

Covenant  
Church  
*Presents*

**AMBASSADORS  
TRAINING  
COURSE**

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***Class II***

Covenant  
Challenge

### **GREETINGS FROM PASTOR SEAN COOK...**

Welcome to the *Covenant Challenge* discipleship class. This is the second of four classes in the *Ambassadors Training Course*. We believe this class will empower you to grow in your walk with God! As disciples of Jesus Christ, our lives should continually get better. Jesus came to give us an abundant life, however we have to learn how to fully embrace the freedom we have in Christ before we can experience the abundant life Jesus promised.

The purpose for this class is to bring to your attention some important truths about living this new life we have in Christ. God has given us a new spiritual DNA because we have put our faith in Jesus Christ. As we learn to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in our hearts, then we are able to work out our salvation in every area of our lives. This is the life God intends for us to experience during our time here on earth.

We encourage you to embrace the truths in this class and allow them to impact your life. When you do, then you will soon discover a life filled with purpose and potential.

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# New Creation

## NEW CREATION

The first step toward building a successful life, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, is to clearly understand what happened to you when you were born of the Spirit. In **John 3:3** Jesus declares, ...*“unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”*. And in **John 3:5** He goes on to say *“...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”*. These verses of Scripture define the necessity of a new birth, prior to *seeing* and *entering* the kingdom of God. Therefore, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables our spirit to recognize and experience the reality of God in our lives. It is important to note, that without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to see or enter into the Kingdom of God.

To explain this a little more lets go to **II Corinthians 5:17**. *“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”*. Before we received Jesus Christ into our hearts, we were literally in Adam; the first created man (Genesis 1:27). And because Adam sinned from the beginning, we were all born into his sin. However, when we received Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we were placed in Christ. And because Jesus never sinned, we were born-again into His Righteousness. The point is this; because we are born of the Spirit we are no longer *in Adam*, but rather we are now *in Christ*.

To be in Christ is to be a new creation. This means we have a new nature. We no longer have to try to be good enough. We no longer have to struggle with a guilty conscience. And we no longer need to be afraid. As we allow the Holy Spirit to renew our minds with the Word of God, then our will and our emotions will line up with our new nature.

One of the greatest benefits of a new nature is that our old sinful nature has been put to death. That means old sins, bad habits, poor attitudes and negatives thought patterns are no longer part of who we *truly* are. The key to experiencing this new life is to abide in Christ through faith. When we develop our faith, then we begin to understand who we are in Christ. However, if we do not develop our faith in Christ, then we will become weak in Christ and begin to notice the symptoms of our old nature. Therefore, it is essential to grow in the knowledge and grace of God, then to apply what we learn in our lives.

The following *12 Habits of a Disciple* you are about to discover will awaken the **Warrior Poet** God has made you to be. Bon A’ Petit!

# The

# Bible

## PROFILE

Within the pages of the Bible you will discover the written **Word of God**. We learn from II Timothy 3:16, “*All Scripture is **inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness**”*. The Holy Spirit moved upon the hearts of men, inspiring them to articulate the Word of God in written form, also known as Scripture.

The Bible is divided into two sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The following **Visual Survey** defines some key factors for each Testament.

	Old Testament	New Testament
<b>Size</b>	2/3 of Bible	1/3 of Bible
<b>Years of History</b>	Over 4000 Years	About 100 Years
<b>Number of Books</b>	39	27
<b>Theme</b>	Man’s unsuccessful attempts to please God through works	The person and work of Jesus Christ who gives salvation
<b>Key Word</b>	<b>Law:</b> The Law was given through Moses	<b>Grace:</b> Grace and truth are realized through Jesus Christ
<b>Jesus Christ Is seen in</b>	Over 300 prophecies the Passover Lamb the Tabernacle and sacrifices	In flesh and blood in the teachings of the Apostles His coming return
<b>Original Language</b>	Hebrew	Greek

# The Bible

To get a better grasp on how all the books in the Bible flow together, it is helpful to place them into categories.

Old Testament Books	Category
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Genesis thru Deuteronomy	<b>The Law</b>
Joshua thru Esther	<b>History</b>
Job thru Song of Solomon	<b>Poetry</b>
Isaiah thru Malachi	<b>Prophets</b>

New Testament Books	Category
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Matthew thru John	<b>The Gospels</b>
Acts	<b>History of Early Church</b>
Romans thru Revelation	<b>The Epistles</b>

## FAITH

In the book of Romans 10:17 the Bible says, “*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*”. Therefore, we can conclude that the **source** of faith comes from the Word of God. This means we need to continually expose ourselves to the Word of God.

Of necessity, we should habitually read the Word, study the Word, hear the Word and do the Word. Faith is the vehicle, which God has chosen to bring victory into the lives of His disciples. So, as we allow the Word to develop faith in us, then we are able to grow into mature disciples.

At the moment we are born-again through faith in Jesus Christ, God seals us with His Holy Spirit. This is a precious gift we have as God’s children. The Holy Spirit works together with the Word of God to form Christ in our hearts through faith. Therefore, a regular diet of the Word of God provides the Holy Spirit with the necessary ingredients to create for us a victorious life.

# The Bible

## BIBLE STUDY METHODS

It can't be emphasized enough how essential it is for disciples to develop a solid commitment to the Word of God. What we believe defines who we are and how we live. The bible has the potential to form our belief system on *absolute truth*. The significance of this is the impact it has on the quality of life we experience, and the fulfillment of our destiny.

Our *approach* to reading the bible is as important as actually reading it. The following list includes some of the most common ways to read the bible. Your learning style and the season of life you are currently in are a couple of factors that affect the way you receive the Word of God. As you read the bible always remember this rule of thumb, "the bible interprets itself". In other words, don't try to make the bible say what you want it to say, but rather let it speak for itself.

Keep in mind, the purpose for reading the bible is to gain the necessary *knowledge, faith* and *inspiration* for intimately knowing and following Jesus Christ.

### **Character Study**

This type of bible study is focused on a specific person or a group of people. The strength of this study is the value of learning from the lives of other people.

### **Historical Study**

Some of the greatest lessons in life can be learned through a healthy understanding of history. Finding a connection with past generations can help you discover the potential of your generation.

### **Prophetic Study**

The bible is filled with numerous prophecies that have been fulfilled and numerous prophecies that have not yet been fulfilled. Prophecy reveals the hand of God throughout the history of man. There is a real sense of excitement when we learn about what God has done and what He is about to do.

### **Word Study**

This type of study brings a deeper value to the words we learn about. Sometimes getting a revelation on a particular word can give us a spiritual breakthrough.

# The Bible

## **Topical Study**

This is a great way to learn about an entire area of life. For example, marriage, money, careers and eternity are just a few topics the bible has much to say about.

## **Doctrinal Study**

It is essential to have a clear understanding of what we believe and why we believe it. The bible accurately defines the fundamental truths of Christianity.

## **Story Form Reading**

Sometimes simply reading the bible like a story and getting into the life of the message is just what we need.

Every bible study method is important and valuable to us all in our pursuit of spiritual maturity.

## **Study Helps**

Mixing up the way you read the bible not only helps you learn more, but it also spices things up. Also, paying attention to the condition of your heart as you approach the bible helps you realize how much of the bible you need. Sometimes a little bit every day or so is all you need to keep you growing. Then, sometimes you may need to invest more time to get a spiritual breakthrough. Just like our physical body, which has an appetite, so does our spiritual body. Feasting on the Word of God will build your spiritual man up and make you successful in life.

There are many bible study helps you can acquire at most Christian bookstores. The following list is just a few resources you can utilize with your personal bible study program.

- Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.
- Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words.
- A Modern Webster's Dictionary

## **MEDITATION**

Developing a habit of investing time in the word of God on a regular basis has tremendous benefits. To really maximize the most out of your time in the word, meditating on what you read even after you're finished



# The Bible

reading is powerful. When we hear and receive the word it is possible that much of what we receive can be lost. However, when we learn to retain the word in our heart long enough for it to take root, then we will see the fruit of that word in our lives. The way we retain the word in our heart is to meditate on it. That means we ponder what we have heard, we roll it around in our mind and consider its application in our lives. This process helps us to appreciate the word, thus allowing it to anchor our soul and direct our life. So, when you spend time with God in His word, don't be too quick to move on with your life without considering His word in your heart. Give place and time for His word to make a difference in your life. You will not regret it!

