying scripture?

1. I Peter 2:2 _____
2. Joshua 1:8 _____
3. Eph. 6:17 _____
4. Ps. 119:11 _____
5. Ps. 119:23 _____
6. Ps. 119:24 _____
7. Ps. 119:25 _____
8. Ps. 119:27 _____
9. Ps. 119:28 _____
10. Ps. 119:29 _____
11. Ps. 119:32 _____
12. Ps. 119:38 _____
13. Ps. 119:45 _____
14. Ps. 119:53 _____
15. Ps. 119:66 _____
16. Ps. 119:72 _____