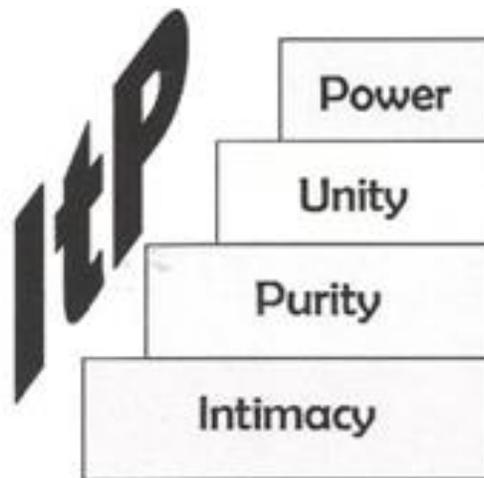


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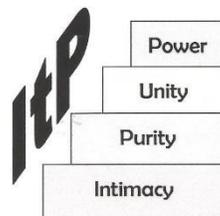
A Bible Study for Individuals and Small Groups



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UNITY: A Bible Study for Individuals and Small Groups
By Mary Glenn Hadley & Charlotte Stangeland
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WEEK 1: Unity

Day 1

Key Verse: Ephesians 4:13 (Good News Bible)

“And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ’s full stature.”

Life Experience:

My (Mary’s) father became the pastor of a small congregation in Iowa, which, prior to his going there, had gathered for their monthly business meeting. They knew that their church building needed some repairs. They also knew that they needed to add Sunday school classrooms and put in kitchen and restroom facilities. As they discussed the matter, they knew that they did not have the needed resources to make the larger improvements. They decided just to make the necessary repairs on the building they were using. Not long after that, a tornado visited their community and struck only their church, nearly demolishing it. Those believers gathered together and immediately recognized that God was not happy with the decision they had made about their building. Right there and then, they humbled themselves before God and agreed, by faith, to repair the damaged areas of the church they could salvage and add a basement which would include restrooms, classrooms and a kitchen. They did most of the work themselves, contracting only for things for which they lacked skills. One day, a group of the men had gathered and were trying to resolve an issue about the furnace. The discussion became divisive and one man stomped out of the church, got in his truck and drove away. Before long, my dad, who was, by then, the pastor had witnessed the heated conversation. He quietly told the others that he would be back. Although he didn’t say where he was going, the men knew he was going to talk with the angry gentleman who had just left. After some time, the pastor returned followed by the man who had left angrily but now was ready to work with the others.

[Note: Each day there will be questions for personal reflection and prayer. At the end of the week, choose a few of these questions to discuss briefly with your small group.]

Think of an experience you have had when there was disunity within the body of believers? How was it resolved?

What factors are you aware of that bring about unity in your church?

Week 1 - Day 2

Intimacy, Purity, UNITY, and Power

I Timothy 5:1-7

As we pursue intimacy with God and knowing God better, He purifies our lives and clarifies our identity as sons and daughters of the King of Kings. We then find ourselves drawn to other people who share this love for God and who desire to see His kingdom come and His will done on earth as it is in heaven. ***We can do so much more together than we can alone and God’s purposes can only be effectively completed if we work together as a functioning Body.*** In this way God leads us from Intimacy with Him to Purity, and Unity. Only in a purified and unified Body of Christ can God release His Power through the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, we sometimes hear of people in the community talking about a church known for fighting among the members, or where believers feel they are not being nurtured spiritually because messages seem to be based more on opinions than on the Word of God. Jesus tells us that Christians will be known for their love. There are some very basic essentials required in our churches if we are to be united and empowered as the Body of Christ to impact our society. It is good to look at the New

Testament church to gain perspective for being effective as a church. The Bible describes the church as a family of God. We are to treat each other as mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, showing kindness and love for one another.

In what ways is your church like a family?

Week 1 - Day 3

The message of salvation.

Acts 2:22-24, 32-33, 36-39

After Jesus' death and resurrection, He appeared to His disciples on various occasions. One thing He told them was that they were to wait in Jerusalem for the gift God had promised them which was the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). We are told that after Jesus ascended into heaven, they gathered in the upper room and prayed. It was the time of Pentecost. People were gathered in Jerusalem from all over to celebrate this festival. The Holy Spirit fell on the disciples and they spoke in different languages that people could understand. It brought attention and confusion. Peter boldly addressed the crowd trying to explain what was happening. Peter told them directly that they crucified Jesus. Their hearts were grieved, and they asked what they must do. "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...' v. 38. Those who accepted this message became a part of the believers. To be a church united in Christ, there must be intentional plans for sharing the salvation message and giving opportunity for people to make their commitment to Christ and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

How are you intentional about sharing the message of salvation and giving people the opportunity to make a decision for Christ?

How is your church intentionally inviting people to receive salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit?

Week 1 - Day 4

Discipleship based on the Word of God and the Holy Spirit

Matthew 28:16-20

A young boy attended Sunday school for the first time. After the class was finished he went up to the teacher and asked about that black book that she had used during the class. It became apparent that he had never heard of the Bible and didn't know what it was. There are many people in our society today who have not grown up in the church and do not know the Word of God. Therefore, they do not have a biblical framework for distinguishing right from wrong. Dallas Willard in his book *The Allure of Gentleness*, (HarperOne, 2015, page 157) says that people who have no relationship with God have to rely on their own strength and cleverness. He reminds us that the reason people behave as they do, or make the choices they make is because they are "uprooted from God". Too often today we let the media determine what is right and wrong without giving any consideration to the principles set forth by God which we learn from His Word. The church has an important role of impacting the world with Christ's values—not the world shaping the church.

When the church is serious about letting God's Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit lead us in decision making, in determining His principles for addressing social issues, and understanding His priorities for living together, then we can find unity in the body. When there are differences of opinions, it is healthy to sit together and discuss the issue from the various viewpoints. In so doing we must be willing to submit to God's Word, and to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Often times, praying together leads us to an understanding of God's will. These discussions must be held in love. Teaching the Scriptures in

a manner that is relevant to our lives draws us into a more intimate relationship with God and helps us appreciate each other.

How does your church emphasize the importance of the Bible, listening to the Holy Spirit, and discipleship for daily living and the functioning of the church?

Is there an issue within your church on which people have very different opinions which may lead to a divisive spirit? How can you encourage healthy discussions where people can gather to seek the will of God together and choose to submit to His teachings?

Week 1 - Day 5

Koinonia as we fellowship together

Read John 13:31-35.

Henry Blackaby in his book *Your Church Experiencing God Together* (LifeWay Press, 2003, page 32), tells the story of a woman who shared her concern about her wayward son during worship. The church family gathered around her, prayed with her and shared Scripture together. They began to see ways the church family could become involved helpfully in caring about the son. Teenagers befriended him. Men within the church recognized his need for a father figure and saw ways to provide that for him. They agreed to pray for the son. In time, the son was brought into the church fellowship and there was much joy. This is koinonia at work—the body loving God and one another in real and practical ways. According to Vine’s Expository Dictionary (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985) Koinonia means “communion, fellowship, sharing in common.”

There is a lot of brokenness within the church body. We may know one another’s names, but do we care, or even know, about the frustrations or pain another may be experiencing? Some people may visit a church because they are seeking a place where they can find God who can help them know how to face situations. Koinonia doesn’t just happen overnight. We need to provide opportunities where people get to know one another and build trust with one another. Sometimes this happens by doing projects together. Sometimes it happens in small group study opportunities. It really is the responsibility of each one of us to let others know we care about them. It is a way to be Christ’s hands and feet for each other. We have to be willing to share when we need help or guidance. Often then others will decide it is okay to share their burdens as well. Gathering together to pray for one another meaningfully can be very powerful in building trust and a strong fellowship of believers.

What evidence of koinonia do you see in your church? How do you show God’s love in practical ways? What most helps you feel “connected” and a part of a body of believers?

Week 1 - Day 6

Anchored in Jesus Christ

Ephesians 1:3-14. *As you read this scripture note the phrase “in Him” or “in Christ”. Consider how your true identity hinges on who you are “in Him”.*

It is easy to be shaken by what is happening in our culture, our families, or our personal lives. However, if we love Jesus well and know, deep down in our heart, that He loves us; we will have an anchor to hang onto that will hold us steady in all the storms of life. We must daily lift our eyes from ourselves and our life situations and praise God for the life of Christ within. We remind ourselves that we are beloved sons and daughters of the King of Kings. That Jesus died for us, and we have eternal value and worth. The Living Christ is with us, helping us daily with our trials and confusion. The wisdom of God is available if we will but ask, and the strength of God is holding us up even when we feel weak. Jesus is

the anchor and hope on which we build our lives. We renew our hope each day by spending time in praise and worship. Daily worship, Bible reading, and prayer keeps us anchored to Jesus, and prepares us for corporate worship, praise, and prayer.

Christians share a unique unity based on the shared experience of salvation through Jesus Christ, sharing the good news of salvation with others, discipleship through the Word, openness to the Holy Spirit, praying together, intentionally loving one another in real and practical ways, and focusing our lives around Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Ask God how you can help build unity in the body of Christ.

Week 1 - Day 7

Briefly discuss the questions from this week. Then pray together for unity in the church and larger body of Christ. If possible, allow at least 30-45 minutes for prayer. If the Spirit of Prayer is evident, you may want to pray longer. Below are suggestions for your Group Prayer time.

Group Prayer

- Divide into pairs (maybe choose someone you don't know very well to partner with). Share briefly about what is happening in your life. Share prayer concerns with each other. Take time to pray for each other.
- Then pray as a group and pray for your church in the areas particularly of discipleship and sharing the salvation message meaningfully.
- Pray for other churches in IaYM and ask for unity that exalts Jesus Christ. If you know of other churches that are struggling, pray especially for those churches.
- Continue praying as God leads.

WEEK 2 – We believe that prayer changes things

Declaration: My prayers make a difference.

Day 1

Key Verse: James 5:16B

“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”

Life Experience

My son was a teen-ager who had recently started driving alone. I (Charlotte) was still nervous about him driving when one night I dreamed that he was in an accident. In the dream his vehicle was completely totaled, and he was seriously shaken, but he survived the crash. After that I began to pray Psalm 91 for him every night. I particularly prayed that God would give His angels charge over Andy as it says in Psalm 91:11. A few months later Andy was driving on the highway. A car that was coming from the other direction got in a hurry and passed the car in front. He didn't realize, until it was too late, that he was pulling right into the path of my son's pick-up. They hit head on with the other car going well over 55 miles an hour. Andy's truck flipped over on its side into the ditch. The momentum kept it moving, and it hit the culvert and flew up into the air. A friend who saw the whole thing said it looked like he would land upside down. If he had done so, the cab would no doubt have smashed, causing serious injury or death. However, she watched it miraculously turned over 180 degrees so it was upright and it landed on its tires. He was, indeed, very shaken, but he was not killed, as he could have been. Thankfully the other driver, although injured, also survived the crash. I believe my prayers made a difference.

Think of a time when your own prayers or the prayers of your friends made a difference.

Week 2 – Day 2

Different Kinds of Prayer

Luke 11:1-13, Luke 18:1-7

In Luke 11 the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. He gave them the Lord's Prayer as an example, and then told a parable. Robert Henderson in “Why you don't get your prayer answered,” (Charisma, April 2017, p 32) points out that Luke 11 shows us two ways to approach God. First, we can approach Him as Father, and secondly as Friend. Our view of who God is affects how we feel about seeking Him. If we think of God the Father as generous, kind, and eager to bless His children, we will be more likely to turn to Him for help and provision. Jesus regularly addressed God as Father in His prayers (Matthew 11:25-26, John 17:1, Luke 23:34).

Are you able to also think of God as a friend? In John 15:15, Jesus says that those who obey His commandments are His friends, and that He will tell His friends what He is doing (John 15:14-15). Friends frequently ask each other for help, but they also just talk to each other sharing about their day and about their thoughts and feelings. Do you approach God as Friend?

Henderson points out that Luke 18 shows that we can also approach God as a Judge. Based on our covenant relationship with Him, we can cry out to Him for justice. We see how the children of Israel cried out to God as judge in their captivity as slaves in Egypt (Exodus 2: 23-25, 3:7-9). God intervened by sending Moses and a series of mighty miracles. In the same way, when we are suffering, God hears our cries for justice and comes to help us.

Do you see God as Father, Friend, and Judge? Which is easiest for you?

Week 2 – Day 3

Our Father

Psalm 106:1-3, 31-33

The Lord's Prayer models for us a pattern of how to pray. It starts with PRAISE as we honor God as Our Father ("Our Father who art in Heaven") and praise His holy name ("Hallowed be thy name.") It is appropriate to start our prayer by focusing on God—His names, His holiness, and His character. Daniel models this for us in his famous prayer of supplication:

"O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands," Daniel 9:4-5

Solomon, also, begins his prayer with words of praise:

"O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below — you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way." 1 Kings 8:23-24

We, too, begin our prayers with praise and adoration for who God is, by remembering His goodness, His mercy, His power and His love for us. We take time to remember His many names – Our Shepherd, Redeemer, God who Heals, The Way, The Truth, The Light and many more.

Do you regularly take time to praise God and remember His name as you start your prayers? Today spend some time thinking about God's names and praise Him for who He is.

Week 2 – Day 4

The Pattern of Prayer

Matthew 6:25-34

The Lord's Prayer starts by praising God's name. Then it says, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Before we make requests for our own needs, we think about the needs of the Kingdom of God, and how God's will can be done on earth. We talk with God about what our part is in bringing about the good of God's Kingdom. Matthew 6 urges us to not "worry about your life," but instead, "seek first the kingdom of God". Do you put the Kingdom of God above your own needs and wants? Do you seek the good of God's Kingdom above everything else?

Our own needs, however, are not forgotten. The next phrase is, "Give us this day our daily bread." This is our opportunity to seek God for our daily needs.