## LOVE LETTER

God created us out of His desire to love. Because of His great love for us, He will never push Himself on us. However, the bible communicates God's heart toward us. As we yield our hearts to God and approach His word with a desire to know Him, then we soon discover an overwhelming love awaiting us. John 3:16 sums up the heart of God, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*" The bible renews our minds and transforms our hearts by revealing God's love to us. The bible is literally a love letter from God. This is tremendously important to us because our greatest need in life is to know we *are* loved and to know that we *do* love.

## OWNERS MANUAL

Lastly, the bible is our owners' manual for life. God, man and the bible are similar to a manufacturer, a vehicle and an owners' manual. A manufacturer will design and create a vehicle, then develop an owners' manual for the vehicle. Furthermore God designed and created man, then developed an owners' manual (the bible) for the man. Owners' manuals tell you what everything is and how everything works. Thus, the bible tells us the same about our lives and ourselves. We can rely on the bible to teach us what our true purpose and potential in life really is.

# Prayer

## VERTICAL CONNECTION

The unique reality that distinguishes a disciple of Jesus Christ from a non-disciple is a *Vertical Connection* with God. When we receive Jesus Christ into our hearts, then the Holy Spirit makes His dwelling place within us. The Holy Spirit gives us access into the Presence of God as we reach out to Him in faith. Connecting with our Heavenly Father through the power of the Holy Spirit releases Gods promises, provisions and power into our lives.

Jesus teaches us the importance of having a *Vertical Connection*, through a prayer found in Matthew 6:9-13, “*Our Father who art in **heaven**, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in **heaven**. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For **Thine is the kingdom**, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.*” As outlined in this prayer, Jesus teaches us the importance of identifying with our Father in heaven. This unique connection with God releases into our lives the fragrance of the knowledge of God. When our souls are filled with and retain the knowledge of God, then our lives truly become meaningful.

## FORMS OF PRAYER

- One of the most utilized forms of prayer is called a **Petition**. This literally means to *ask* .
- Similar to petition is another form of prayer called **Supplication**. This means to *earnestly* ask out of a need.
- A prayer of **Confession** means to *agree* with what God say’s about Himself, about you and your circumstances.
- **Intercession** means to make a *petition on behalf of another*.
- A prayer of **Thanksgiving** means to render acceptable, as the reciever, or to give thanks.
- A prayer of **Adoration** is to *bless* or *praise* God for who He is.
- A unique form of prayer is simply to be still and **Listen** to the voice of God in your heart.
- Another form of prayer is **Groaning** deep within ourselves with the help of the Holy Spirit.
- There is available for disciples the gift of **Tongues**, which is a mysterious prayer language, where you speak directly to God from your spirit to His Spirit.

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## PRAYING THE WORD

This characteristic of prayer is essentially the most important to understand for seeing our prayers answered. Many times when we offer prayers to God, they are focused on circumstances and opinions, rather than God's promises to us. We generally offer these unfruitful prayers to God because it's natural for us to talk about our problems. On the contrary, praying the Word of God about our circumstances is a learned discipline. This is one of the reasons followers of Christ are referred to as disciples. It is easy to give mental assent to this truth, however, until you truly begin to practice praying the Word of God you will have very little, if any of yours prayers answered.

### Promises of God

Everything God does in our lives is according to what He has promised in His word. That is why it is important to know what the bible says about what God has promised. As we come to understand what God is willing to do in our lives, then we are able to line up our attitudes and our expectations with God's promises.

In the book of **Hebrews 6:11-12**, we learn how to enter into what God has promised. Listen to the passage, *"And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through **faith and patience** inherit the promises"*. When we invest our time in the Word of God, the faith we receive begins to bring definition in our hearts concerning what we expect God to do in our lives. This is essential to entering into the promises of God. When our hearts are filled with vagueness concerning our expectations of God, it is difficult if not impossible to see results from our prayers. Therefore, the key to effectively praying the Word is to **study** what God has said He will do. Then, line up the content of our prayers with what we learned about God's will in His Word.

## SINCERITY & PERSISTENCE

Prayers can be frustrated by having a wrong motive. We learn this in James 4:2-3 *"...You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with **wrong motives**, so that you may spend it on your pleasures"*. It is true, if you ask God to do something in your life, that He said He would do for you in His Word, He will do it. However, there is a condition for receiving from God. And that condition is a

right motive. In other words, you have to be sincere in your relationship with God. He will not permit us to relate to Him as a magic wand. He desires to demonstrate to us throughout our lives that He is faithful and worthy of our trust. When we are sincere in our relationship with God, as we ask Him for certain things in our lives, then when the answer comes it will strengthen our relationship with God.

Sometimes prayers are unfruitful because there is a lack of persistence. In Matthew 7:7-8 the scriptures says, *“Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened”*. The context of this passage of Scripture literally means to keep on asking, keep on seeking and keep on knocking. The essence of these two verses is to emphasize that he who is persistent with God will receive from God.

## KINGDOM OF GOD

Ultimately, in the mind of God, He desires to reveal the knowledge of His kingdom in our hearts. This is the greatest cause for prayer. Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, *“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you”*. The Kingdom of God is simply the way God does things. It is His government in our lives. Sincere prayer is a demonstration of humility before God. When we pray, we are subjecting ourselves to God's government in our lives.

As we allow God to work in our lives the way He desires to, then we begin to see ourselves the way God does, in His righteousness. God always views us through the eyes of Jesus Christ. As we mature in our prayer life with God, then we begin to see what God sees. This is how He establishes us in His righteousness.

The more we discover of God's government in our lives, the more established our lives become. This is the place where our heavenly Father is drawing us to. It is at this place of understanding that all the other things in life we need or desire are added to us.

## CASTING OUR CARES

*“Casting all your anxiety (cares) upon Him, because He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7)*. Jesus desires to carry our burdens for us, but we have to be willing to give them to Him. When we cry out to God in prayer we are actually

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asking Him to give us relief from our burdens. Jesus' response to our crying out is *"no problem, I just happen to be the Almighty and I can handle it."* When we find ourselves feeling heavy and suffocating with the issues of life we can simple cry out to Jesus in faith and know He will diligently care for us. Casting our cares on Jesus happens when we are more *aware* of Gods ability to take care of things than we are our inability to take care of things.

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## PRAYER JOURNAL

Keeping your thoughts, prayers, desires and goals in life organized in a journal can be very helpful to you. When you have no direction in your life, you can develop a lack of purpose. It can be discouraging to not know where you are going with your life. In fact, when you don't have a sense of destiny it is easy to fall into sin or compromise your convictions. However, developing a habit of writing down dreams and desires you believe God has put in your heart can really produce positive momentum in your life. You don't have to excel in English or writing to have an effective prayer journal. Simplicity and honesty lay the foundation for an exciting prayer journal. Consider obtaining a notebook and pen dedicated solely for journaling your prayers, desires and dreams. Be specific and biblical with what you right down. Then, begin the exciting journey of watching God fulfill the dreams He has put in your heart.

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## BECAUSE HE IS WORTHY

The **value** that one possesses has the ability to influence and motivate others to desire intimacy with that one. There are many people and many things that possess varying degrees of value in each of our lives. However, only our Creator God possesses value that is unsearchable. Listen to King David in Psalm 145, *“I will extol Thee, my God, O King; And I will bless Thy name forever and ever. Every day I will bless Thee, And I will praise Thy name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and highly to be praised; And His greatness is **unsearchable**.”* David was a man just like you and I. He had many people and many things in his life that were valuable to him. Nevertheless, David understood there was only One who possessed unsearchable value that was worthy of the highest praise and deepest passion.

Consider this, if Creator God ceased to exist (which is impossible), then all created things would cease to exist as well. On the other hand, if all created things ceased to exist (which is possible), then God would still continue to exist. God is self-existing and needs nothing to be Himself. We as people exist only because God created us. Therefore, we are dependant upon God for our existence. Because of this, God is the only One worthy of our most intimate worship.