Supplication is followed by confession of sins. We ask for forgiveness, always remembering we must also forgive. Then we ask that God would keep us from falling into temptation again and protect us from the evil one. We close by once again praising God. "Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Try following this pattern today as you pray. Adoration, Praying for God's Kingdom, Supplication, Forgiveness, Prayer for Protection, and end again with Praise. How is this different than the way you usually pray?

Week 2– Day 5

Prayer of Agreement

Matthew 18:18-20

Praying together is one of the privileges of being a part of a body of believers. The early believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, breaking bread together *and to prayer* (Acts 2:42). Churches that follow New Testament teaching will value gathering together regularly for corporate

prayer. Jesus assures us that when we pray together, He is there in our midst. There is a deep level of fellowship that we experience when we pray together.

Praying together is a learning experience. We will need to adapt to other people's styles of prayer. Some people pray very formal prayers while others are very casual in the style. Some are loud, some are timid. We have to learn to consider the group as well as our own needs. Like any conversation, we have to yield to one another, so that no one person dominates the prayer time. We also must learn to allow times of waiting quietly together, so the Lord has time to speak. Some people may find it difficult to pray aloud. However, the group is richer if each person contributes something. One person may like to include scripture in their prayers, while another likes to sing a chorus during prayer times. These differences can enrich us as we learn from one another. We remember that we are talking to God, not performing for a group. Having others pray with us can be an encouragement when we are discouraged, it can help us find guidance when we are confused, and it can remind us of God's love when we feel overwhelmed by problems.

We are told in Matthew 18 that God hears and answers the prayer of agreement. Agreeing together increases our effectiveness in prayer. When we speak our prayers aloud others can agree with us, and add their own thoughts and prayers. We need to be careful that our prayers of agreement not only agree with each other, but also agree with God's will. One time a lady asked her pastor to agree with her in prayer for her son. She went on to describe how the son was involved in drugs, and he was probably going to end up in jail. The pastor said, "I can't agree with you in prayer. You've already decided the situation is hopeless, and your son is going to end up in jail. When you have faith to believe that God can intervene, then we can pray together."

How is praying together a learning experience for you? Are you praying in agreement with God and with each other? Does your church value praying together? If not, how can that change?

Week 2 – Day 6

Pray the answer, Pray the scripture and Declare your faith

Hebrews 10:19-25

The example from yesterday's reading highlights another key of effective prayer. Sometimes people focus their prayer around the problems, describing in detail all the things that are wrong in their family, their church and their community. This kind of prayer is not helpful, and we can go away from our prayer time more discouraged than encouraged. Instead we need to seek God's will for the situation and **pray His answers**. For example, the woman whose son was on drugs knows that drug addiction is not God's will for her son's life. To pray the answer, she might pray this way, "Lord, I know you have good plans for my son's life. I pray that he would fulfill those plans. I thank you that you are going to set him free from drugs, so he can become the man you created him to be." Often as we pray the answer, hope begins to rise up and our faith grows.

If you are praying about a situation where you don't know God's will, then it is helpful to **spend time asking God what he wants** for that situation, or to **pray scripture verses** that relate to the situation. For example, this mother could pray Psalm 23:3-5 for her son. "Lord, please restore my son's soul. Guide him in paths of righteousness for your own names' sake. Thank you that even if he walks through the valley of the shadow of death, you are with him. You are preparing a table of blessing for him." We can pray the **prayers the apostles prayed** for our loved ones (for example, Ephesians 1:17-19, Colossians 1:9-14, or Romans 15:5-6). Praying the scripture also helps bring that scripture to life for us.

Once we know God's will we can speak it as a **confession of faith**. Hebrews 10:23NIV says, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." The word profess or confess refers to speaking, as well as living out, the faith we have. Our prayers can be statements of the hope we believe. For example, the mother in our story could make professions of faith like these: "I believe God is at work in my son's life." "God hears my prayers and will answer me." We can just think these words, but it builds our faith when we speak them aloud (Romans 10:8, 17). Starting with this lesson we have include a faith profession, or faith "declaration," at the beginning of each lesson. You may want to speak this declaration as a prayer or statement of faith as you begin your time of prayer each day during the week.

Try praying the answers, praying scripture verses, and making faith declarations rather than praying your problems. Share about how that works for you.

Week 2 – Day 7

Briefly discuss the questions from this week, then pray together.

Group Prayer:

- Enter a time of worship and praise. Praise God as Father, Friend and Judge.
- Move into prayers for the Kingdom of God. Pray for the church, the Yearly Meeting and God's work in other spheres of influence such as government and schools.
- Continue praying as God leads.
- Have the leader close with prayer.
- Move into small groups and pray for one another.

WEEK 3: We reflect the Image of Christ

Declaration: I am being transformed, from glory to glory, into the image of God.

Day 1

Key Verse: II Corinthians 3:18

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Life Experience:

In an unusual way, I (Mary) was asked to go to the home of a church leader in Kenya. I was asked to come late in the day and upon arrival I found several “leaders of the church” already present. I had no idea why I was asked nor was I prepared for the events that took place that evening. I was aware that mysterious things were happening at the national church headquarters such as attempts to do away with the executive officer. Other strange things were happening, but were carefully being hidden from us missionaries. As I listened to the conversation, I was given just a little glimpse into the divisions that were about to break open within the national church. I believed these who had gathered were appalled at the extent to which people were seeking power for themselves and attempting to lead the church away from God’s direction and purpose. I believed they were seeking guidance for mending bridges and helping the church find its way back to God’s purposes. I had recently led a Theological Education by Extension (TEE) lesson on the book of Titus. The teachings of that book seemed to be what God gave me to share with these people—a reminder that the church and its leaders are to be the image of Christ. I will never forget the way the people listened to the Word of God that evening. I will never forget the sense of God’s presence in the midst of tremendous solemnity. The seriousness of the occasion hit me full force when the men informed me that they would follow me the ten or so miles to my home. They wanted to make sure I arrived unharmed. They would follow me at a distance so no one would know that we were journeying together.

Can you think of a time God used His Word through you to help someone else?

Are you spending enough time in the Word so that you know it well? If not, what can you do differently?

Week 3 - Day 2

Develop Strong Leaders

Read Titus 1:5-9.

We have learned that as we love God more and more we long to become like Him. We begin to purify our lives and clarify our identity as children of God. We become more and more like Jesus. Read yesterday’s key verse, II Corinthians 3:18, again. Not only do we need to reflect the character of Christ as individuals but the corporate body of Christ must reflect His image. The world looks at the church to see what Jesus is like. The book of Titus gives the Body of Believers advice for developing the character of Christ in our churches.

Titus is the young Gentile believer Paul had left on the island of Crete after starting a church there. This was a difficult assignment for a young believer because the believers in Crete lacked leadership, therefore they lacked sound doctrine. False teachers were taking advantage of the situation. Harmony and morals of the young congregation were being disrupted. This letter from Paul to Titus provides sound guidelines for building a strong church. Three main teachings stand out in this epistle. The first is that we need to develop strong leaders who demonstrate God’s love.

I (Mary) was asked to lead a prayer seminar in a church in Iowa. I had known the pastor and his wife in that church for some time. When I was invited to their home for supper, I felt a distinct coldness between the two of them. I could not identify the cause for the tension. Conversation didn't flow as there seemed to be an undercurrent of distraction. Although they were present at the seminar there didn't seem to be a warmth or support for the event. Instead there seemed to be a cloud surrounding us. I later learned that the pastor was involved in pornography and eventually, he and his wife separated. Many people will form their opinions about God or the church by the leaders who live out their daily walk in the community or the workplace

In recent months I have been in conversations with people concerned that new church plants that have been in existence for maybe five or more years are floundering as changes in pastoral leadership are taking place. The comment regarding the struggle is that leadership has not been well developed.

What qualifications does Paul tell Titus are necessary to become leaders within the church? Do you have the qualifications for leadership?

Are there ways we could be more intentional about discipling believers and preparing leadership for the church?

Week 3 - Day 3

True Teaching

Titus 1:10-16

The second teaching from Titus is that we need to teach sound doctrine. A friend of mine (Mary) who had grown up in the church, but slipped away during the early years of her marriage, shared her story with me. After the tragic loss of their two-year old son, she and her husband sat down together thinking that there had to be more to life than they were experiencing. They decided to each make a list of what really was important to them, ranking them in the order of importance. When they compared notes, they realized that both of them had put God as number one. They determined that they needed to get into church and become more intimate with God. They chose a church and became involved, attending a Sunday school class faithfully. She related that through the teachings of the Sunday school class, she had been unknowingly drawn into Satanism and had become a queen. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit reached down and drew her from the snares of Satan through a PTL TV program. She rarely watched the show but that day, the Spirit compelled her to call the number on the screen and she realized without a doubt that the teaching she had been given was false. That day over the phone she received the baptism of the Holy Spirit which transformed her life dramatically.

Titus was faced with false teaching in the church at Crete. Paul points out in Titus 1:10 that false teachers are "rebellious", other translations say "insubordinate". Gary Demarest in *The Communicator's Commentary (Word Books, 1984, p. 308)* says that "A mark of false teachers in every age is their unwillingness to be under discipline. They are fiercely unaccountable." Paul tells Titus the way to overcome false teaching in Titus 2:1: "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine." Sound doctrine needs to be based on the Word of God and leadership in the church needs to hold teachers accountable to the Word.

Have you or someone you know been influenced by false teaching? Tell about it.

Do you recognize false teaching easily? Give examples.

How are you becoming grounded in the Word and sensitive to the Holy Spirit?

Week 3 - Day 4

Pure Lives

Titus 3:4-9

Paul tells us in the letter to Titus that leaders whose lives demonstrate God's love build a strong church. He also says that the teaching of the church must be of sound doctrine. The third thing he says is that all the people whose lives are touched and transformed by God should live pure lives. In Titus 3, he says that we should be good citizens and do good works. In Titus 3:3-7, he lays down the doctrinal basis for good works based on what God has done in our lives. Our faith in God then, should issue forth good works on a regular basis.

The janitor at my (Charlotte's) school was one of the godliest men I know. He modeled Christ every day. He worked hard and kept the building spotless. If teachers needed a repair, he was quick to do it. He was kind and helpful to the children, often sitting with them for lunch, or inviting them to help him with his work. He was a leader in the church and in the community. The only Bible many people will read is what they see in our lives. We are the image of Christ within the church as well as in the community and workplace.

Consider people you know who demonstrate a pure life in the community. How do they do it?

How does living a pure life make a difference in the way you go about life in your families, in the church and community and in the workplace where you have some influence?

Week 3 - Day 5

Women in Leadership

Galatians 3:26-5:7

In discussing the development of leadership, I have assumed that leadership can be men or women. There are many examples in Scripture of women serving as prophets (Luke 2:36-38, Acts 2:17, Acts 21:9), teachers (Acts 18:24-26), evangelists such as Anna, the prophetess (Luke 2:36-38), the Samaritan woman (John 4:28-29) and Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:10). Paul even refers to one woman, Junia (Romans 16:7), as an apostle. Wives worked alongside their husbands in ministry while some hosted churches in their homes (Acts 16:40, Romans 16:3, Colossians 4:15). However, some churches struggle to let women assume leadership roles in the church. Let's address that issue.

Many times when the question is raised about allowing women in leadership, people refer to the passage in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 NIV: "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home..." We must be careful not to take passages like this out of context. Paul was not saying that women should never speak in church because he refers, in chapter 11, verse 5 of the same book to "every woman who prays or prophesies." He is saying that women were allowed to both pray and prophesy publically in worship. The problem Paul is addressing in this instance is that apparently women were causing a disturbance during worship. It sounds like they were asking questions of their husbands during the church service. Since they were probably seated on different sides of the room, it was causing a disruption.

Another passage which is sometimes quoted in regard to women assuming leadership roles in the church is 1 Timothy 2:9-15. It should be noted that the words that are translated **women** and **men** could just as accurately be translated **wives** and **husbands**. The twelfth verse then would read "I do not permit a wife to teach or to have authority over a husband; she must be silent." This may be addressing order in the home rather than order in the church. The emphasis in this passage should be on the word

learn. Paul says, “A woman should *learn* in quietness and full submission,” 1 Timothy 2:11. The women in Timothy’s church were creating a problem because they had not been taught the scripture, as the men were, and yet they were trying to instruct others. Paul’s response to the problem is, “Teach them so they can learn.” To teach women was a radical idea in Paul’s day, but he recognized that the women need to have the opportunity to *learn* because they were experiencing unusual liberty in the church and were taking leadership positions.

When Paul writes about spiritual gifts in I Corinthians 12:7, he clearly says “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” He does not say “to each man”. Both men and women who believe in Jesus receive a manifestation of the Spirit or a spiritual gift. Acts 2:17-18 also indicates that women are to manifest spiritual gifts. “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy... your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”

Are women encouraged to take leadership roles in your church? Why or why not?

Week 3 - Day 6

Everyone has a role

Titus 2:2-14

All people play a role in being examples of followers of Jesus—the young and the elderly, men and women, rich and poor. In Titus 2, Paul instructs Titus to teach the elderly men and women to be examples of the faith and encourage the young men and women to be faithful in their walk with God. Sometimes we fail to learn from the elderly thinking that they are less relevant to our situations. However, when we draw them out, they can relate how God has led them, allowing us to learn from them. Sometimes those who are older and more experienced refuse to listen to younger people and be open to new ideas. Sometimes we honor those who have more education or more wealth, and ignore those the world deems less important. Jesus valued and welcomed all kinds of people – children, the Samaritan woman, the tax collectors, the fishermen. He invited them all to the table of blessing and welcomed them into God’s family. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Let’s honor one another as family.

*How do older people and younger people show honor, respect and care for each other in your church?
Are there ways we can improve?*

Week 3 - Day 7

Briefly discuss the questions from this week, then pray together.

Group Prayer

- Praise God for His good leadership and for the gifted people He has placed in your church. .
- Ask God to help you and the people within your church to be true images of Christ.
- Continue praying as God leads.
- After the leader closes with prayer, ask if anyone needs prayer ministry. In groups of 3-4 pray for those who need prayer.

WEEK 4: We Walk in Love

Declaration: I look for opportunities to walk in love.

Day 1

Key Verse: 2 John 6

“As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.”

Life Experience

One time at Heartland Church in Des Moines, I heard Pastor Dave Olsen talk about sacrifice. He said that people who knew he loved motorcycles sometimes asked him, “Why don’t you have a Harley?” His answer was, “I have children. I would love to have a Harley, but because I have a family I have more important things to spend money on than a motorcycle.” Then he gave the example of the early pioneers who would give up the comforts of home and leave their family and friends and go west. Why would they do it? They were pursuing something better and more exciting—something they were passionate about. We do things for the sake of love that we wouldn’t do for any other reason.

We are called to pursue God with whole-hearted love that is willing to sacrifice. We do not make sacrifices just for the sake of sacrifice, but for the sake of love. As we pursue God with passionate love we get to know Him well. We learn to know His heart, and we begin to understand that He not only loves us, but He loves every single person on earth. He urgently wants to touch them with His love and forgiving grace. *Because we love God* we begin to love others the way He loves them, and we long to touch others with God’s love.

*What are you passionate about? What would you give up to pursue that?
What sacrifices do you make because you love God?*

Week 4 – Day 2

Unconditional Love

Mark 12:28-31

Love for God comes before love for others. We will never be able to love others with God’s love unless we have experienced His love and acceptance of us as sons and daughters. The love of God is so profound that we cannot fully comprehend it. Our experience of human love is often imperfect and falls so far short of God’s love that we have difficulty describing what the love of God is like. Jesus demonstrated what God’s love was like when He healed the sick, forgave sinners, and fed the hungry. He used pictures, parables and allegories to help us understand what His love is like. The greatest demonstration of God’s love was Jesus’ sacrifice of His own life on the cross for us. He continues to show His love for us today by His daily provision and care. Still, we sometimes struggle to believe in God’s great love for us.

We have been pursuing intimacy and purity in our relationship with God. Now God is saying, “*Step up into unity.*” In order to step into unity we have to come up to another level—we have to learn to walk in love *with other people.*

Most love, even between husband and wife and parent and child is conditional love. There is an unspoken, and sometimes unconscious, expectation of something we hope to get in return. We may do many kind things for our loved one, sacrificing our time, energy and resources, but at some point in time we hope for and fully expect something in return. Loving with God’s love means we want to show others His love without expecting anything in return. Bob Mumford calls this “love without a hook”. When we love in this way we might receive something in return, but that is not our expectation or demand. Our

motivation is pure love—to share the love of God with others without receiving anything in return. This kind of love keeps on giving, even when the other person disappoints us.

How has God's love changed you? What events or people helped you understand God's love for you? What expectations might a husband or wife have for their spouse? A parent for a child or child for a parent?

Week 4 – Day 3

Love with God's Love

1 John 4:15-21

Jonathan Leeman in *The Church and the surprising offense of God's Love*, (Crossway, 2010) says, "We should love God for God's sake, and we should love our neighbors for God's sake. I should not love you for your own sake; I should love you because you are created in God's image, because you belong to him, because he has commanded me to, and so forth. Love centered on anything other than God is the opposite of love."

My (Charlotte) first experience of learning to love "for God's sake" came one summer when I was angry with my husband. We had a hot, difficult, conflicted day and after he was in bed, I went outdoors to try to cool off. God spoke to me and said, "Pray for your husband."

I thought to myself, "I don't want to. I don't even like him right now."

God said, "I love him. Just let me love him through you."

Reluctantly I said, "Ok. Love him with Your love through me." I pictured God's love flowing through me out to my husband. Suddenly I *felt* God's love for my husband and my perspective shifted. I could see him as God saw him—someone lovable and special who had a hard day just like I had. Since then, many times, when I am not feeling particularly loving toward someone I ask God to, "*Give me Your love for that person. Help me see them as you see them.*" It never fails to shift my perspective and change my feelings about the person.

When have you felt less than loving toward someone, and God's perspective or God's love helped you overcome those feelings?

What are situations where you need God's love to help you act in loving ways?

Week 4 – Day 4

Check your motives

James 4:1-3.

Much of what our culture calls love is really greed or lust. It is motivated by our self-centered desires. We need to always examine our motives and see if they truly reflect the love of God. When I (Charlotte) was a college professor we had a foreign student who lived with us for three years. She was a wonderful girl who was independent, easy to get along with, quiet, and a great house guest. I found that I didn't mind sharing the house, but I did have problems sharing the kitchen. I especially didn't like going to fix a meal and finding the sink full of dirty dishes or the counter a mess. As we neared the end of her final semester with us, I found that more and more often she was neglecting to clean up after herself in the kitchen, and I was getting more and more irritated about it. I didn't like my own attitude any more than I liked the dirty dishes. I was thinking that I would sit down with her and have a talk about it. That's when the Lord stopped me and said, "*This is an opportunity for you to learn to walk in love.*" So, for the last few weeks of her stay with us, I would do her dishes for her, and as I washed them I would thank God for her. I would think about all her good qualities, and thank God for the opportunity to have her in our

home. When I changed my expectations, I found that I didn't even feel irritated about it anymore. If I had talked with her at that point, I would have been motivated by anger, not love. It would have been unfortunate to have an angry discussion just weeks before she was to move out. It was more important that I learn to practice love than that she take responsibility for her dirty dishes.

Another example of wrong motives is when we deny the truth to keep the peace. This is not true love. Sometimes we have to stand up for truth and righteousness and our friends or family may react with anger or hurt. We don't judge our actions by how others react, but by our motives. Our honesty and willingness to risk may plant a seed of truth in their heart that will eventually bear fruit. The key is really our motivation. Many times we react with selfishness or self-protective behaviors that are not motivated by love, but by our own desires or selfish needs. If you are not sure about your own behavior, check your motives. Our purest motives are always grounded in love.

Consider your own motives. Confess any ways your love has not been pure love.

Week 4 – Day 5

Tough Love

Galatians 6:4-10

Some situations call for tough love that sets boundaries and clarifies expectations to empower others to take responsibility for their own life. Jesus is our example as He was continually setting boundaries and clarifying expectations with his followers (Luke 4:42-44, John 14:6, John 11:24-27). If the student who lived with us had been planning to stay for several more months, I would have talked with her about my expectations. I would have asked her to clean up after herself, so we could continue to have a good relationship together. I remember another student who came to class regularly, but never turned in assignments on time. I realized he was going to fail my class, and was probably failing other classes as well. I had him come to my office, and had a conversation with him. I explained that he would not pass my class unless he stepped up his performance. Confronting him probably made him uncomfortable, but it was still an act of love. I was motivated by concern for him and wanted him to succeed.

Another one of my students let his girlfriend write his papers for him. The girl friend thought she was showing love by doing his work for him; however, she was enabling him to be irresponsible, hindering the learning process, and not encouraging him to do his best. This kind of behavior is called co-dependency. It is really a false love that motivates us to take care of others. We do it so we can feel good about ourselves, or to protect them from the consequences of not being responsible. It not only hurts us, it hurts them by creating dependency on us. When in doubt about what to do in a situation, it is usually more loving to encourage others to step up to their responsibilities than it is to be over-protective or to take their responsibilities onto our shoulders. However, we must make sure we are motivated by love—not by fear, anger or frustration.

Sometimes we may find ourselves on the other side of a co-dependent relationship. We may be the one who is expecting others to take care of us. If you feel dependent or controlled by someone else, you very well may be in a “false love” relationship. True love never calls us to bondage or leaves us a victim. Love calls us to freedom, responsibility, and hope. This is how Jesus calls us to be all that we were meant to be.

Think about how people can get caught up in “false love” situations.

When have you had to set boundaries, clarify expectations, or encourage someone to step up to their responsibilities? Did you do it in love?

Week 4 -- Day 6

The Battle for love

John 18:22-26

The battle going on right now in our culture is a battle for love. Conflict, polarization, and divisiveness are at work everywhere we look. In politics, in the media, in our churches, and in our homes, the powers of darkness are desperately trying to divide us from one another. It is very easy to be caught up in the conflicts of our age. In John 13:35 Jesus said the world will know we are His disciples by our love. If love is destroyed, the world will never see a demonstration of how much God loves them. The powers of darkness try to prevent us from being a demonstration of love. Causing separation and conflict is one of the ways they do this. We must guard our hearts so we are instruments of love, and not of conflict or divisiveness.

For revival to change a culture, God needs a church that can demonstrate His love to the world. We need to be a living, breathing example of how the Family of God walks in love. The fear of the Lord may be established through the shakings and judgments of God, but love is what is needed to transform lives. We must keep our hearts filled up with God's love, so we are able to reach out and touch those around us with the love of Jesus.

What is the reward for loving with God's Love? It is to walk with Jesus in the authority and power of God. It is victory over the enemy of your soul. It is the privilege of sharing Jesus with others and seeing people saved. It is to know and experience the love of God in the deepest way possible. It is eternal life. It may seem hard to love with God's love, but the rewards are worth it. Not only are you blessed, those around you are blessed, and your love for others gives God joy.

What evidence do you see in our culture of conflict and divisiveness?

Where is God stretching you to walk in love in your own life? What challenges are there, for you, to walking in love?

Week 4 – Day 7

Briefly discuss some of the questions from this lesson. Then pray together.

Group Prayer

- Praise God for His love. Thank Him for His mercy, kindness and compassion.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to walk in love in all situations.
- Continue praying as God leads.
- After the leader closes in prayer, ask if anyone needs prayer. If someone responds, have 3-4 others gather around those who need prayer to listen and to pray.

WEEK 5: We honor others

Declaration: We honor one another above ourselves.

Day 1

Key Verses

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves,”
Romans 12:10-11

Life Experience

A young man we'll call John could not figure out why he had so many problems. He had a difficult start in life. His father was abusive both verbally and physically, and as a child he didn't really know what normal family life was like. However, as a teen, his friend led him to the Lord and brought him to church. The church family, and especially his friends' parents, showed him what it meant to be loved and cared for and from them he learned the joy of being included in a family. He was now in his early thirties and he had been fired from three different jobs. He blamed each situation on the boss who, according to John, was always “difficult”. He was now struggling in his relationships with his wife and children. His wife was threatening to divorce him, if he didn't learn to control his anger. In desperation he went to his pastor for counseling. The pastor quickly took him back to the root of his problem—his anger and lack of honor toward his father.

Honor releases blessing. Picture a river that flows from a mountain top to a lake below. Along the way are several dams which can be opened and closed. The blessings of God are like that river. God sends his blessings through people. In the family, the blessings are to flow from father to mother and to the children. Children may rebel or may be tempted to stop honoring their parents because they are less than perfect. However, we choose to honor because *we are honorable*. When we dishonor someone, especially someone in authority over us, the gate that lets blessing into our heart is closed. We have not only shut out the other person, we have shut out the flow of blessings from God. If a mother dishonors the father, it causes a blockage that makes it difficult for children to be blessed. If the parents act dishonorably it makes it difficult for the children to learn to honor. If members of a congregation dishonor their pastor, it makes it hard for them to receive any blessing through the pastor. If we dishonor our boss, we have shut off this avenue of blessing at work. However, *honor is a choice*. John must choose to forgive his father and to honor him as the one who gave him life even though he hurt John deeply. If John doesn't forgive and learn to honor, the pattern of dishonor will continue to be repeated in his life—in his relationships with those who have authority over him and in his marriage relationship and his relationship with his children. Dishonor opens the door to the fruit of bitterness instead of the fruit of blessing.

Consider your own life. How did your relationship with your parents form a pattern that affects other relationships?

Week 5 – Day 2

Dishonor blocks blessing

Numbers 21:4-9.

Honor releases blessing, but dishonor blocks the blessings of God. The story in Numbers is a picture of what happens when we dishonor those in authority over us—our pastor, lay leaders, our boss at work, or our parents or spouse. Dishonor opens the door to the curse. It releases all kinds of little snakes (evil) that can destroy us. All kinds of problems enter our lives through the door of dishonor. Jesus brings up

this story in the New Testament. **Read John 3:10-15.** Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus, but he is addressing the problem that all the Pharisees had in believing that Jesus is the Messiah. He compares the Pharisees to the Israelites in the wilderness who dishonored Moses.

Dishonor hardened the hearts of the Jewish religious leaders, and they could not receive any of the blessings that Jesus came to give them—salvation, His teachings, healing, or deliverance. Similarly, when we harden our heart toward our pastor, father, employer, or someone in authority over us, we can't receive any of the blessings God wants to give us through them. When we show disrespect toward someone, it blocks the flow of the blessings of God. When we are disrespectful, God's blessings will no longer reach us because disrespect turns the blessings away. This is true in our families, in churches, in government, and in the workplace.

What evidence is there of honor or dishonor in your church fellowship?

What kinds of "snakes" does dishonor release today? What do we have to do to be cured?

Week 5 - Day 3

Does honor have to be earned?

1 Samuel 24:1-10

David honored King Saul even when Saul was sinning against him because of Saul's position as God's anointed. He trusted God to remove Saul when the time was right. Paul instructed Timothy to give prayers of thanks and blessing "for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness," 1 Timothy 2:1-2. This was during a period of time when Paul himself had been imprisoned unjustly, and Christians were being persecuted. The fact that someone in authority is not always acting honorably does not excuse us from showing them honor. We honor their position and treat them with respect **because we are people of honor**. Our act of honor opens the door for God to work. This does not mean that we ignore sin or do not deal with it, but we continue to treat the person with respect because of their position. This includes parents, husbands, pastors, and employers as well as government officials. If we dishonor those in authority we are dishonoring God because He is the one who allowed them to be in a position over us.

Francis Frangipane, in his book, *A House Divided: How Christ-Centered Unity Can End Church Division*, (Chosen Books: 2002,2005) points out that there is a great difference between the way Korah rebelled against Moses' authority (Numbers 16) and the gentle, humble way Jethro questioned Moses' methods of leadership (Exodus 18). Jethro was concerned for Moses well-being as much as he was for the people. His suggestion was humbly presented, and Moses chose to listen to it. We can question authority as Jethro did, but we should do it humbly, respectfully and, usually, in private.