## OUR SELF WORTH

Having a strong sense of self-worth is essentially one of the deepest needs of the human heart. When we feel worthless and think we have no significant value, then we are susceptible to destructive behaviors. However, when we develop an awareness of our self-worth, then we are able to resist destructive patterns of thinking, believing and behaving. Furthermore, we are released to harness our time, energy and talents for the fulfillment of Gods purpose for our lives.

As we worship our Creator God, we are able to connect with Him relationally and emotionally. In the experience of worship, we discover the awesome Presence of God. In His Presence we are able to see through the eyes of our heart the worth of God. When we see His worth through worship, then we are able to also see the worth that He has bestowed on us. Worshipping God is as much for us as it is for God. We worship God because our own self-worth comes from Him.

## FINDING OUR LIFE

Listen to Colossians 3:1-4, *“If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”* We learn from this passage that we should set our mind on God who is above. As we focus on Him in worship, then we begin to find our life in Christ. The way this happens is that the Spirit of God begins to open the *eyes of our heart* as we seek God in worship. It is only through the eyes of our heart that we can truly see God and discover ourselves in Christ. Many people, including Christians, try to find themselves in so many things other than God. The problem with this scenario is that only God has the capacity to give us life. Other things may give us momentary pleasure or temporary satisfaction, but only God Himself can give us life. Therefore, because of the need to live, we all have to find our life in Christ. Remember what Jesus said in John 10:10, *“...I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.”* Let’s worship Him because our lives depend upon it.

## THE PLEASURE OF GOD

All people desire pleasure. Whether it’s to please another person or to please ourselves, we all desire pleasure. The problem with pleasing people or pleasing ourselves is that it is never enough. Even though it’s very biblical to love and serve people, it is very dangerous to make it more important to us than pleasing God. Jesus exemplified a life of blessing people everywhere He went. However, what was even more important to Him than this was pleasing His Father. Listen to what the Father said to Jesus immediately following His baptism, *“...This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”* (Matthew 3:17) Jesus obediently followed the will of His Father into baptism. Even though John the Baptist argued with Jesus about baptizing Him, Jesus was more committed to pleasing His Father than He was pleasing John. As a result, John baptized Jesus. Because of this the Father spoke from heaven that he was well-pleased with His Son. Looking at the humanity of Jesus, there were many times he had to make decisions by faith to please God rather than people or even Himself. Likewise, in our humanity, we are tempted many times to please ourselves or the opinion of man more than God. In Hebrew 11:6 we find some direction in

# W O R S H I P

dealing with this issue. “*And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek him.*” It requires faith to please God. Therefore, when we practice worshipping God by faith, then we develop a desire to please Him. Developing a desire to please God brings us into the experience of the pleasure of God. There are many righteous and unrighteous experiences that bring pleasure into our lives. Things such as relationships, sexual encounters, eating tasty food, hobbies, recreation, entertainment, ect. However, none of these pleasures can fulfill us like the pleasure of God. We were made by Him and for Him, therefore, pleasing Him is the greatest pleasure in life.

## **A**T**M**O**S**P**H**E**R**E **O**F **H**E**A**V**E**N

The definition for atmosphere is *the surrounding influence or environment*. King David teaches us about the Presence of God in Psalm 16:11, “*Thou wilt make known to me the path of life; In Thy Presence is fullness of joy; In Thy right hand there are pleasures forever.*” David experienced the atmosphere of heaven through his relationship with God. He understood that life, joy and pleasure were experienced at the highest level only in and because of the Presence of God. When we observed the life of David we see a man whose highest priority in life was experiencing the Presence of God. This is why he was regarded as a man after Gods own heart, a man who worshipped his God.

Our adversary will fight us on this issue harder than anything else because he knows what happens to us when we experience the atmosphere of heaven. Nevertheless, as we worship our way *through* distractions, hurts, temptations and condemnation, then we can enter into the Presence of God and experience our souls being restored and our spirits being energized. Let us express our worship to God with instruments, songs, singing and with our very life. Then God will fill our hearts with His holy Presence and we will be continually satisfied with the atmosphere of heaven.



## DELIVERED BUT NOT FREE

As we observe the life of Moses and the Hebrew people we discover some powerful truths on how God works in our lives. In summarizing the book of Exodus, Moses is called by God to deliver the Hebrew people from the hand of Pharaoh and the Egyptian army. The Hebrews had been in captivity for over 400 years and God responded to their cries by sending Moses. Ultimately, Moses did lead the Hebrews out from the captivity of their oppressors. The next step in Gods plan for His people was to teach them how to trust and obey Him. So, he took them to the wilderness for training and preparation. It was Gods will to not only deliver them from their enemies, but to bring them into the Promised Land. However, in order for the Hebrews to come into the Promised Land, they had to develop their character. In other words, they needed to renew their minds. Even though the Hebrews were no longer in Egypt, Egypt was still in them. In the wilderness, the Hebrews continually refused to serve God wholeheartedly. In their minds they were constantly complaining and even began desiring to return back to Egypt. They were spiritual babes that refused to grow up.

Renewing the mind is the difficult part of walking with God. As a matter of fact, the intended short season in the wilderness for the Hebrews ended up becoming a long 40 years. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, every man twenty years old and older died in the wilderness during that 40-year period. What we learn from this example is that when we first receive Christ and become a Christian, it is a sovereign act of God. We simply turn to Jesus, then He delivers us from the hand of our oppressor, Satan. However, this is only the beginning point in our journey with God. There still remains for us a promised land to inherit, which is freedom from all oppression in our mind.

Following the 40-year test in the wilderness, Moses died and Joshua was then appointed by God to lead the Hebrews into the Promised Land. Moses was used by God to deliver His people from the oppressor, then Joshua was used by God to lead His people into the freedom of their inheritance. The Promised Land, or rather our inheritance is occupied by enemies. Therefore, we have to work with God and learn to think differently. A renewed mind qualifies us for possessing the things that God has prepared for us. Jesus first delivers us from the oppressor, then He sets us free from oppression as we renew our minds with the word of God. At this point we are able to freely walk in and experience all that God has prepared for us.

## THE OLD SELF

*“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.” (Galatians 2:20)* Paul teaches us in this passage a life changing truth about those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ. The moment we receive Christ into our heart, we become a child of God. By virtue of a spiritual birth we no longer belong to the kingdom of darkness, but rather the kingdom of God. This means our old, fallen nature that we received from Adam and Eve has been removed from us. That is why it is futile to try and get Gods approval through good works or religious activity. God wants to put to death our old rebellious nature and give us a new nature. This is what it means to be born-again. However, after becoming a child of God through the new birth, we still have to renew our minds with the word of God. God does give us a new heart and a new spirit, but we are required to renew our minds. This is where we develop a vital relationship with God. If we fail to commit ourselves to growing in our relationship with God, then our unrenewed mind will keep us defeated and frustrated. So, the real battlefield for the Christian is in the mind.

## THE NEW SELF

*“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” (II Corinthians 5:17)* This verse of Scripture is absolute truth for every child of God, whether we feel it or not. After our initial decision to receive Christ, the primary purpose for the rest of our lives on this earth is about *growing* in Christ. In order to truly experience our new life in Christ daily, we have to nurture our faith in Him. As we learn to consistently trust and obey Christ we grow in our awareness of our new life in Him. We should continually seek God for the things He freely gives us in Christ. This is where the challenge comes for us. Our unrenewed mind will try to make us work for or earn the very things God gives us freely. Religious activity and church attendance is not how we grow in Christ. We will naturally grow in Christ as we serve Him in every area of your lives. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 7:24-25, *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against the house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock.”* The emphasis of this passage is to *act* upon the word of God. In other words, we need to literally practice our faith. It’s not enough to

# Renewing Your Mind

just hear the truth. If we desire what God desires for us, which is a new and abundant life in Christ, then we have to act like what God says is true. Only when we do this are we really going to experience this new life Christ has promised us.

The more we practice the truth the more we realize our new self. The reason why it takes time and patience to fully discover our new self is because our mind is going through a transformation. Listen to Paul in Romans 12:2, “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*” Obedience to the word of God stimulates our new self, causing our minds to completely change. It is in the *application* of biblical truth that our minds are transformed.