How do you disagree with someone and still show respect and honor? Can you share an example?

Confess any ways you have not shown submission and honor to others in the church, family or workplace. Ask God if there is anyone you need to be reconciled with or how you can show honor to those who are in authority over you.

Week 5 - Day 4

Honor in the Family

Ephesians 5:20-6:3

The family is a picture, for the world, of what God is like. The father and mother are to be honored, showing how we reverence and honor God our Heavenly Father. Jesus is referred to as the bridegroom

(Ps. 19:5, Isaiah 62:5, Matt. 9:15, Matt. 25:1) and throughout the Bible the people of God are compared to a bride (Isaiah 61:10, 62:5, Rev. 19:7, 21:2, 22:17) and called to purity and holiness--loving God with single-hearted devotion. Because Jesus is the bridegroom and the church is His bride, wives are to honor husbands in the same way they honor Christ. Husbands are to show the tender, sacrificial love for their families that Christ shows his church. This model teaches our children how to honor God. It is also a demonstration to the world of the love of God, and what it means to be part of the family of God.

This imagery of family is important to help us understand how much God loves us and how He is eternally faithful to His church. This is why any kind of sexual immorality is so abhorrent to God. It distorts for our children and for the world, the picture of God and the Church. Anything that distorts that image (as all immorality does) grieves the Holy Spirit because it gives a false view of God. Fornication (sexual relationships without any commitment to marriage) is prohibited because it distorts the enduring commitment between Christ and His church. Adultery is compared to idolatry because it is unfaithfulness to the lifelong commitment. Homosexuality is particularly offensive to God because it pictures a relationship of man to man. This rejects the idea that humans need God (someone who is very different from self) in favor of a relationship with another who is exactly like self. From the beginning to the end of the Bible a committed relationship (marriage) between one man and one woman for life is held up as a beautiful reflection of God's relationship to His people and as His plan for His people. Honor within the family demonstrates for our children and the world how we love and honor God.

How has your own experience in family impacted your view of God and His relationship to His church?

Week 5 – Day 5

Honor Church Elders

1 Timothy 5:17-20

In the same way that honor in the family impacts our children's view of God, so honor in the church impacts the world's view of God's leadership. The passage in Timothy gives several ways we show honor to church elders and those in ministry. When we show honor for those in church leadership we are, in effect, showing honor for God and demonstrating for the world a right relationship to God. When the church does not provide generously for the pastor's needs, it presents to the world a picture of a stingy God. When church members are overheard gossiping and criticizing those in leadership, it may discourage unbelievers from becoming a part of a church and encourage rebellious attitudes toward God.

A good guideline in the church is that the only time we publically criticize a pastor or spiritual leader is when there is a clear sin issue. Blatant sin such as adultery needs to be dealt with openly to clarify what is acceptable in the church. When the problem is immaturity, an honest mistake, or a difference of opinion, we need to make sure we are honoring that person and protecting their position. We might respectfully disagree about some issue, but we would not gossip about them to others, or undermine their position of authority by being disrespectful. Most issues can be addressed in private conversation and with an attitude of respect. When there is a serious issue, the elders or spiritual leaders must prayerfully consider how God would have them deal with it. God has placed leaders over us just as He placed Saul over David, and even if it is not an ideal situation, God can use it to help us mature as Christians. When you find yourself in a difficult situation, it can be good to ask how God is wanting to use difficult situations to change and mature your Christian life.

How does honoring someone in authority require trust in God's provision for you?

How can being submissive to a leader who is difficult help develop character?

Week 5 - Day 6

Kings and those in authority

1 Timothy 2:1-5

I (Charlotte) remember when I was in elementary school that after a presidential election, my teacher told us, "It doesn't matter which person you were hoping would win. Now that the election is over we should all show honor for the person who was elected because he is our new president." Sometimes it is hard to honor those in authority if we disagree with them. In this age of political divisiveness it is easy to criticize and complain about those in government. During New Testament times the government authorities often persecuted Christians and did not help the cause of Christ. Paul himself had been unjustly imprisoned, and yet Paul urged that we honor government leaders with prayers of thanksgiving and intercession.

Do you pray regularly for those in leadership in government? How do you think politics would be different if all Christians honored those in office and prayed blessings for them?

Why do you think there is so little honor and submission in our culture? What can be done about it?

Week 5 – Day 7

Briefly discuss the questions from this week. Prayerfully consider if your church shows honor, especially for those in leadership.

Group Prayer

- Honor God for what He has done for you. You may want to sing a chorus such as *He is Lord or Glory and Honor and Praises* or offer prayers of praise.
- Ask if anyone has a personal need and pray for one another.
- Pray for those in leadership – in government, in the church, and in families.
- Ask God for righteous leaders who will give peace and blessing to those under their authority.

WEEK 6: We are Light in our Community

Declaration: My life makes a difference in my area of influence.

Day 1

Key Verse: Matthew 5:13-14

“You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world...let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

Life Experience:

God gives us spiritual gifts which we have learned are to be used to benefit the body of Christ. He also gives us special abilities that can affect the place in which we have influence such as the marketplace or our community. Loren Cunningham tells the story of a rather obscure man who impacted the nation of Japan. (*The Book that Transforms Nations, YWAM Publishing, 2007, p.154-156*). William Merrell Vories was an architect who went to Japan in 1905 with the desire to live the life of Jesus before the Japanese. Vories got a teaching job in a very remote area and in his off-hours he held Bible studies. Many young men became followers of Jesus. When their families kicked them out of their homes, they made their home with Vories. After two short years, Vories was fired from his job because the Buddhist priests were alarmed with what was happening to these young men who were becoming Christians.

As Vories prayed about his next steps, he felt led to found an architectural firm and train these new Christians in this trade. Within a short time, they were running a very influential design firm in Japan. By 1950, the firm had designed and built 2800 structures located all over the country. But it was the radical way they demonstrated Christ in their personal lives and professional work that really became known in the country. Though they were making substantial money as architects, they each basically lived on \$62 a month. The profit left was poured back into establishing churches, schools, TB sanatorium, training pastors in seminary and supporting the pastors in their ministries and more.

How could we live more simply so we could give more to others?

Week 6- Day 2

More Opportunities

Matthew 28:16-20

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) not only tells us to call people to Christ, but it also tells us to “disciple *nations* and *teach them* to observe all I commanded you.”

Perhaps their biggest contribution Vories and his workers made was that they taught Japan a new way to run a corporation. Corruption and graft were considered normal at that time, but this architectural corporation was built on Christian principles that applied to every job from drawing board to completed structure. No bribes were accepted and if it happened, those people forfeited the chance to work. They worked under humane working conditions and did not work on the Sabbath. Industrialists came from all over Japan to study Vories’ management principles. When he was asked to lecture on his successes, he took the opportunity to teach biblical principles of economics, leadership and business.

Things were very difficult during the war as military leaders started rumors that Vories was an American spy. As a result Vories and his wife had to take refuge in the mountains. Following the war, however, wonderful possibilities opened up for Vories. With the American occupation in place, Vories became a liaison between the new government and the American occupational authority. He was given opportunity to lecture in universities, hold evangelistic meetings and meet with government officials to discuss the spiritual aspects of democracy. Through this one man who “bloomed where he was planted” the country of Japan was impacted.

Has there been a time in your spiritual journey when you were “in hiding” or set aside for a time as Vories seemed to be when he hid in the mountains? What spiritual development happened during that time?

What changes would there be in your sphere of influence (family, education, media, business or government) if biblical principles were the basis for operation?

Week 6 – Day 3

Faithful Servanthood

Luke 19:12-27 the story of Joseph is another example of a man who lived for God no matter what his life situation. He was faithful when no one else could see what he did. Because he was faithful in the little things, God made him faithful over much. As a boy, his older brothers were jealous of him. They sold him to Midianite merchants who sold him to Potiphar in Egypt. Because Potiphar found Joseph to be trustworthy, he left him in charge of his household and everything he owned. When Potiphar’s wife lied about Joseph taking advantage of her, Potiphar put him in prison. Joseph proved to be trustworthy in prison and the jailer made him supervisor of the jail. When Pharaoh had a dream no one could interpret, a former prisoner remembered Joseph interpreting a dream for him which had come true. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dream and Pharaoh realized that Joseph was the right person to put in charge of preserving food during the seven abundant years to provide for the seven lean years that were coming. God had prepared Joseph for this position of leadership as he proved himself faithful through many difficult situations. Later Joseph was able to say to his brothers, “...God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance,” Genesis 45:7.

What does faithfulness look like in your work situation?

Week 6 – Day 4

Seven mountains that mold our culture

Colossians 3:20-4:2

When we listen to the news or see headlines in newspapers, we may grow discouraged. We ask ourselves where America is headed because it may feel like we are slipping farther and farther away from the principles upon which our country was built. Many of us stand by helplessly wondering when this downhill slide will end and where we can begin to raise our country to the higher standard.

Loren Cunningham tells how he was asking that kind of question when God quietly told him that “there are seven areas of society that are like classrooms to disciple nations,” (Cunningham, *The Book That Transforms Nations*, YWAM Publish, 2007, pages 46-47). Those seven areas are Family, Religion (church and mission), Education, Celebration (arts, entertainment, sports), Public communication (media), Economy (including business, science, and technology) and Government. The next day he met with his friends Bill and Vonette Bright with Campus Crusade for Christ. Before he could share what God had shown him, Bill told him that the Lord had shown him several ways the nation could be changed. He unfolded his paper and read his list which was virtually the same as Loren’s. A few weeks later, Dr. Francis Schaeffer, founder of L’Abri Fellowship gave the same list of areas to be targeted. God spoke to three people in three different parts of the body of Christ with the same message. There are seven spheres in society that mold our culture. In each area, except the church, the body of Christ has very little influence and, for the most part, biblical principles are not the basis for activities. The church needs to be a place where people meet Jesus and experience the transforming power of God’s love. It also needs to prepare transformed people to live their lives by biblical principles in the sphere of culture

where they have influence. Maybe you feel you are not in a place of decision making and therefore you think you are not in a position to impact your sphere to return it to following the principles handed down by God. Consider that God has placed you in this sphere for a reason and ask God to show you ways to apply Biblical principles in all you do.

How is the church equipping people to live out their lives by biblical principles in the other spheres of life?

Which is your mountain of influence?

Week 6 – Day 5

God uses people in varied ways

Philippians 3:7-11

It is so easy to think that God’s activity generally happens at church on Sunday. Yet much of God’s activity is accomplished in the marketplace because that is where people live throughout the week. Henry Blackaby in his book *Experiencing God* (LifeWay Press, 2007, page 262-263) shares several incidents where people in the marketplace have been used of God to make a difference. One business man noticed a colleague whom he did not know well and felt the Spirit nudging him to sit with him for lunch. He learned the man’s wife had left him that morning. Through that conversation the man came to trust Christ and was restored to his wife.

A salesman traveling around his community kept noticing a particular house. It went up for sale, then he saw a moving van in the driveway, and shortly after, he noticed a wheelchair ramp being installed to the front door. Every time he passed, he felt the Spirit nudging him to find out who lived there. When he decided to stop, he was met by a disabled man with a bitter, lonely story. Because the salesman’s church was nearby, he invited the man to come to his church. The stranger said he had noticed the church, and wondered if people there were friendly. Now he knew they were.

When Michael Stephens began working at Starbucks, he had just finished ministry school and was determined to find a way to share Christ in the workplace. He began asking for God to give Him words of encouragement for his customers. God would give him words of knowledge and prophetic words to share with the people he served at the coffee shop. He became known as the “Starbucks Prophet” and people would come to the shop just to get a word from God. His boss valued Michael because he worked hard and brought in customers, and Michael had many opportunities to share the love of God. (From an interview with Bob Fraser on *Influent.life*, podcast episode 8).

How is your faith impacting your life in the workplace or community?

Week 6 – Day 6

Churches can encourage people in the Marketplace

Isaiah 11:2-3, James 1:2-8

A man whose business was floundering expressed sadness that there was no one who would pray with him. He said, “If my problem was spiritual or if I was sick, I could go to my church and they would pray for me, but no one seems to care about my business.” God wants to partner with us in every area of life. Bob Frazer, founder of Joseph International, tells how he learned to regularly sit with a pencil and paper and discuss his business with God. He found that God gives creative ideas and inspiration for the everyday demands of life. Isaiah 11 tells us that the Spirit of God offers wisdom, understanding, counsel, power, knowledge, and fear of the Lord.

I (Mary) served as an interim pastor in a church in Iowa. While there we felt challenged to pray for church members who would be in the marketplace during the week. Using the seven mountains as a guide, each Sunday for several weeks, we invited people working in the different areas of society that mold our culture to stand as we prayed and commissioned them to be faithful in their areas of influence. It was a good reminder that God wants to use us in places of service both within the church and in the marketplace. He puts us in positions where we can be His hands and feet. He calls us to be Christ where we are planted. We are to be light and salt wherever God places us.

Can you think of additional ways to encourage people in their areas of influence?

Week 6 - Day 7

Briefly discuss the questions from this week and pray for one another.

Group Prayer

- Get into groups of three or four and share where God has spoken to you about being His hands and feet in your sphere of influence. Share how the group can pray for you to be faithful. Then pray for one another.
- Then gather together to pray. Praise God that He is the Master Builder.
- Pray for your church to find ways to prepare and support believers in the place where they have influence.
- Continue praying as God leads.

WEEK 7: We respond to conflicts with love

Declaration: I am learning to stay calm in times of conflict.

Day 1

Key Verse: Phil 4:2-3 NIV

“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”

Life Experience

Unity does not mean that we will never have conflicts. As we see in the passage from Philippians, church conflicts are as old as the church. Conflict--in families, churches and communities--are a part of life. Conflict and change often go hand in hand and can cause shifts in our thinking and behavior. Conflict, is an opportunity for positive change, if it is handled effectively. If we are to have unity, we must learn to handle conflict in a positive way.

Remember that God allows trials and shaking to train us up as sons and daughters of God. Conflict is not bad, if we learn to use it for growth and learning, but many times we are paralyzed by conflict and don't know how to use it constructively. If we do not learn to use conflict and hardship for growth we are “wasting” our trials.

Son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline [training], and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves...No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Heb 12:5-7, 11 NIV

Probably no one had more serious conflict with his family than Joseph. His brothers were jealous and hated him. He was betrayed and sold as a slave by his own brothers. Yet he did not “waste” his trials or allow them to cause him to be embittered against his brothers. Instead, he believed God was at work for good and was accomplishing His plans and purposes even when his brothers were plotting evil against him.

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.” Genesis 50:20

We do not know how God will use our trials and conflicts for His purposes. We must trust that even in the midst of conflict He is able to bring about good for His people, if we will submit to His leadership.

This week we will explore how to use conflict for growth. Bowen's Systems Theory offers some helpful language to understand conflict and gives us tools to use conflict for growth. A “system” is a group of people who are in relationship with each other. A family is a system. A church is a system. A workplace is a system, because in all these situations people are operating in relationships with each other. Systems Theory looks at the interactions between people in a system. Several sources that were used for this week are listed at the end of Day 7 and can be useful if you wish to explore this topic in more depth.

When has conflict led to positive change in your own life or the life of your church?

Week 7- Day 2

Emotional Systems

Ephesians 4:24-32

Often when a problem surfaces in a church the argument gets very heated, and rational discussion of the issue becomes impossible. The issue might be theology, or it might be the color of paint in the

sanctuary. It could be whether the pastor should stay, or which kind of music to use for worship. The issue is often not the main problem. The main problem is relationships within the church which get locked into automatic, instinctive patterns that make it difficult to resolve the disagreement in a friendly way. Looking at relationship patterns can help ease tensions. Systems Theory helps us understand these relationships. There are three key assumptions.

1.) The **whole is greater than the parts** and in order to understand the system (family, church or organization) one must look at the relationships between people. In other words, no one person is the problem! Churches tend to blame the pastor or key leaders when there is a problem. Looking beyond one person and considering the relationship patterns within the church will give a more helpful perspective.

2.) Another key is that the real problem is often the **reactivity** in the emotional system. *Reactivity* is an automatic, instinctive, defensive response. *Thinking* is more creative and imaginative than emotions. When I (Charlotte) took classes in school counseling, they told us that when someone is angry or scared all the blood rushes from their head to the hands and feet. This triggers a flight or fight response. That is why, when we are angry, afraid, or upset, it is hard to think clearly, and we often react instinctively. It is best to wait until someone is calm before we try to reason with them. Churches, like families, build up patterns of responses that are automatic, rather than rational. Recognizing when we are acting out of our emotions and taking a step back to *think* about why we are so reactive can help calm us.

3.) A third key concept is **differentiation**. Differentiation is the ability of an individual to think, act and speak independently while staying emotionally connected to others in the group. It implies the ability to disagree and still care about one another. It is the key to emotionally healthy families and churches. Often we avoid people we have conflict with or we take a defensive, fighting stance. **To disagree and yet stay connected in a friendly way is difficult but life transforming.**

What are some situations when you have responded with emotional reactivity instead of well-considered thoughtfulness?

Share an example of staying connected with someone even though it is (or was) difficult.

Week 7 – Day 3

Anxiety

Philippians 4:4-9

Anxiety is *the* basic human emotion. It is good when it motivates us to change. However, if anxiety becomes too intense, it causes us to feel paralyzed instead of motivated. Very intense anxiety clouds our thinking so it is difficult to respond rationally or creatively. There are several types of anxiety.

1. **Situational anxiety** is the response to a specific situation. Some examples of situational anxiety in a church might be the church burns down, a child dies, or the pastor leaves abruptly.
2. **Chronic anxiety** is on-going anxiety that is unresolved. This could be tension over worship style, sharing space, a staff conflict, or money issues.
3. **Hidden anxiety** is when there is a “secret”. This could be a key leader having a secret affair, a suicide that was never revealed, or some kind of abuse issue. Secrets are generally a sign of an unhealthy church.
4. **Projected anxiety** in the church is anxiety that people bring from their home and work situations. For example, the choir director is being sued over an incident at her home, the treasurer’s wife has left him, or a key elder is being laid off from work. This anxiety can easily spill over into church

as these people overreact to situations in the church family. We need to try to understand our own anxiety and what the root cause is so we don't let our anxiety affect all our relationships. With so much anxiety flowing around us, it is no wonder that churches often have conflict—especially if they do not know how to manage anxiety.

Can you think of examples of anxiety in your own church? Which kind of anxiety is it?

Are you experiencing any anxiety that might impact how you react to others?

Week 7 – Day 4

A Calm Reflectiveness and Self-Differentiation

John 6:41-48, 60-69

Calm reflection is the alternative to anxiety. This requires stepping away from our emotions and *intentionally thinking* about the process and our choices. The more the leaders of the church can respond as “a non-anxious presence” in the conflict, and listen attentively to both sides, the more likely it is that conflict will be resolved successfully. It requires good listening skills and the ability to manage one's own emotions well. Leaders must think about the process of communication and the relationships between people, as well as the issues being discussed. It also requires a willingness to stay connected with people who are difficult. When a church can adopt a non-anxious non-reactive communication style it will be more imaginative and creative, more respectful of others opinions, and more able to look forward into the future. This reflective style often takes longer to resolve issues, but results in more long lasting satisfaction.

Jesus is a good example of this non-anxious leadership. The Sadducees and Pharisees were constantly harassing and baiting Him. Even His disciples disagreed with Him. Yet He stayed calm and continued to dialogue with them and teach them. He did not give in to anger or fear, but calmly restated Truth over and over.

Who do you know that shows calm reflectiveness in the face of conflict or crisis?

What does that look like and how does it impact those around them?

Week 7 – Day 5

Differentiation

John 8:12-18

Selah was shy and sometimes when she tried to express her ideas in church others would disagree with her. She felt angry and upset, but didn't tell anyone. Instead, she became less and less involved in Sunday School and committees. Eventually she stopped coming to church altogether. Selah did not know how to *self-differentiate*. **Differentiation** is *expressing what you think, believe and feel to others*. Before we can express ourselves, we must think through what we believe and what is important to us. Then we can clearly communicate it to others. Differentiation always happens in relationship. You cannot isolate yourself and self-differentiate at the same time.

Jesus is, again, our example of how to be a self-differentiated person. He clearly states over and over who He is, even when others deny it and argue against it. He stays connected with those who disagree, but maintains His own identity. If you imagine a continuum with differentiation in the middle, *Independent or Distant* would be on one end and *Overly connected* would be on the other.

Distant

Differentiation

Overly connected

Overly Connected is being too dependent on “belonging” and sacrificing your own opinions and feelings to keep the peace. This may seem very noble, but it leads to unhealthy congregations when people do not feel free to express their own opinions and feelings. Over-connection can result from everyone trying too hard to not hurt anyone’s feelings, or it can be the result of one or two people insisting that they are always right. **Distant or overly-independent** is separating one’s self from the group to relieve anxiety. In the church situation this could be someone remaining silent during a meeting even though they have strong feelings, or someone dropping out of church activities. If we “cut-off” or distance from one relationship we will repeat the same pattern of behavior in another relationship with more intensity. Often we react to one extreme by moving to the other extreme. For example a too-connected, overly dependent family may have one daughter who moves across the country and never calls home as a way to distance and become more independent. However, the daughter may re-create the overly dependent, too-connected relationship with her own children by becoming a hovering “helicopter” parent.

Confess any ways you have hurt others or have been hurt by church or family conflicts. Confess any ways you have distanced from God, the church, your family or others because of conflicts. Thank God that He is the Healer and He never abandons or disengages from us.

Week 7 – Day 6

How to differentiate

Read Philippians 2:1-10

Churches self-differentiate by being clear about their identity in Christ, by stating plainly what they believe, and by having clear goals and mission. Learning to clarify one’s own individuality is key to healing the family or church. It is also important to recognize and honor others’ attempts to express themselves and allow them to be themselves. Here are some ways to differentiate:

1. Recognize one’s own anxiety and reactivity. Take a step back to think and then make choices about how to respond responsibly. If you do react emotionally in the moment, rethink your action and consider how you could respond differently next time.
2. Look at one’s family (immediate and extended) and see what connections there may be with the issue that is causing anxiety. Often there are patterns of unresolved anxiety. For example, someone may complain that the pastor is too distant and uncaring. This may reflect an on-going issue with one’s own father who is distant and unavailable.
3. Clarify one’s own beliefs, values and life goals, and address important emotional issues in one’s own family. For example, reconnect with family members who are cut-off. Talk about the family secrets, discuss issues that have been avoided. Forgive those who have hurt you.
4. Make I-statements rather than you-statements. *Example:* “I feel ____ because ____ . I want ____.” rather than, “If you would do *this*, I would be happier.”
5. Stay connected to the emotional group (family or congregation) by making time and opportunity to listen, and avoid the temptation to distance from difficult people. Respect and honor their right to disagree with you. Staying connected while being true to your own beliefs is key to maintaining healthy churches. **This is really unconditional love in action.** You are not requiring people to agree with you before you love them. Instead you love them no matter what.

Jesus is the perfect example of a self-differentiated person. Jesus never backed down from being Who He was and expressing the truth, and yet He never broke fellowship with His disciples even when they didn't understand, agree or support Him. His heart of love continually reached out to those who were disengaged and sought to bring healing and life to them. May we offer this same kind of life, love and healing to others.

How can we encourage a healthy environment where people are free to disagree and be themselves?

Week 7 – Day 7

Briefly discuss the questions. Then pray together.

- Praise God that He is the Wonderful Counselor and the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)
- Ask God to heal our homes and churches. Help us to learn to relate in healthy ways that allow us to disagree without breaking fellowship with one another.
- Break into smaller groups and share anything that is causing anxiety or any issues that came up as you read this week's lesson. Pray for one another.

Below are resources used to develop this week's readings. If you would like to know more about Systems Theory and ways to manage conflict you may want to explore these resources.

Resources for Individuals:

Guernsey, D & L. (1991). *Birthmarks*. Word Publishing. This book is a very simple introduction to Systems Theory for individuals and families.

Lerner, H.G. (1989). *Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Intimacy*. Harper Collins. This book is not written from a Christian perspective, but very useful in understanding systems theory and written in an easy to understand, engaging style with many examples. Most of the examples are of women, but the principles are applicable to men as well as women. Lerner has a number of other books about Systems Theory.

Resources for Churches:

Friedman, E. (1985). *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. New York: The Guilford Press. This is an older textbook which influenced Steinke's writing. It gives a foundational understanding of how to apply systems theory to the church.

Steinke, P.L. (2006). *Healthy Congregation*. 2nd edition. The Alban Institute. Steinke has a number of resources to help congregations understand and apply Systems Theory in the church. Other books by Steinke include *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* and *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*.

WEEK 8: We are Unoffendable

Declaration: I am quick to forgive.

Day 1

Key Verse: John 13:34-35 NIV

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Life Experience:

One time a close friend stole something from me (Charlotte). When I discovered what she had done I felt angry, hurt, and betrayed all at the same time. I wasn't just angry that she took something, but that she had betrayed my trust in her friendship. I went to talk to her, but she didn't seem sorry she had taken it, and only expressed regret that I felt hurt. I was angry that she didn't take responsibility for her actions or express true repentance. I went home still upset.

Over the next few days, I tried to forgive, but I couldn't seem to let it go. One day I went to prayer, and I asked Jesus how he felt about the situation. I saw my friend and me as we had been the last time I talked to her. I asked Jesus what He would do or say in that situation. I "saw" Jesus come into the room and put one arm around each of us. I realized He loved me very much, but He also loved her just as much. I could not stay angry with her and stay in fellowship with Jesus. I suddenly realized my anger was as wrong as her actions. I gave Jesus my grief and anger and felt His love and forgiveness wash over me. I then prayed that He would bless her, also. Even though I could no longer trust her, I truly felt love and concern for her again.

I learned an important lesson that day. When someone hurts us or disappoints us, *our reactions* can be just as sinful as their behavior. When we hang on to unforgiveness, we are sinning against God and against the other person. We break our relationship with God and harden our heart so that it is hard to hear God. True forgiveness frees us from the bondage of sin (because unforgiveness is sin), but it also frees the other person, so God can deal with them without us getting in the way.

How do I react when others sin against me? Do I need to repent for my reactions?

Week 8 - Day 2

What is "unoffendable"?

John 13:34-35

I first heard the word "unoffendable" in sermons by Mike Bickle and Francis Frangipane. To be unoffendable means that insults, slights, and rejection rolls off of us. We never hold a grudge. It is such an accurate description of what a Christian should be like that it should describe everyone of us. Jesus said that the world will know we are His disciples by our love. If love is going to characterize our relationships, we must learn to forgive quickly, and become a people who are "unoffendable," no matter how unjustly we are treated.

Jesus is our example in this. Jesus' disciples abandoned him, Judas betrayed him, the soldiers beat him and mocked him, and the Jews demanded that he be crucified. In addition it was our sins that put Him on the cross. As Jesus hung on that tree He lifted His eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) That is being unoffendable—and we are to be like Him.

So what are we to do when others hurt us? Are we to stand by and let them continue sinning against us, or are we to respond in some way? What is a godly response? Matthew 18 tells us how to handle offenses in the church, but one must study the whole chapter to understand the complete context.

When have you had to forgive someone? Was it difficult? What has helped you be able to forgive?

Week 8 - Day 3

Humble like a child

Matthew 18:1-5, 10-14

One time I (Charlotte) asked some upper elementary children what Jesus meant when he said to humble ourselves as a little child. One of the children said, "It means to be teachable." I thought that was an excellent definition. We need to be open to learning from others and from God. If we are teachable we will listen to others' opinions and ideas, and try to understand their point of view. Sometimes God will use someone we would not naturally honor to tell us something important. A pastor's wife told the story of how she had been praying for several things. One day a six-year-old from the congregation came up to her and said God had told him something he was supposed to tell her. He then shared with the woman about the very issues she had been praying about. The pastor's wife had to decide if she would humble herself enough to receive from a six-year-old.