## BELIEVING TRUTH

“*But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth...*” (John 16:13) One of the major roles the Holy Spirit fulfills in our lives is to lead us into all the truth. Absolute truth does not exist in our culture nor in the way the world thinks. Only the bible contains absolute truth and only the Spirit of God can cause us to experience this truth. When we come to faith in Christ, there are still many areas of our mind that needs to come into the truth. It takes time for the Holy Spirit working with the word of God in our hearts to bring our minds out into all the truth. In order to pull down untruthful arguments in our minds we have to make a strong commitment to continue in believing the truth of Gods word. If we allow ourselves to stay deceived in any area of our mind, then we cannot grow beyond that place. However, the Holy Spirit will honor our persistent belief in truth and eventually cause us to experience all the truth.

## THE MARK

Before becoming disciples, we were all born with a *sin nature* that we inherited from adam and eve. We each had varying degrees of *active sin* in our lives. However, there remains the need *for all* to receive a new nature. As discussed earlier, this happens when we repent of sin and turn to Jesus for the forgiveness of sin. This is the essence of the Gospel message.

Now, as disciples of Christ, we have a call from God and a desire in our heart to share our testimony with other people. A testimony is to publicly acknowledge your experience with God. However, it is important to realize because of the various degrees of sin each individual has come out of, each experience will be different. This salvation experience we are talking about we will refer to as **The Mark**. It is the place in your heart that Jesus Christ touches when you are *born-again*. You never forget the mark and it literally determines what you do with the rest of your life. As a matter of fact, the mark becomes the very foundation God establishes for building everything else upon.

## SALT & LIGHT

In Matthew 5:13-14 Jesus said, “You are the *salt* of the earth...you are the *light* of the world”. Because Christ dwells in our hearts, we now possess a very unique nature. The most effective testimony we can give anyone is a demonstration of the nature of Christ in us. Eventhough we may have struggles from time to time, we still have the potential to make a difference in this world.

The Holy Spirit who lives in us longs for us to step out of our comfort zone and touch people with Gods love. When we take courage and begin to seek opportunities to preserve **moral excellence** among our peers, then we develop effectiveness in our witness for the Lord. This is when our faith becomes an exciting journey, as well as a challenging mandate.

People are looking for hope everywhere. Therefore, it is essential for disciples to preserve and demonstrate life by being salt and light in this world. This role in many situations may be uncomfortable because of the risk it involves of rejection. You will not always be accepted when you stand strong in your faith. This is the place where salt and light are

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most effective. This is also the place where we as disciples of Christ discover our true potential.

## OVERCOMING THE ENEMY

It doesn't take much living to figure out we are in a violent spiritual battle. The nature of this battle is the struggle for our very souls. Every human being has the same adversary known as the devil. The devils previous occupation was that of an archangel. He exalted himself above God and as a result of his rebellion was cast out of heaven. Now, the main objective on the devils mind is to hurt God and everything He loves. The top of his agenda includes hurting that which God loves more than anything else in all creation, people.

With this in mind, as disciples of Christ we need to assume an offensive approach toward life. Reason being, we are a threat to the kingdom of darkness. Therefore, the very principle of evil itself will challenge the faith of everyone who believes in God for eternal life. It is critical to understand the spiritual **WAR** between the forces of good and evil has already been declared finished. Listen to what the bible says in I John 3:8, "...*The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil*". The works of the devil are the fruits of sin. When Jesus went to the cross He destroyed sin through His righteousness. Therefore, Jesus now has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). However, even though the **WAR** has already been won, there are many **BATTLES** yet to fight as His disciples in the earth.

After Jesus defeated the devil, the devil was left with no authority. The only weapon our enemy possesses now is deception. In Revelation 12:11 the bible says, "And they overcame him because of the blood of the lamb and because of the word of their testimony...". When we sense the enemy bringing accusations or temptations to us, then we can overcome him by *remembering* the blood Jesus shed for us and by *testifying* of the victory we have through Jesus Christ. The more we exercise our faith in Jesus Christ, then the more battles we win. This exercising of faith develops within us the ability to recognize that the war has already been won.

## THE GREAT COMMISSION

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you ...” (Matthew 28:19-20). As disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have a commission from our Lord to make disciples of all nations. The first step in fulfilling this commission is to share with those who will listen our testimony of Jesus Christ. When we tell others how God has changed our lives and how He is continually changing our lives, then we become living proof of the love and power of God. A changed life is the evidence people will look at to decide if God is real and has a personal interest in them.

Sometimes well meaning disciples will preach at someone who does not know God and actually push them away from God. What people who don't know God are looking for in people who do know God is a changed life, not a scripture or a sermon. Proverbs 11:30 says, “...*And he who is wise wins souls*”. In light of this verse, it is so important to be aware of how people are perceiving us when we are sharing our testimony with them. It is the goodness of God and the gratitude of our hearts that will influence these people toward God. Jesus is actually the most beautiful person who ever lived and the clearer someone can see Him in us the more they will be drawn to Him. In other words, Jesus can sell Himself. So, we don't have to conjure up some hysteria to get a person's attention on God. Instead, let's just naturally communicate our affection for Jesus and people will see His beauty in us

## SHARING OUR LIVES

God has created us all with a need for relationships. The reason for this is that we are all part of one another as followers of Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, the bible identifies us as the body of Christ (*see Romans 12:4,5 & I Corinthians 12:12-27*). Furthermore, because we are the body of Christ, we are part of God. Therefore, as we practice the art of fellowship, we create opportunities for experiencing the life of God. Many times disciples will try to live their life of faith without fellowshiping with other disciples. This may be due to fear, pride or a lack of experience in sharing their lives with others. Whatever the case may be, it is dangerous and should be avoided. God has an enormous amount of encouragement to impart to us when we share our lives with one another. If we truly desire to fulfill God's purpose for our lives, then we need to be aware of the need we all have for giving and receiving love, acceptance and value.

## GETTING CLEAN

Romans 3:23 teaches us a very important lesson about life and about ourselves. Listen to what it says, “...for we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”. We don't have to sin to be a sinner because we are all descendants of Adam and Eve. King David goes on to say in Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me”. As long as we live in our present bodies we will have the symptoms of our fallen nature with us. However, through the grace of God the memory and tendencies of our fallen nature can be brought into subjection to our new nature in Christ Jesus. The nature of Jesus was that of total righteousness. Therefore, as we learn to allow the grace of God to rule in our hearts, then we can experience the righteousness of God.

The challenge for disciples is to live in the world but not let the world live in them. When I say **world** I'm talking about the way people live their lives ignorant of the knowledge of God. It is literally the influences of the culture in which we live. These influences can summons the residue of our fallen nature into active duty. So, as disciples the potential always remains for sin to creep back into our lives through the memory of a fallen nature that Christ put to death. With this in mind, the bible teaches us how to be cleansed from the influences of the world. Listen to this passage in I John 1:7, “...but if we walk in the light as He Himself is

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# F e l l o w s h i p

*in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”*

God is in the light and we are called to walk in the light with Him. However, darkness does exist in the world and in the memory of our fallen nature. Therefore, we need to be released from the pull of sin and this world so we can walk with God in the light. One of the processes God uses to release us from the things that weigh us down in this world is godly fellowship. When disciples get together and share themselves with one another the anointing which resides in them is released. This anointing applies the redeeming blood of Jesus to our souls and sets our minds free. This is the love of God at work.

## REALIZING OUR POTENTIAL

We all possess hidden ability and power that is waiting to be released into our lives. However, the right ingredients need to be mixed into our lifestyle to ensure the realization of our potential. Fellowship is one of the major ingredients that makes this awakening of potential possible. Getting to the place in life where we are consistently walking in obedience to the will of God is the greatest blessing of life. Fellowship was a common practice among the first disciples in the bible and is also the will of God for our lives. As we engage in fellowship with other disciples, then we begin to see what we can truly become.

Galatians 5:14 says, *“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, **You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**”* Jesus gave this new commandment to us, which is essentially the nature and practice of christian faith. God is very interested in His children interacting with one another. Our potential in Christ is linked together with other disciples. When we get together in faith we can literally provoke one another to good works (see Hebrews 10:24). One spark of light coupled together with another spark of light inevitably creates a fire. Then, this fire begins to spread among the people and the environment becomes an all consuming fire. This type of environment, created through fellowship, produces a zeal in people which results in good works. This is what God is after and what we were truly made for.