Humility is also a recognition that our authority comes from God. Numbers 12:3 NIV says, "Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth," and in Philippians 2 we are told that Jesus was very humble. Jesus and Moses were confident, anointed men who understood their position as leaders and their authority with God, but they totally trusted God's leadership. We sometimes think of humility as being similar to poor self-esteem or the opposite of pride. Actually low self-esteem and pride are two sides of the same coin. They both are focused on self. The opposite of self-focus is really "Focus on God". Humility is yielding to God and focusing on what He wants. It means obeying Him even if it causes us personal loss, discomfort or humiliation.

Those who focus on advancing themselves and their own ideas lose their perspective and their focus on God and His Kingdom. God can trust a person who has a humble spirit with great honor and positions of authority because He knows the person will submit to God even when it is difficult or costly. He also knows that a humble person will give all the glory to God, instead of taking the honor for themselves.

*Would you have difficulty receiving a word from God if it came from the mouth of a six-year-old?
Who else might you have trouble receiving from?*

Week 8 - Day 4

Show him his fault

Matthew 18:15-20

When we feel someone has sinned against us, or we have a conflict with someone, we need to take action to deal with it. If we do not, we may continue to hold bitterness in our heart, and the unity of the Body of Christ is disrupted. However, we must go in the attitude of humility. This is what I attempted to do with the friend who stole from me. This passage suggests that if our first attempt does not work, we should take others with us who can act as mediators and, perhaps, make the person more aware how serious this is. It is important who you choose to go with you. It should be a mature Christian who listens carefully to God and will offer an impartial opinion. Sometimes as we discuss things together, we realize there has been wrong on both sides. In my case, I realized that my reactions were as wrong as her behavior. It is not often that a situation escalates to the third level where the whole church needs to be informed. This would most often apply if the person is in leadership and the offense is clearly a serious moral sin such as adultery or embezzlement. In those cases the entire church needs to deal with the issue together. The goal of this process is reconciliation and restoration.

When have you done this? Was the relationship restored?

Have you seen situations where failure to do this caused on-going conflict?

Week 8 – Day 5

Forgive

Matthew 18:21-35

This is a very sobering parable. It points out that if we want God to forgive us, we must forgive those who sin against us. It makes clear that if we follow the process in Matthew 18:15-20, and the person does not repent, we still must forgive. If they sin against us again and again, we still must forgive. This is where the difference between forgiveness and trust is important. If someone has hurt you, you must forgive as quickly as possible, but if trust is to be rebuilt it will take time and communication between the two of you. The purpose of going to talk to someone is to reconcile so you can rebuild the relationship and rebuild trust. However, some people do not repent, and we realize that to continue to have a relationship with them puts us in a position where we will be hurt again. Often, in that case, it may be best to end the relationship. It is very important, however, to seek God's guidance as to whether or not you should continue that relationship. Sometimes He wants you to stay in the relationship and continue to be a reflection of His unconditional love for that person. Other times He may direct you to end the relationship because it is unhealthy for you to continue, or because you are not able to love unconditionally. Forgiveness means letting go of our right to vengeance and letting go of hurt and anger. It does not mean that we have to continue putting ourselves in situations where someone can hurt us again. After my friend stole from me and refused to admit her offense, I realized that I could not fully trust her. Our relationship was altered. However, because I forgave her, I was able to let go of the anger and hurt feelings, and care about her again.

It is important that we remember all the instructions in Matthew 18. We must have an attitude of humility when we go talk to our brother. Humility means we are willing to listen and try to understand. We must realize God loves them, and their soul is redeemable. We try to restore the relationship, but whether that is successful or not, we must forgive, so God will forgive us.

Ask God to show you any bitterness or unforgiveness you are hanging on to. Repent for unforgiveness and for any wrong reactions. Give the situation to Him.

Week 8 – Day 6

Dig out the roots

Hebrews 12:15

We may think we forgave someone, but still have a seed of bitterness buried in our heart. Bitterness is any negative emotion you hide in your heart for a long period of time. With a seed of bitterness buried in your heart, it will soon grow and produce fruit in your life. Just as an apple seed produces apples, and a seed of love produces love, a seed of bitterness produces more bitterness in your life. If there is an area of your life that continually produces unhappiness, look to find the root of your unhappiness. Very likely it is related to hurt or anger you have buried.

When I (Charlotte) was training to be a school counselor we were taught that painful memories are often stored as pictures rather than words. The pictures may not even be accurate, but they reflect our feelings. For example, one boy in my third grade class continually drew pictures of himself without arms. That expressed the helplessness he felt in a difficult family situation. It is possible to forgive with our minds, but unless the emotions (often in the form of a picture) are brought out and healed, we may still be carrying hurt, anger, and unforgiveness in our hearts. In the story at the beginning, I had a picture of myself trying to talk to my friend, and my friend not taking any responsibility for her actions. Every time I remembered that conversation, I felt angry all over again. When I brought that picture to Jesus, He

showed me what He would say and do in that situation. You may have forgiven with words, but if your heart still hurts, your emotions are still bound up in bitterness. Try bringing the painful pictures before the Lord in prayer, and ask Him what He would say or do in that situation. Only when you have let go of the feelings of hurt, anger, and bitterness have you truly forgiven, and only then will your heart truly heal.

Do you know anyone who is obviously bitter? (Don't name names—just share experiences.) How does that affect other relationships and situations in their life?

Week 8 – Day 7

Briefly discuss some of the questions from this week's readings.

Group Prayer

- Praise God that He loves you and forgives you. Thank Him that He went after you, the lost sheep, and brought you home.
- If someone has an unhappy memory they would like to share, have 2 or 3 people gather around that person, listen, and pray with them. If they are struggling, pray with them that they be willing to forgive.
- Share personal prayer concerns and pray for one another.
- Then join in group prayer asking for unity and forgiveness to prevail in your church.

WEEK 9: We Seek God's Will Together

Declaration: God is helping me make good decisions.

Day 1

Key Verse: Romans 12:2

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Life Experience:

Rev. David Hughes, a Baptist pastor, tells about being contacted by the chair of a search committee seeking a new staff member for his church. It seems that the committee had reached a deadlock around two candidates. Every attempt to break that deadlock had failed. Would he come and help them through this? Rev. Hughes had recently attended a “discernment retreat”. He wondered if any of that experience could help this struggling committee. He began by reminding the committee that unity within a body is a clear sign of the work of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ. He introduced them to their need to *pray for indifference*, a prayer in which they ask God to make them indifferent to anything but God's will. He led them through a time of listening and prayer. He sensed some of the tension in the room was lessening. Instead of pushing for a decision that night, he suggested they bring the meeting to a close, and encouraged the members to pray and meditate over their decision before reconvening. At their follow-up meeting, the committee chair enthusiastically reported to Rev. Hughes that they had reached a unanimous decision about a candidate to recommend. Interestingly enough, the one they were going to recommend was not the one she had favored just a few days before. They went on and hired that person whose ministry has reportedly been one of the best for their church. (*Pursuing God's Will Together* by Ruth Haley Barton, InterVarsity Press, 2012, p. 229-231)

Many people are familiar with collaborative decision making which involves careful listening to each other and discussing issues until there is unity. Spiritual discernment is similar, but the goal is to hear and agree to God's will for this situation. Too often people are in a hurry. They come with their minds made up of how the situation should be resolved. They fail to listen to the hearts of those closely affected by the situation, or to take time to pray and really seek to hear God. Discerning God's will requires good listening and an open heart and open mind. Discernment is defined by Ruth Haley Barton as “the capacity to recognize and respond to the presence and activity of God as a [...] group relative to the issues we are facing, and to make decisions in response to that Presence.”¹

Think about a time when it was impossible to discuss alternatives because someone's mind was already made up before you started the discussion. What was the impact on the group?

If you have been guilty of this, ask God to forgive you for thinking your own opinion is more important than His will.

Week 9 – Day 2

Clarifying question and Prayer of Indifference

Read Acts 15:1-6

There are several incidents in the Bible which relate the power of discernment in finding God's will. One of these is found in Acts 15. This incident describes a major decision involving doctrine and practice that needed to be discerned. Something new was happening. The Holy Spirit was being poured out among the Gentiles and they were coming to faith in Christ. There was immediate disagreement about

¹ *Pursuing God's Will Together* by Ruth Haley Barton, InterVarsity Press, 2012, p. 11

how to respond. To begin a discussion it is important, to narrow the discussion to a specific question which will be discussed.

Spiritual discernment begins when each person who is a part of the discernment process is able to lay aside their own agendas and prepare themselves to listen for God's leading, allowing themselves to "...be transformed by the renewing of [their] mind," Romans 12:2. Asking God to help you be indifferent to anything but God's will is necessary in order to hear Him speak to you on a concern. This openness to God often comes through deep prayer. Praying for God's wisdom in a matter and asking God to strengthen your trust in Him to guide the process will make a difference in approaching the matter for discernment.

Is there a decision you are facing? Can you define it as a question?

Thank God that He is our Counselor and He wants to help us make decisions.

Week 9 – Day 3

Seek the Wisdom of God

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

God's wisdom is different than natural wisdom. He is eager to help us with every decision we have to make. We go through a process similar to what has been described each time we make a decision in our own lives. We need to clarify the question, set aside our own desires and will, and then listen carefully to God and see where He leads us. Sometimes, especially when making a difficult or important decision, it is useful to ask others to help us discern what God's will is. We can ask people we trust to sit with us and hear our concerns and questions. The clarifying questions others ask help us think through our situation more deeply. Then as the group seeks God together, often wisdom will emerge from the group that will help in making a decision. We must always take responsibility, in the end, for our own decision, but this kind of group process can help us choose wisely.

Praise the Only Wise God" for His wisdom. (Romans 16:27)

Think about a decision you had to make where opening yourself up to God's will led to a different outcome than you would have originally made if you hadn't prayed about it.

Week 9 – Day 4

Leadership and including all voices

Acts 15:6-21. *As you read think about who contributed helpfully in the discernment process.*

Notice that the group considered both what scriptures said about the subject, and also what the Lord had been showing the apostles through the work of the Holy Spirit. Also notice that they listened carefully to both sides of the argument. Then James helpfully summarized the discussion.

When organizations have disagreements where both sides have strongly held opinions it can make decision making difficult. It is important to choose a leader for the discernment process who understands how to conduct the meeting and guide the process in hearing God's will. In this biblical story, it is James who provides that leadership.

Including those whose voices need to be heard will contribute helpfully in the process. In this story in Acts we find that they included those who would be affected by the decision such as the converted Gentiles. It included those whose experiences were pertinent to the issue being considered; namely Peter, Paul and Barnabas who provided key information. It feels like Peter had a special anointing or expertise regarding the issue being concerned because God had given him a vision about it (Acts 10). It is also important to include those who have to carry out the course of action that will be decided.

Another important person to include is an intercessor, someone who will hold the group in prayer throughout the process. That person may not actually speak to the concern, but if God gives that person insight, they have the freedom to do so.

Think of times when you were involved in a decision making process. Were all voices invited to be heard? How did that work or why did it not happen? Were scriptures considered? Was the work of the Holy Spirit mentioned?

Week 9 – Day 5

Discussion and Prayer

Acts 13:1-4

Acts 13 tells of another incident when a group of people followed the leading of the Holy Spirit. They were worshipping God with fasting and prayer when the Holy Spirit instructed them to set apart Barnabas and Saul. What an important commissioning service that was because Paul was to write the majority of the New Testament. A sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's leading is essential for discernment. When as a group, you feel prepared for the Spirit to lead your discernment process, you are ready to begin.

Listening is probably the key word—listening to God, listening to each other, listening to what is going on in the depths of one's own heart and mind. A brief summary of the facts surrounding the question with any updates will provide the purpose for the gathering. The leader can then invite questions for clarification. Listen carefully to the questions and the responses. It is important to receive the comments without judgment choosing instead to formulate questions for clarification. Be fully present to hear what each person is asking or saying. Be careful not to be formulating what you want to say while someone else is speaking.

After discussion, the group is encouraged to settle into prayer. This is a time for pulling together what you have heard in God's presence and see what He brings to your attention. If someone is led to voice a prayer on behalf of the group, pray with that person. The leader may bring this to a close by leading in a group prayer. The group is invited to share what God is saying. It is interesting that solutions may begin to emerge for some while others may discover that God has shown them they need to make a change in their attitude. Scriptures may come to mind, and for some, there may be more confusion than clarity. When a way forward begins to emerge, then the group considers what is consistent with what God seems to be doing. Sometimes there may be two or three options that arise. Stating those clearly—even putting them on newsprint to look at may be useful. In the presence of the Spirit, consider what is good or what could be improved in each option. In my (Mary) experience, often what clearly emerges is a combination of what is best in both that forms the solution to the question.

How do you feel about using a group process to make decisions? Can you trust God with the outcome?

How could your church improve their decision making process.

Week 9 – Day 6

Summarizing and Implementation

Read Acts 15:22-31.

James obviously had listened carefully to everything that had been spoken. He had heard the Jews who were adamant that the Gentiles must obey the law of Moses and being circumcised was necessary. Yet when Peter, Barnabas, and Paul told more detail and what they saw God was doing among the

Gentiles, James realized that Old Testament prophets were speaking to this very question. God enabled him to connect the dots between Peter's testimony and the words of the prophet Amos (Acts 15:17). He was therefore able to state what he understood to be God's will and offer a way forward for implementing the discernment on this weighty question. A discernment process is not effective unless a plan is made to carry out the decision.