## SENSE OF BELONGING

Psalm 133:1 says, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.” We can experience a wonderful sense of belonging through the art of fellowship. It can be a very uncomfortable feeling when we find ourselves isolated, alone and disconnected. The kingdom of God is in our midst and we have the privilege of experiencing it in our lives. God has put a desire deep in the heart of people to be a part of something bigger than themselves. When we pay attention to this desire it will give us the strength to push past any obstacle, so that we may belong to that bigger thing. That bigger thing is actually the kingdom of God, which is in our midst.

Fellowship produces a sense of belonging in our hearts. This experience brings to our lives tremendous fulfillment. Another way to understand it is when we know we belong, then we know we are part of a family. This satisfies a deep longing within all of our hearts.

## REACHING PEOPLE

Eventhough there are great benefits in fellowshiping with one another, God still has more in mind for fellowship. Listen to Acts 2:46-47 “*And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*” God loves saving people from destruction. So, when He sees His people enjoying fellowship with one another, He draws others into the action. This is such an effective way to bring people into the kingdom of God. There is so much **joy** in true fellowship and everyone needs joy. This is the influence God wants to use to build His kingdom on the earth. “*and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls*” (1 Peter 1:8-9).

# Fellowship

## HOLY CONVERSATIONS

Galatians 4:29 says, *“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.”* When we come together in conversation and begin to talk about our faith in God, we actually impart grace into one another's heart. These holy conversations are vital to our growth in God. Furthermore, they also keep us from going astray from God. As disciples we have the ability to reinforce one another's faith through the conversations we share. These unique conversations function as a source of accountability in our pursuit of God's will for our lives. Remember what Jesus said, *“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst”* (Matthew 18:20). When we come together with Jesus on our mind, then He reveals himself to us.

## U P S I D E D O W N K I N G D O M

The world system in which we live is fueled by a motivation that is opposite of the kingdom of God. This motivation is egocentric and completely ignorant of the knowledge of God. Listen to what the bible says, *“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lust; but the one who does the will of God abides forever”* (I John 2:16-17). The world system is driven by two goals, to feed lust and to feed pride. This creates a dangerous problem because neither lust nor pride can ever be satisfied. Thus, we have a dissatisfied world filled with chaos.

We learn from Jesus what the kingdom of God is like. *“...but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:26-28). The essential goal in the kingdom of God is to demonstrate love. We do this by esteeming one another through serving. This is the avenue God has established for our progress in His kingdom. The challenge with this mindset is that it moves us in the opposite direction of the world. This is the will of God for our lives, but it requires a total commitment from us.

## L O V I N G G O D

I John 4:20-21 says, *“If someone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.”* You cannot separate loving God from loving people. If you love God, then you have to love people. Actually, you can develop your love for God by loving people. However, sometimes we think we are loving people just because we say we love people. Listen to I John 3:18, *“Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”* Therefore, we need to put our love for people into practice. As we commit ourselves to demonstrating acts of kindness towards one another, then we will come into the understanding that we are truly children of God.

## THE JOINT SUPPLIES

The apostle Paul received a wonderful revelation from God about the body of Christ. This is what he says in Ephesians 4:15-16, *“but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”* Every individual member in the body of Christ has an important role to fulfill for the spiritual growth of the collective body of Christ. Joints hold different members together in the body. The joint is literally the place where life is experienced. The joint represents the relationships we share with each other in the body of Christ. Through these relationships the life of God is released and experienced.

Being a disciple is not a spectator sport. However, it is engaging, interactive, challenging and rewarding. It requires nothing less than a total commitment of your whole person. If we hesitate or become double-minded, then we risk missing out on what God really has for us. When we make the decision to be committed to the process God has us in for transforming our lives, then we begin to see the need we have for faith-filled relationships. It really is a double standard with relationships. We have as much a need to *give* in relationships as we do to *receive* from relationships. We are all interdependent within the body of Christ. Relationships serve as a vehicle for love to be experienced. And without love it is impossible to grow in God because God is love.

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

We all have a desire deep within our hearts to know that our life matters, to know that we made a difference. This longing is actually the heart of God for our lives. It is true that God desires to see our lives blessed spiritually, emotionally, physically and financially. However, these blessings do not satisfy the longing we have to make a difference. Listen to what Jesus said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35)*. It’s not healthy to spend all of our time as Disciples trying to receive from God or from people. On the other hand, it is healthy to look for opportunities and to create opportunities for blessing God and for blessing people.

As we begin to make a difference in the lives of others, then we will recognize the value God has given every human being. We will start seeing areas of criticism, judgment, unforgiveness and distrust literally melt away from our hearts. Many times because people sense shame, guilt or even fear in their hearts they will not even try to serve people. This is due to a belief that says I am unworthy to be a blessing to someone. The truth of the matter is that God has established the art serving as a means for us to draw from the redemption we have in Christ. In other words, it's a great way to adjust our attitude if it becomes negative. This is important to understand because the greatest impact we have on people is our attitude.

## FULFILLING YOUR DREAMS

Having visions and dreams are an integral part of the disciples life. When you begin to pursue the dreams God has placed in your heart, you soon realize it takes the ways of God to make those dreams a reality. One of the *Ways of God* is for us to help make the dreams of **others** come to pass. In doing this, we are also sowing seeds for the fulfillment of our own dreams. The more we help other people make their dreams come true, then the more we will see our dreams come true. As a matter a fact, in the kingdom of God we actually limit our own dreams when we fail to serve people by helping them with their dreams. The nature of God is to help. Therefore, as we help one another Gods nature empowers us all to fulfill our dreams.

# YOUR

## GOD OWNS IT ALL

The first step in understanding how to view your money is to understand ownership. *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)* This is the first recorded verse of scripture in the bible. Within this passage we learn that the origin of all creation came from God. Furthermore, listen to Genesis 1:27, *“And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”* We learn from this verse that God also created mankind. Therefore, we can conclude from these two verses of scripture that God owns it all. (see Psalm 24:1)

To bring more depth to our understanding of *all creation belonging to God*, consider the following thoughts. Whether it is something visible like a tree, a mountain, an ocean or even other galaxies. God created it all. Or even something invisible like a human soul, an imagination, emotions, intelligence or even energy, gravity and air. Still, God created it all. Therefore, whether it's the physical property that your house sits on or the intellectual property that resides in your mind, God owns it all.

# MONEY

## THE TITHE

There is a powerful illustration of how to relate to God with our money found in Genesis 14. To summarize the story, Abrams nephew Lot was taken captive along with his family and possessions. When Abram received word of what happened to his nephew, he organized his men for battle and pursued those who took Lot. Abram and his men swiftly overtook the enemy and returned with all the people and their possessions, along with the goods from the enemy. Shortly after his victorious return, Abram met with Melchizedek (Jesus Christ). During their meeting, Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all he had.

The significance of this tithe that Abram gave to Melchizedek was the motivation he had in giving it. Abram had just experienced a major victory in battle. Then, the first response he had because of his victory was to honor the Lord God with the first portion of his increase. This established an acknowledgment in Abrams heart that God was his source for provision. This interaction between Abram and Melchizedek caused a covenant of blessing to come into Abrams life. Therefore, as we practice tithing, then we can expect the same covenant of blessing to come into our lives.

# Y O U R M O N E Y

## FUNDING THE KINGDOM

The tithe is the primary avenue by which God uses to carry out His work in the earth. Listen to Malachi 3:10, *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.”* The Lord is depending on his children to bring their tithes into the church, so the message of His kingdom can be advanced in the earth. Only when vision and provision are working together can the work of the Lord be fulfilled.

## ABOVE AND BEYOND

The tithe establishes a covenant relationship between God and us concerning our money. Still, beyond the tithe is to give **offerings** to the Lord and His work. Listen to *II Corinthians 9:6-7*, *“...he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.”* God is love and one of the most noticeable characteristics of love is to give. Therefore, God gets excited when he sees his children giving out of love.