It has been my experience that once a group has gone through an intentional discernment process there is an awesome joy that emerges, and peace and unity break forth. Let me share a brief story of a larger process that involved writing a mission statement. The representative body had struggled for some time with the theological breadth that existed among the group. One of the tough places was that many were clear about the divinity of Christ while others believed Him to be an important historical being. We agreed to give a full afternoon where carefully chosen groups, which included people from all persuasions that existed among us, met together. An exercise was given to each group to work through which we hoped would allow them to come to a point where they could agree on a mission statement. They were to bring that statement on newsprint back to the larger group and hang it on the wall so we could all read them. As the large group began to reassemble and each mission statement was put on the wall, we sat in awe at the similarity of the statements. Thirteen of them unashamedly and boldly included Jesus as Lord and Teacher and the one remaining included Christ in a very similar manner. Only God could have orchestrated such a movement as this. We were in awe of God and praised Him.

Look at the summary below and consider a time when a difficult group decision had to be made. Which steps of the discernment process were included?

Summary of the steps for discernment

1. **Preparation.** Choose a leader who can prayerfully guide the group through the process. Include the people who need to be heard. Clarify the question to be discussed.
2. Pray the **Prayer of Indifference**—that you would be indifferent to anything except God's will.
3. **Listen** as people share and lay out the facts of the situation. Ask only clarifying questions.
4. **Prayer.** Settle into a time of listening to God. If someone feels led to pray for the group they may, but this time is primarily silent prayer.
5. **Decision making.** Reconvene the meeting to share what thoughts have emerged from prayer. This may mean writing the options down. Continue discussing and praying together until there is a sense that you have heard and understood God's will together.
6. **Make a plan** to carry out the decision.

Week 9 - Day 7

Briefly discuss the questions from this week. Then pray together using the suggestions below.

Group Prayer

As a group, practice a discernment process by choosing a question to discuss and pray about together. If the group or some individual in the group has a decision to make, you may choose to use that question for your discernment process. If not, choose one of the questions below. Then work through the six steps above.

- Ask God which of the names of God He most wants to reveal to the group at this time and how He wants that to inform the activities of the group during the coming months.
- Ask God what His will is for the church during the next year and what, if anything, the group can do to join with God in what He is doing.

WEEK 10: We Grow Through Perseverance

Declaration: God is always with me.

Day 1

Key Verse: Romans 5:3-4

“...but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

Life Experience:

Barbara Hughes, in her book *Disciplines of a Godly Woman* (Crossway Books, 2001, p. 108-109), relates her story of being in Israel with her husband when they were abruptly awakened in the very early morning of their first day. It was their youngest son anxiously telling them that his brother was in the hospital and the doctors didn't know if he would survive. Unable to get a return flight home until midnight they spent the longest day of their lives in deep agony of soul and praying for the life of their son. She turned to John 14 for comfort: “Do not let your hearts be troubled...” v.1. But it wasn't the first verse of that chapter that captured her attention. It was the last twenty-five words: “...the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. Come now, let us leave” v. 31. What comforted her was Jesus' behavior that she saw in these words. Jesus was about to undergo the greatest test of persevering faith. And he was remaining resolute to do God's will in facing the cross. And so must she. She could have said that God had let them down or that their many prayers for safety for their family had gone unanswered. Instead, they endured one day at a time, sometimes only one hour at a time as they kept a vigilant watch over their son. Days and hours turned into long months of hospitalization and medical help. Gratefully, their son did make a full recovery.

Consider a time when you went through a time of adversity, a time of fear, or suffering. How did you feel about God through that experience? What did you learn from the experience?

Week 10 – Day 2

Rebuilding the wall

Nehemiah 2:11-18

Webster's Dictionary (Lexicon Publications, Inc., 1990) tells us that to persevere means to “try hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties.” Nelson's *New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986, page 969) defines perseverance as the steadfast effort to follow God's commands and to do His work.

Nehemiah was a man whose obedience to God to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in spite of obstacles and difficulties teaches us much about perseverance. Nehemiah served as the Persian king's cupbearer. When he learned of the deplorable condition of the returned exiles in Jerusalem, that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and its gates burned, he mourned and wept, fasted and prayed. Then Nehemiah asked King Artaxerxes to send him to Judah, so that he could rebuild the city. With the king's permission, he was granted letters to present to the governors of the regions he would travel through giving him safe passage. The king also provided timber from his forests for the building and appointed Nehemiah governor of the province with authority to rebuild the city walls.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he called the people together to “Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem.” Almost immediately they faced opposition from Sanballat and Tobiah, officials of Samaria and the Ammonites, who tried to prevent the rebuilding of the wall. Nehemiah was steadfast and answered them, “The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build...” 2:20. In spite of the opposition, the people steadily progressed in building the wall. This

only infuriated their opponents who conspired to attack Jerusalem and create more confusion. Nehemiah and the people prayed. They armed themselves and continued to work. The people reached a point of grumbling and complaining. Sanballat and Tobiah were unrelentless in trying to stop the building of the walls. But Nehemiah did not move from his purpose. He stayed true to God's steadfast care and prayed for strength. Nehemiah persevered through many obstacles and the walls of Jerusalem were completed in 52 days—an outstanding accomplishment.

*What was the driving force behind Nehemiah that kept him on the task of rebuilding the walls?
What kept him from giving up when he faced so much opposition?*

Week 10 – Day 3

Perseverance Builds Character and Strengthens the Church

II Peter 1:5-8

If we are honest with ourselves, probably we all would admit that we could live happily without facing any form of adversity or suffering. When it comes, we often want to blame God, or we decide that God isn't faithful to us. God allows these difficult times to build character and strengthen the church. It's a little like pebbles in a flowing river. The original pebbles probably had a lot of rough edges, but over time, the water (adversity) made the rough edges smooth. So it is with perseverance.

From Nehemiah we discover important truths about perseverance. His relationship with God was strong. He knew where to turn for guidance and strength. He knew what task God had given him to do. He did not waver when opposition came. Instead he relied on God and did not doubt but that God would be faithful. Because he demonstrated strength the people kept working. God faithfully completed the task through Nehemiah. Perseverance in any great test comes as a result of disciplined preparation in the ordinary days.

A Chinese young man came to America to study at university. He roomed with an American student who was influential in his becoming a Christian. When he graduated he returned to China and faced persecution for having become a Christian. As a result, his faith matured and deepened. In the meantime, his friend had gone about finding a career. He got away from his commitment to God and became a nominal Christian. Sometime later he visited his friend in China. When he was leaving, his Chinese friend said that he was going to pray that his friend face persecution. He wanted his friend to experience the deep relationship with God that he had found by persevering with God through persecution.

How does perseverance help us develop character?

Talk with God about any obstacle or adversity you are facing right now. Ask God to help you see the things He is doing in the midst of the trouble

Week 10 – Day 4

Perseverance is God's Means of Perfecting Us

Romans 5:1-5

Barbara Hughes in her book *Disciplines of a Godly Woman* (Crossway Books, 2001, pages 104-113) suggests three reasons why we are allowed to face adversities. One is that it is God's means of perfecting us. Facing adversity doesn't mean that we are necessarily out of tune with God as some people suppose. It simply means that God wants us to be perfected or refined. Two words are associated with this process—temptations and trials. Temptation is often associated as the tempter trying to destroy. Trials are likened to what happens when metals are refined. They are subjected to very high temperatures

resulting in dross coming to the top and when it is skimmed off, what is left is the pure metal. A lady went to a silversmith and asked him to tell her about the process of refining silver. After he fully described the process to her, she asked what he did during the process, just sit there. The silversmith explained that he had to keep his eyes fixed on the furnace the whole time. Should the time for refining be exceeded in the slightest degree, the silver would be injured. As the lady started to leave she asked one more question. "When do you know the process is complete?" The silversmith quickly said, "When I can see my reflection in the silver, the refining process is finished." When we persevere through trials, people can see the reflection of Jesus in our lives and we can be sure that God is with us, faithfully watching over us

Think of examples to illustrate the difference between temptations and trials.

Have you known someone who has gone through a trial that has "perfected" them? How have you seen God's reflection in them?

Week 10 – Day 5

Perseverance is a Means of Spreading the Gospel

James 1:2-4

Like it or not, all of us will face adversity at some time. The adversity may be small and annoying or it may be traumatic and very difficult. However the adversity comes, the way we respond to it will reveal our character. Several years ago, I (Mary) awoke in the middle of the night with a man on top of me. He tied my hands and feet, raped me and left me unable to seek help. For 16 hours I lay with my hands and feet turning black due to the ties cutting off circulation. I spent nine days in the hospital followed with many weeks of care and physical and occupational therapy to restore use to my hands and feet. I remember asking God once why this had to happen to me to which He replied, "Why not you? You live in a world where evil is all around you. You are not exempt from it." I was blessed with so many people praying for me, extending love and care to me. I learned many lessons from that experience. One is that God will bring good out of horrible situations and His Gospel can be spread. We need to look for the good He wants to bring from the experience rather than focusing on the tragedy of the situation.

A lady whom I had known sent a letter to me telling me that as a child she had been molested by her step-father. She had never forgiven him for that. By now, she was the mother of four children. From a letter I had sent to her, she felt that I had already been able to forgive my perpetrator. God convicted her that she needed to call her step-father and tell him she forgave him, but everything in her fought doing that. Instead she ran out to work in the garden, but God did not let her off the hook. Finally she went to the phone and called her step-father. She told him she forgave him and before their conversation ended, he had given his heart to the Lord. Not long after that, he was diagnosed with cancer and within three months, he passed away. At his funeral, family members shared how they wanted whatever he had found because his life had been so dramatically changed. Several of the family members that day turned to Christ as they learned about salvation that was available to them through Jesus. The Gospel can be spread as a result of our persevering through adversity.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, the believers experienced terrible persecution which resulted in their leaving Jerusalem and going to many different areas. What resulted from their being dispersed throughout the world?

How can the church encourage and help someone going through adversity?

Week 10 – Day 6

Through Perseverance Our Awareness of God’s Activity Among Us is Sharpened

Hebrews 12:1-4

It is not unusual for a body of believers to face trials. Sometimes there are people who are more mature in their faith who feel the church should step out by faith into certain ministries while others oppose the idea because they work out of the secular world mindset. It means the church must be faithful to lay a strong foundation for knowing God and recognizing God’s will. Prayer needs to be very central in the life of the church. It also means that people will need to persevere as they wait for others to catch the vision.

The church I told about in Lesson 1 which went through a tornado realized that God was not happy with the decision they had made. They had made repairs on the church instead of adding the necessary classrooms, restrooms and kitchen. They experienced a lot of trials as they built that church. They seemed to face one wall after another, not enough money or not enough skilled people to do the work. But there was unity that the decision to build was of God. They persevered and their faith grew. One lady committed her Sunday egg money for the church. In telling about that, she said she had read of others who had done that and discovered that their hens laid more eggs on Sunday than any other day. She really didn’t believe it but when it happened to her, she could only praise God. They listened to each other as God led first one and then another to pursue some aspect of the building. For example, one lady said that God had laid on her heart a need to get the exterior doors ordered though they were not nearly ready to hang the doors. In response, a few went to the nearest city where they could be ordered prepared with the exact dimensions. After they put in their order, the man taking their order informed them that their door size was a little irregular but they were setting molds that day and they could have them ready soon, otherwise it would have been six months before they would have been setting molds again. As they dealt with the obstacles that arose in the building process, they became much more aware of God’s involvement in this process. Their faith grew. They faced each trial together and saw God answer so many of their prayers.

When have you seen God affirm you or your church as you went through a time of struggle?

How have you or others helped your church persevere when they faced obstacles either of a spiritual or physical nature?

What things stand out to you as important to remember when you are faced with adversity or obstacles?

Week 10 - Day 7

Group Prayer:

- Praise God for His wisdom and love
- Thank God that He never gives you more troubles than you can bear
- Share with one another an obstacle you are facing and pray for each other to be faithful as you persevere to complete the plan of God
- Pray for your church to faithfully prepare people to understand that adversity comes to help develop our character so when faced with adversity God will be glorified
- Close by singing together the Doxology or a song of your choice

WEEK 11: We Value Spiritual Gifts

Declaration: I am eagerly pursuing spiritual gifts. (I Corinthians 14:1)

Day 1

Key Verse:

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. . . Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” I Corinthians 12:4, 7

Life Experience

In 1904, Revival came to Wales. (See sources at the end of this week.) Many people were filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered to go out and minister. The blessings spread from church to church. During revival meetings, sometimes one church would be so full, they would have to open a second church to hold the overflow crowd. The meetings would last for several hours—sometimes as long as 10 hours. Often no one gave a sermon. The gatherings were characterized, instead, by singing, testimonies and prayer. Young people rather than trained ministers often led these services. Evan Roberts, one of the leaders of the revival in South Wales, had many visions and, later in life, healing miracles and other spiritual gifts accompanied his ministry (Orr). George and Stephen Jeffreys were saved during the Welsh Revival and started one of the first Pentecostal organizations. They had a powerful ministry with healing miracles and evangelism. Rees Howells was also converted during the revival. He was called to be a powerful intercessor. He started the Bible College of Wales that was used in strategic intercession that greatly impacted the outcome of World War II. Over 150,000 people were saved in Wales alone in the first year. The Holy Spirit inspired many to become evangelists and missionaries and carry this anointing around the world. England, India, the United States and other countries were impacted by the Welsh Revival. When the Holy Spirit comes with power, it is not just so we can enjoy renewal in our churches. It is to empower us to minister to other and evangelize the unsaved. Gifts of the Spirit are given to help us minister more effectively.

What would help you minister more effectively to others?