The world is filled with many different needs. These needs are met through people just like you and I. As we make the decision and commitment to give above and beyond two powerful things happen. First, love is expressed to someone who needs it. Secondly, our hearts are enlarged by the love of God. This is definitely a win win situation!

## STEWARDSHIP

The way we handle money has a significant effect on the quality of life we experience and the level of trust the Lord gives us. Listen to the following verses, *“He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. If therefore you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon (money), who will entrust the true riches to you?”* From a human standpoint money has the potential to create positive circumstances that can promote our quality of life. From Gods standpoint money is a *tutor for spiritual success*. In other words, when we develop trustworthiness in our handling of money, then we begin to understand the true riches of God.

# YOUR MONEY

Every disciple of Christ is designed by God to have good spiritual success. However, this success only comes through our faithful stewardship. With this in mind, it is essential to be found faithful in our management of money. The principles for managing our money with a biblical perspective are (1) earning an income, (2) honoring God with your tithe, (3) creating a budget (spending), (4) investing money (saving) and (5) sowing money (giving). When you diligently practice these five principles, then you will find good success. (see Joshua 1:8)

## FINANCIAL FREEDOM

The ultimate goal for managing finances is to attain financial freedom. To have financial freedom is to be free from debt (with the exception of a mortgage), to have all your needs met, to have assets, to have investments and to be a blessing to others. Financial freedom does not happen over night, but it will happen through the process of applying ourselves. It is important to develop a plan of action and to have someone hold you accountable to that plan. It is also important to note that as we make the decision to attain financial freedom *we will face strong resistance from the world system, possibly from other people and even our own minds*. This is the place where we need to renew our minds to think differently.

Many people constantly struggle to just earn a living. The problem with this scenario is that God has called us to live a destiny. When we have the *just earning a living* attitude, then we put ourselves in a survival approach toward life. However, when we have the *living a destiny* attitude, then we put ourselves in a conquering approach toward life. There are many things we have to conquer before we will enjoy financial freedom. Some of the issues to conquer are; developing self-discipline, faithfully holding ourselves accountable, resisting indulgent spending and developing patience.

As we develop and practice a detailed plan of action for attaining financial freedom, then we will begin to see our circumstances change and we will notice the favor of the Lord in our lives. Living our lives in a way that we actually become *a burden to none and a blessing to all* is the essence of financial freedom.



## E.S.B.A.M.

The book of Ephesians, penned by the Apostle Paul, is the model church from which local churches are to follow. In chapter four we find a detailed account of the purpose and potential of the church. Listen to the following passage, “*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the **equipping** of the saints for the work of **service**, to the **building** up of the body of Christ; until we all **attain** to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a **mature** man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*” The primary functions of the local church are equipping, serving, building, attaining and maturing (E.S.B.A.M.).

The Lord *gifts* and *calls* individuals into leadership within the church. These leadership roles are known as apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. The individuals who fulfill these roles in the church are responsible for **equipping** disciples to serve God. The way in which these church leaders are to equip disciples is through revelation knowledge. As disciples are taught the word of God, they are then equipped with revelation knowledge.

Concerning **servicing** the will of God, we as disciples are released according to the level of revelation we have of His word in our lives. Therefore, as we are continually equipped with revelation of Gods word, then we are always able to effectively serve the will of God. Serving the will of God moves us out of self-centered living and moves us into God-centered living.

We are all in need of being built up in Christ. When we become disciples we begin a life long journey of growth and development. As we give ourselves to serving the will of God, then we actually begin to **build** one another up in Christ through what we say and do for one another. Those that are being served as well as those that are serving are both being built up in the Lord.

As we are being built up, we develop the capacity to **attain** some powerful eternal truths. It is one thing to *hear* about truth and it is an entirely different thing to *experience* that truth in our lives. In other words, the truth does not set you free. It is knowing (*experiencing*) the truth that sets you free. We as disciples can attain these truths as we are built up in the Lord.

The ultimate goal for all disciples who practice their faith is **maturity**. Another way to say it is...to become like Jesus. When we read about the life of Jesus we discover an extraordinary life. His relationship with the Father, His ability to forgive, His compassion and love for people and his amazing example of humility are just a few qualities we admire about Him as His followers. Therefore, when we get plugged into a local church and are equipped, then we will begin to serve others causing everyone to be built up. This makes it possible for the attainment of truth and ultimately experiencing the life of Christ for the whole body.

## REDEMPTIVE COMMUNITY\*

The world is filled with many different *communities* of people with varying purposes. Disciples of Jesus Christ around the world represent one of these communities. Even though there are many different denominations and doctrines among disciples, the *common unity* shared among disciples is the experience of redemption. We will always have different points of view, interpretations, expressions and even values. However, as disciples we all share the same experience of being ransomed by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. We represent His body (the church) because He redeemed us with His blood and gave us His Spirit. Glory to God.

Matthew 18:20 says, “*For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.*” When we come together in the Name of the Lord, we are facilitating an opportunity for experiencing the work of redemption in our lives. We are all called by our heavenly Father to rise above the limitations, distractions, irritations and speculations of our time. He desires to see us assume our place in Him where the life of Christ flows freely through us. However, this desired place of purpose and power does not happen simply because you are a disciple or because you really want it. Our adversary the devil will most certainly use every evil scheme and deceitful weapon imaginable to keep us from the truth. Furthermore, the worldly cultures in which we live are always competing for our attention and our affections. Even more, the memory of our own flesh nature will wrestle with Christ for control of our lives. Understanding these enemies of our faith and the real danger they represent helps us to realize just how much we need to be actively engaged in redemptive community.

Through participation in redemptive community we are empowered to overcome our past, our weaknesses and our enemies. Furthermore, we are empowered to discover our purpose, develop our potential and fulfill our destiny. Listen to Psalm 133:1,3 *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity...for there the Lord commanded the blessing-life forever!* The Lord Himself values us coming together in His name so much, that He commands the blessing of eternal life in that place. Through the authentic experience of redemptive community hearts are touched and lives are changed forever.

## INTIMATE ALLIES\*

It is essential to our growth as disciples of Jesus Christ to have Intimate Allies in our lives. Intimate Allies are those people who we share a deep sense of trust with, who we share our deepest concerns and struggles with. These are the few people who have access to our heart and have the ability to influence us in our decision-making. Jesus modeled this for us in the Gospels. We learn from His life that He selected twelve men to be close to Him. And from these twelve men He selected three of them to be His intimate allies.

The most evident characteristic of Intimate Allies is that they will **fight for your heart**. Listen to what Jesus said in the Gospel of John 13:34-35, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* When we observe how Jesus loved, then we soon discovered that He fought for the heart of every human being. That is what He communicated so clearly when he willingly went to the cross and died in our place. He did not give up on us, but instead He fought for our hearts even to the point of His own death. As we accept the responsibility to sincerely fight for one another’s heart, then people will recognize that we are truly disciples of Christ, including ourselves.

The most effective way for your heart to fully come alive to Christ is to fight for the hearts of your intimate allies. A passage found in John 21:15-17 gives an account of Jesus after His resurrection asking Peter three times if he loved Him. All three times Peter answered Jesus with a yes and Jesus responded each time to Peter with this statement, *“Tend to My sheep.”* When we fight for each other’s heart, then we are coming alive to the deepest desire Jesus has...to win people for His glory.

# FORGIVENESS

## GOD FORGAVE FIRST

Before we can even begin to practice forgiveness in our lives, we must understand that God Himself initiated forgiveness toward us first. Ephesians 1:7 says, “*In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace...*” This verse of Scripture teaches us that God has forgiven us because of the sacrifice of Jesus. To take it a step further, listen to Romans 5:8, “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” God didn’t wait around for us to get our act together before he made a move toward reconciling us back to Himself. It is because of who He is that motivated Him to forgive us. God is more interested in loving us than He is condemning us. Therefore, He satisfied His righteous judgment concerning our sins by pouring His wrath upon Jesus Christ at the cross. We will never be asked to forgive more than God forgave us through Christ. However, because God did forgive us we are required to likewise forgive those who hurt us as well.

## MORE THAN A DECISION

It is true that authentic forgiveness begins with a decision. However, the decision is only the beginning. There is a process to work through in order for forgiveness to reach its full expression, which is reconciliation. This means there has to be an *emotional release* that takes place in our heart and mind. If we decide to forgive someone who has hurt us and even confess that we have forgiven them, but fail to release the *pain* they caused us, then we are not allowing forgiveness to be fully expressed. The uncured pain from the offense will remain as a wedge between us and the other party, which means there is no true reconciliation. Even though the other party involved may not desire to be reconciled, we still have to resolve the issue for ourselves. In other words, we forgive people as much for ourselves as we do for them.

Emotional pain is very dangerous and can destroy lives. It literally produces anger, bitterness and isolation. There is much medical evidence indicating that unforgiveness is the cause for many sicknesses and diseases. We as human beings do not have the capacity to hold onto pain, anger, bitterness and unforgiveness for very long. Eventually these dangerous emotions will begin to cause our spirit, body and mind to breakdown.

# Forgiveness

There is a powerful illustration of forgiveness found in the seventh chapter of Acts. The entire chapter is an account of a man named Stephen who was filled with the Holy Spirit. He is preaching before the Sanhedrin (Jewish Council). The words that he was saying and the Spirit in which he was saying them overwhelmed the religious rulers. They simply could not receive the truth that Stephen was preaching. Instead, they were offended and became angry with him. They became so enraged that they began to stone him. In the last two verses of this chapter we see an awesome example of forgiveness. Listen to what the bible says, *“And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, Lord Jesus receive my spirit! And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them! And having said this, he fell asleep (died).”* Can you imagine being in a position where people were really hurting you (emotionally and/or physically) and you were actually innocent? Then, from that place of unjustified hurt you begin to exercise forgiveness toward those responsible for hurting you. It would take a supernatural experience to be able to forgive like that. Well, when God forgave us it was nothing less than supernatural. Stephen understood this truth, therefore was able to completely release the hurt brought upon him by these violent people. He came to the place of *compassion* instead of *revenge*, which is something we should all be practicing.

## LIFE GIVING SPIRIT

Listen to I Corinthians 15:45, *“So it is written: The first man Adam became a living soul, the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.”* When we come to faith in Jesus Christ we become a life-giving spirit. This means that giving life is essential to who we are and how we function. This is so important to understand in relation to forgiveness. When situations and circumstances occur that hurt us emotionally, the natural response is to hold on to the hurt, shut down part of our heart, live in fear of being hurt again and become angry because we aren't fully living. Not only does everyone lose, but we are not able to be ourselves as well.

To be a life-giving spirit means to always have potential to experience new things in life. Romans 6:4 teaches us, *“...we also should walk in newness of life.”* The Holy Spirit lives in our hearts through faith and is always ready to release our potential for new life. This is the lifestyle God has in mind for His children. He desires for us to always be growing, expanding and experiencing more of His abundant life in us.

However, many times what happens to us is the exact opposite of what needs to happen. We allow our pride and fear to be more important to us than our freedom. The problem with this scenario is life will begin to pass us by while we find false comfort in our negative emotions. Even more, we will miss God's purpose for our life. Reason being because our purpose is connected to our potential. When our potential is slowed down or completely stopped up, then our purpose remains only in the mind of God but not lived out in our life. This picture illustrates the valuable lives of countless individuals throughout the history of man.

When we learn to forgive from the heart, then we become more sensitive to what's really important in life. After overcoming a hurt we put more value on the things that make us come alive to God. Experiencing true forgiveness teaches us to manage the issues of our heart with more diligence. We begin to steer our hearts in a direction that leads us out of dangerous emotions and into positive emotions. The abundant life Jesus was talking about in John 10:10 is connected to our *emotionality*. As we observe the life of Jesus in the four gospels we find a very personal Jesus who expressed powerful emotions. It is critical to our maturity that we manage our emotions well, but we also need to learn how to express them appropriately. The fifth chapter of Galatians reveals to us the nine attributes of the fruit of the Spirit. This fruit of the Spirit is literally the emotion of God that consist of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. As we obediently exercise the habit of forgiveness, then we can expect to grow in the fruit of the Spirit. The more we live out of this place the more we will want to live out of this place. This is the abundant life that belongs to us in Christ.

## DEVELOPING COMPASSION

It is very uncomfortable and undesirable to experience emotional hurt. Nevertheless Jesus modeled a lifestyle of forgiveness regardless of how much hurt someone may have caused Him. We are all tempted even as Christians to withhold love from the one(s) who have hurt us. What God commands us to do when someone offends us is to respond with compassion rather than insisting on revenge. This is a difficult lesson to learn, but an attitude we must develop. We all possess the ability to give compassion and when we do God is glorified and we are released to live and enjoy our lives.

# Repentance

## REQUIRED FOR SALVATION

*“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 4:17). This was the message that Jesus Christ preached during His earthly ministry. The first issue Jesus addressed when He began His ministry was the condition of the human heart. Ever since the fall of mankind (see Genesis 3) there has been embedded deep within the heart of man a weakness to do evil. Even though there are *varying* degrees of sin in every individual’s heart, there still remains for all of humanity the inescapable *condition* of the human heart. Jesus had such an understanding of this problem that it became the emphasis of His ministry.

When Mary conceived Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit the Son of God became the Son of Man. This means all that God is and all that God has He brought to the earth in Christ. Jesus lived His life as a man in perfect obedience to His Father. The heart of Jesus only knew righteousness. He was tested many times and in many ways. However, His heart never yielded to evil, but always stayed loyal to the Father. He sacrificed his body on the cross as a ransom for the hearts of those who would believe in Him. This is why Jesus went around preaching repentance because he knew that humanity needed a new heart. Listen to Ezekiel 11:19, *“And I shall give them one heart, and shall put a new spirit within them. And I shall take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.”* In order for Jesus to save us and to give us the gift of eternal life, we have to respond to Him with repentance. In the context of Scripture repentance means to turn from *your own way* of living and turn to *God’s way* of living. When we hear the Gospel message and repent, then the Holy Spirit reconciles us back to God. We literally receive a new heart from God. This new heart desires to love, serve and worship God naturally. This new heart allows us to see and enter into the kingdom of God. We can actually experience heaven on earth or should we say heaven in our heart? All of these amazing things happen to us *after* we repent.

## AS A LIFESTYLE

As important as it is to understand the requirement of repentance *before* salvation, it is as equally important to understand that repentance is a habit that we should exercise on a regular basis *after* salvation. Listen to what Paul said in Philippians 2:12-13, *“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence,*

# Repentance

*work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”* We learn from this passage that we are to *work out* our salvation. This means there is a process for us to walk through in order for us to *experience* our salvation. When we become a new creature in Christ God begins to teach us how to live out of our heart. This is where the life of the Spirit resides.

Becoming a disciple of Christ does not mean that the *world* changed, it means that *we* have changed. Furthermore, even though we changed when we repented and accepted Christ, we still have the *capacity* to become carnally minded and sin. Because of this reality repentance becomes a necessary habit we need to practice. When we sin or when we are sinned against the experience has an affect on our heart. Our heart can be hurt, hardened, embittered, angry or fearful. When these things happen to our heart, then we can't *experience* our salvation. When we do stumble and find ourselves in darkness, then repentance is the answer. Listen to Romans 2:4, *“Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?”* We could not repent if the goodness of God did not lead us to it. Even in the mist of a mess God will speak to our heart about restoring our life. As we heed His promise of restoration, then we will ultimately repent and allow God to bless us.

## PROOF IS IN THE FRUIT

As was previously mentioned in the habit of forgiveness, Galatians 5:22-23 says, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.* When we come to the place in our heart where the evidence of the Spirit is not present, then we can know there is an issue. It is the will of God for us to enjoy the fullness of His Spirit in our lives. However, if we refuse to deal with or just ignore the dangerous attitudes and behaviors we sometimes have, consequently we will not enjoy the fruit of His Spirit.

We as human beings find it difficult many times to *admit* that we are not happy or that we can't sense the Presence of God in our life. We actually default back into pride when we fail to admit our struggles. When we live in this place where we begin to pretend everything is good and actually lose a sense of who we really are. Unfortunately, God can't do anything for us because we are not being honest with ourselves. If we do find ourselves in this place, then the first step toward freedom is to acknowledge from our heart our *need* for the grace of God.



# Repentance

After acknowledging our need, then we *sincerely* ask God to help us come into the light with Him. It is at this place where God begins to lead us out of our struggles and into His peace. The reason why it is difficult is because it is in our human nature to save ourselves rather than allow God to save us. We have to remember that God is better at being God than we are. When we practice repentance, then God is able to help us and cause us to bear an abundance of the fruit of His Spirit in our lives. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to our attitudes and behaviors so we can know for certain if we are in need of the *gift of repentance*.

## IS IT INSTANT OR A PROCESS

Experiencing repentance is a process as well as instant. When repentance has been fully exercised, then there is an instant freedom as a result. Whether it is the first time we come to the Lord in repentance or at any other time, *the goodness of God* has already been working on us for a period of time. It works this way because God is dealing with our free will. He has to work in a fashion that causes us to be won to Him. God will always *honor our free will* before He does anything else in our lives.

Because we still have the potential, even as disciples of Jesus Christ, to have sinful attitudes and behaviors, we can find ourselves in a place that the bible refers to as a stronghold (see II Corinthians 10:3-6). A stronghold identifies a place in our heart where we have made an *agreement* with an evil thought or idea. In other words, we saw something of an evil nature and yielded our heart to it. As long as this agreement with evil exists in our heart, we will be stunted in our growth, limited in our intimacy and experience many struggles in our life. This is a very frustrating and depressing place to exist.

Praise God for the gift of repentance. There is no stronghold too powerful for God to pull down as we exercise repentance. Strongholds can have varying degrees of influence in our heart. Therefore, the amount of time will also vary concerning how long it will take to fully exercise repentance and pull down a stronghold. It is more than worth the fight to pull down a stronghold, so that we can experience the intense joy and freedom that we were made for.

## THE HEART OF GOD

*“For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for **welfare** and not for calamity to give you a **future** and a **hope**” (Jeremiah 29:11).* This is the very heart of God for His people. As He thinks about our lives, He dreams of blessing us, prospering us and giving us a future. It grieves the heart of God to see His children miss out on what He has for them. Many times we struggle with a false image of who God really is. God is so misrepresented in our culture that we sometimes find ourselves believing a lie about God and His nature. The problem with this is that we will never *see* what God has for us if we *question* His perfect heart toward us. The evidence found in the bible, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and the countless changed lives are more than enough facts to prove that God has a perfect heart. Because of this we can be certain that God has an awesome destiny for us to discover.

## OUR INHERITANCE

There is a passage in the 26<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts that illustrates an experience that the apostle Paul had with Jesus Christ. Paul was a persecutor of all people that testified about Jesus as the Son of God. While Paul (Saul at the time) was on the road to Damascus commissioned by the chief priests to arrest Christians, he encountered Jesus in a supernatural way. Listen to what Jesus appointed Paul to do in verse 18, ... *“to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to the light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an **inheritance** among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.”* Jesus chose Paul to write half of the New Testament and to teach the message of the kingdom of God to all nations and to all generations. Paul’s teachings are some of the most respected in all of the bible.

The two main points that Jesus instructed Paul to teach about were the *forgiveness of sins* and an *inheritance in the kingdom of God*. As we have previously talked about, when we hear the message of Christ and repent, then we receive the forgiveness of sins. From that point forward every time we sin and repent we receive forgiveness. That becomes our lifestyle. This does not give us a license to sin only a remedy for sin if we fall into it. However, the second point is just as important as the first, which is inheriting the kingdom of God. Ultimately, this is where God desires for our focus to be in our journey with Him.

Listen to the definition for **Inherit** - *to come into possession of or receive especially as a right or divine portion.* There is a treasure God desires for us to come into possession of while we still live here on earth. That is why Jesus proclaims to us *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 4:17). He desires to see us experience heaven on earth.

After we receive the forgiveness of sins through repentance, we are now qualified to come into possession of the kingdom of heaven. This experience takes place in our heart as we *align* our attitudes, habits and lifestyle with the will of God. This is where we are to commit to the process of being transformed by renewing our mind. Listen to what Romans 12:1-2 has to say about our minds, *“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”* We have to invest time and energy into hearing, reading and studying the bible. The bible reveals to us the will of God. As we receive revelation of the will of God, then the Holy Spirit will energize us to do the will of God. It is through this process of *doing the will of God* that we come into possession of the kingdom of God. It is only in possessing the kingdom that we will experience true fulfillment and lasting joy. The reason being is because the kingdom of God is what we were created for. Anything less than experiencing the kingdom will frustrate our potential for fulfillment and joy in life.

## HIDDEN IN THE JOURNEY

God has hidden our destiny in our *journey of faith* with Him. A framework was established for the purpose of man and God to develop a vital relationship. Ephesians 2:10 gives us some insight into this truth, *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”* The word workmanship in this verse means poetry. Therefore, when we are living in obedience to what God shows us in our heart through meditation and prayer, then our lives become like a poem or a song. We are destined to create harmony with our life in Christ. Every step of faith is like hitting a musical chord for a song. As we learn to live our life by faith in Christ, then we will sense our life coming into harmony with Gods song for our life. The key to experiencing this harmony is to *seek* the purpose of God for our life. God has things already prepared for us that He desires for

us to discover. He gets so excited when we engage Him in pursuit of our destiny.

The last part of the verse teaches *that we should walk in them*. The reason why this verse says “should” is because there will be many things that will try to distract, discourage and disqualify us from fulfilling our destiny. The apostle Paul encourages us on this matter in Colossians 3:2-3, “*Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*” Fulfilling our destiny requires a mindset that is focused on the intangible things in life. As we practice this, then we will more clearly see the reality of our destiny in God.

## **A**GREEMENT WITH THE **K**ING

Jesus Christ teaches us a powerful lesson about our destiny. In the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew, Jesus is using stories to teach about the kingdom of heaven. Listen to what he says in verse 21, “*His master said to him, 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.*” As disciples of Christ we all desire to hear our Lord say this to us when we stand before Him. Likewise, Jesus desires to say this to all those who follow Him.

The key ingredient for this moment to take place is the practice of faithfulness. Gods blessing is limited or released in accordance to our faithfulness to Him and His purpose for our life. Actually, faithfulness is uniquely one of the most essential characteristics of a true disciple of Christ. We can measure where we are truly at in our journey to fulfilling our destiny, by honestly looking at our faithfulness to God, our spouse, our children and fellow disciples. The blessings of God will increase in our life from the place of our faithfulness. Our faithfulness will bring us into agreement with the King of glory, Jesus Christ Himself. Furthermore, our faithfulness will cause us to experience a joy that is *...inexpressible and full of glory* (I Peter 1:8).

# NEW LIFE

The desired outcome of becoming a **new creation** in Christ is to come *fully alive* to our **new life** in Christ. The previous twelve habits we have discussed, when sincerely practiced, will cause us to experience a completely new life. It is God's job to *supply* us with the Spirit; it is our job to *walk* in the Spirit. Walking in the Spirit simply means to *yield* our heart to the grace of God, then to live under the leadership of God. It is through the *activity of faith* that God supplies us with the Spirit and we walk in the Spirit. These twelve habits represent the activity of faith we are talking about.

God has called every one of His children to greatness. Listen to Colossians 1:27, "*...which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*" The greatness we are talking about here is not greatness according to the world standard, but greatness according to the God standard. There is expectancy in heaven for every disciple to fully manifest Christ in their lives. It is a priceless treasure we have of Christ in us. We all possess the potential to become consumed with the life of Christ, but we have to practice these vital habits so we can overcome our flesh, the world system and the schemes of the devil.

It takes tremendous *courage* to truly experience our new life in Christ. However, "*...If God is for us, who is against us?*" (Romans 8:31). God knows better about the life we are capable of living than we do. Reason being is because it is the life of God that we are called to live. In other words God knows Himself better than we know Him. Therefore, God has given us instruction in His word that can equip us to serve Him successfully. An appropriate verse of Scripture to conclude this class is found in Hebrews 11:6, "*And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a **rewarder** of those who seek Him.*" May we all embrace these twelve habits of a disciple as a means to seeking God, then we will discover rewards that come straight from the One who created us all.