Week 11 - Day 2

Spiritual Gifts

Acts 19:1-6, 11-20

Anointings or spiritual gifts are not the same as natural talents. God gave you natural abilities when He created you. Your natural talents and abilities are a gift from God, but when we refer to **a spiritual gift**, it is something that **enables us to do what we couldn't do without the power of the Holy Spirit**. Sometimes God enhances our natural gift with supernatural ability and then it becomes a spiritual gift. Consider Peter who was naturally bold and outspoken, but he did not naturally have the ability to move 3,000 people to repentance with one sermon until he was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:41). He did not have the ability to walk down the street and heal people just by letting his shadow touch them until he was empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31-5:16). It is the Holy Spirit who gives us spiritual gifts. As each person recognizes and uses their spiritual gift, it builds up the body of Christ and the power of God working through us testifies to the unsaved that God is alive and active in our church. In Acts 19 we are told that the baptism of the Holy Spirit came to Ephesus with speaking in tongues and prophesying (verse 6). There were “extraordinary miracles,” and demons were being cast out (verse 12). As a result “the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing” (verse 20). When the church operates in the power of God with spiritual gifts, it is a testimony to the world which leads people to salvation and frees

them from sickness and demonic oppression. Spiritual gifts are needed to allow the church to do all that God calls us to. In the New Testament, there are three lists of spiritual gifts that we will briefly look at this week.

What is the value of having spiritual gifts?

Week 11 – Day 3

Practical Gifts

Romans 12:3-7

In this passage, Paul lists several useful gifts that are essential for the smooth operation of the Church. He starts off by warning us not to get puffed up or think too highly of ourselves. We recognize that it is God's grace and mercy that gives gifts, and they are not for our own benefit, but to build up and help the Body of Christ. Some of these gifts are also very useful in the marketplace and may enhance our abilities in business, media, arts, or other activities. We want to recognize what our own gifts are, and use them to serve others.

The list in Romans includes prophesy, faith, serving or helps, teaching, encouraging others, contributing generously, leadership or administration, and mercy (compassion). Some of these gifts, like serving, may sound less important, but these are very valuable gifts. Every church needs people who are willing to fix up the building, serve meals, and help those in need.

Sometimes the person who is a good administrator gets impatient with the person whose gift is compassion because they are disorganized. The person who has a gift of mercy may wonder why others don't feel the same concern for the needy that they have. The person who has the gift of prophesy may be impatient with those whose gift is giving generously. We must recognize that we all have different gifts. Instead of looking at people's weaknesses, we need to look for the gift God has deposited in each person and honor them for it.

Can you think of people who demonstrate each of these gifts?

Are there some of these gifts that are missing from your church? Pray God would raise up people with each gift.

Week 11 – Day 4

Leaders to Equip the Church

Ephesians 4:7, 11-16

Here we are told that Jesus gave gifts of people who are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to the Church. It goes on to explain that their job is *equipping* or training others to do the "works of service" so the Church will mature and become more like Christ. The person who has the gift of evangelism helps others understand the importance of reaching the lost and trains others to evangelize. Often this is done by taking people with them when they are ministering to others. The person who is a prophet is not the only one prophesying in the church. 1 Corinthians 14:31 says, "For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged." Those who are given the leadership role of prophet are to *equip others* to learn to hear God accurately so that they, too, may prophesy. Teachers will not do all the teaching themselves because they are training others who will become gifted teachers.

At one time I (Charlotte) had a pastor whose greatest gift was recognizing, encouraging, and equipping others to use their gifts. He recognized that another person and I had a gift for preaching and encouraged us to become recorded ministers. He also gave us opportunities to preach and teach. He recognized that a quiet, gifted musician in our church had a real heart for worship and put her in charge

of planning the worship services. A woman who loved missions became our Missions Coordinator. A couple with a heart for Youth were encouraged and supported in that ministry. Many people were involved in ministry, and he helped equip and encourage them to use their gifts. God never intended for one paid minister to do all the work of the church. He did not give one person all the gifts of ministry. Instead it takes a team ministry to effectively reflect the diversity of the fullness of God's character. The five gifts listed in Ephesians are to lead the church by equipping everyone to participate and helping each person find their place in ministry.

Confess and repent for any ways you have not honored all the gifts or people in leadership.

Ask God how you can use your spiritual gifts to equip others or how you can put yourself in a place to more effectively learn from those who have spiritual gifts.

Week 11 – Day 5

Gifts for Ministry

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

This passage starts off with a warning not to be deceived by false spirits, and Paul tells us how to test for false spirits. If a person cannot say that Jesus Christ is Lord, then do not be deceived. Even if they show supernatural abilities, they are not representing God. Then Paul goes on to list nine wonderful gifts that demonstrate the power of God, and help the church minister more effectively. They are:

Wisdom Word of Knowledge Faith
Healing gifts Miracles Prophecy Discerning spirits
Tongues Interpretation of tongues

Some churches are not familiar with the gifts of the Spirit, and so do not recognize them, or know how to incorporate them into their church. It was not until I was in college that I first heard someone teach on the spiritual gifts listed in Corinthians. However, Paul tells us in two different verses to desire spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 14:1 we are told to "Eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy," and in 1 Corinthians 12:31 is says, "But earnestly desire the greater gifts."

These are not just gifts for a few individuals. Ordinary Christians can manifest these spiritual gifts. We are told in Acts 2:17-18 that in the last days God will pour out His Spirit and our sons and daughters will prophesy, even servants—both men and women—will prophesy. It also says that there shall be dreams and visions. Both young and old will be effected by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that is coming before Jesus comes again. Learning to recognize and encourage the expression of each of the spiritual gifts will help the church minister more effectively. If your church is not familiar with all the gifts, it can be helpful to bring in someone who can explain and encourage spiritual gifts in your fellowship.

Are you familiar with all these spiritual gifts? Are they manifest in your meeting? Why or why not? If not, discuss the ones you are less familiar with.

Week 11- Day 6

Ask and Receive

Luke 11:5-14

Every Christian has the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. However, we can ask for more of the power of the Spirit in our lives and in our churches. In the Bible, the people of Ephesus had been baptized for the forgiveness of sin, but Paul said they still needed to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-4). We also know that the disciples had been baptized with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2), but they

asked for another outpouring of the Holy Spirit when they needed more boldness and wanted God to confirm their preaching with healing miracles (Acts 4:29-31).

Do you see a need for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit on your own individual life and on the corporate life of the church? Do you want to see more of the gifts of the Spirit and the power of God manifest in your church? The unsaved are often convicted of sin when they see the Holy Spirit's power demonstrated by a church. We see examples of this in the ministry of Tommy Hicks, Mariah Woodworth-Etter, Reinhardt Bonnke and others. When the church begins to walk in power with healing miracles, prophesy, words of knowledge and manifestations of all the gifts of the Spirit, more people will turn to God and be saved and the church will be empowered to disciple these new believers.

If you recognize that you need more of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in your own life or the life of your church, you may be wondering how to receive it. We pray and ask God to give us the Holy Spirit just as we pray and ask for salvation. We can even ask for specific gifts that we would like to receive (1 Corinthians 14:1). Jesus is the one who gives the Holy Spirit, so we do not need someone else to pray for us. We can ask Jesus to fill us with the Holy Spirit when we are praying in the privacy of our own home. Or, as a corporate body, the Church can ask for a more general outpouring of the Holy Spirit which will manifest as the power of God on the whole church. We are promised in Luke 11:13 that God our Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.

Ask God for a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit in your life or for the spiritual gifts you would like to see manifest in your church. If you feel you do not yet know enough about the gifts of the Spirit, look for others who can teach you more.

Week 11 – Day 7

Briefly discuss the questions from this week. Prayerfully consider how your church could more effectively encourage the activation of spiritual gifts. Then pray together as a group.

Group Prayer

- Praise God as the Master Builder and Jesus as the Chief Cornerstone of the church. Thank God for the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts.
- Identify members of the group who have demonstrated one or more of the gifts listed in Ephesians 4 or 1 Corinthians. Divide into small groups, lay hands on them, and ask God to increase His anointing.
- Thank God for the spiritual gifts and power of the Holy Spirit.
- If there are some gifts that seem to be missing from your fellowship, ask God to raise up people with those gifts and to pour out more of the power of the Holy Spirit on your church.

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WEEK 12: We join God in what He is doing

Declaration: We work together to accomplish God's purposes.

Day 1

Key Verse: John 5:19

“Jesus gave them this answer: ‘I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.’”

Life Experience:

The last five years that I (Mary) served on a mission field as a registered nurse, God led me into a profound ministry beyond my work at the hospital. It began when I sensed God wanted me to go into the villages and hold small group studies. Were these studies to be health related or was God leading me to do Bible studies? The idea of group studies would be foreign to my Kenyan friends because they were used to a teacher saying what they wanted them to know and giving little, or no, opportunity for them to interact. On a random invitation to a missionary's home on another compound, I learned about a program called Theological Education by Extension (TEE). I learned there was a series of ten week studies written primarily by Africans for Africans. They were programmed studies which were to be done five days a week followed with a group discussion. It became clear I was to do small group Bible studies in the villages. It seemed like an impossible task with my long working hours and preparations for nursing classes in the evening. Where would I begin?

When have you felt God nudging you to move into doing something you might never have thought you were capable of doing? How did you respond?

As I was considering the call to lead small group studies, a Kenyan evangelist, Meshack, came to pray with me. Meshack had an evangelistic ministry spending a week or more in a village visiting in homes, providing opportunity for people to make a commitment to Christ and counseling others who were broken-hearted. After praying with me that day, he asked if God might be asking me to follow-up his evangelistic weeks by offering to disciple these people through the small group studies. I asked a Bible School graduate if he would accompany me and provide translation when necessary. People eagerly joined the studies, faithfully did their preparations and followed out the practical things the study asked them to do. It became clear to me that there needed to be additional training for leaders. About that time, I learned that a Bible School teacher had already recognized this need doing some leadership development. As we talked together we realized that God had put together a team. It would begin in the village with Meshack doing evangelism. Sammy and I would follow up holding ten-week Bible and discipleship studies, and Joseph would follow with four week studies in leadership development. It wasn't long until we were being asked to do this ministry throughout the area. The churches began to realize that younger people who normally were not allowed to hold leadership roles were capable of providing leadership that would strengthen their faith communities. God was at work.

Henry Blackaby² has coined an expression for describing what we experienced as **joining God in the work He was doing**. He says, “When you see the Father at work around you that is your invitation to adjust your life to Him and join Him in that work.” It was an amazing awareness of our **joining God in the work He was doing** as we worked together to provide evangelism, discipleship and leadership training. It felt like God confirmed His activity among us as we saw people's lives changed. It evolved into my training the Bible School students for continuing this work in the villages.

² Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Experiencing God*, LifeWay Press, 2007, page 80

When have you been involved in working with a team? What was it like to be part of a team? How did you honor each other's gifts?

What do you see God doing in your church or community? How does He want you to partner with Him and others?

Week 12 - Day 2

Accountability

Read Mark 6:7-13 and Acts 13:1-3.

We are a very individualistic society and often move out on our own without testing our calling, perhaps without prayerful support of others, or a realization that God may be preparing us for a certain aspect of a ministry which will enhance what someone else is already involved with. As we pursue intimacy and purity with God we begin to see things from God's perspective. God broadens our vision for ministry and draws us to others who love God and desire to see the Kingdom of God manifest on earth. Then God uses the various gifts He has given to accomplish much more than one person could do alone.

Accountability to others keeps us focused. It provides a spiritual support system where we can test further leadings or work through obstacles we face with people who care. When Jesus sent the disciples out, He sent them two by two and they were accountable to Jesus upon return. In the Acts passage, we read how the Holy Spirit led the church to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work God was calling them to do. After completing the missionary journey they were called to do, we read in Acts 14:27, "Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles."

When our TEE team realized that God had brought us together for this ministry that seemed much bigger than we were, we knew it was important that we meet faithfully every week to pray and seek God's guidance for the ministry—the villages we were to enter, meeting the needs of people we met, and being faithful to the tasks He entrusted to us.

Share about groups or individuals who have helped clarify, encourage or hold you accountable to follow God's leading.

Prayerfully consider if there is anything God is leading you to do or explore further. Are there others that share your interest in this?

Week 12 – Day 3

Assembling Together

Hebrews 10:19-25

There is so much value in meeting together and sharing with each other what we see God doing within ourselves or what God is doing within the church. Often as we share, we mention a part of what God is doing and others add to that until the picture is clear. In an article titled "*Why is Koinonia So Important for The Great Commission?*"³ Rick Joyner offers some interesting comments. Joyner says, "When He [Jesus] says that wherever two or more are gathered in His name He will be in their midst," Matthew 18:20, the word "gathered" does not mean merely occupying the same room or space. It is where they have been "assembled together" like the parts of a bicycle have been assembled together. This is why we are told "not to forsake the assembling together," Hebrews 10:25.

³ "*Why is Koinonia So Important for The Great Commission?*" by Rick Joyner. Posted March 18, 2014 on Elijah List at www.elijahlist.com

*How is being “assembled” [like a bicycle] different from being “gathered”?
What would it look like if your church was assembled rather than gathered?*

Week 12 - Day 4

God Gathers His Body

I Corinthians 12:4-12

There was an occasion in our (Mary’s) church when the choir director felt it was time to step down from her position. She had done a good job for many years. However, no one came forward within the church to accept that responsibility. A notice was put in the bulletin that the music committee was looking for someone to use their gifts as the choir director. The Sunday that announcement came out in the bulletin, a couple visited our church. Shortly after they sat down, they became intensely engaged in a conversation with each other. After the service many of the congregation welcomed them, yet they seemed in no hurry to leave. When opportunity came, they spoke with the pastor. They had moved to the area where he had accepted a teaching position as the music teacher. He told the pastor that he had been the choir director at the church they had just left. They wondered if he could be considered for the choir director we were looking for. God brought into our body of believers a person with the exact gifting we were lacking. God gathers together the people He chooses to form a congregation. We need to be sensitive to God leading us to a particular church.

Are there people in your church who have not found their place in the “assembly”? How could you help them?

Week 12 – Day 5

Overcoming Disunity

Ephesians 4:1-3

We are reminded to be “humble and gentle, be patient” and bear “with one another in love” making “every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Satan does not want us to be in unity and attempts to divide us in many ways. One of the ways Satan causes disunity is to cause us to become offended about someone or something. We need to guard our hearts to avoid a spirit of offense or a critical attitude.

Some people who don’t seem to fit may still be God’s gift to the Body. Once a person who had some disabilities began attending church. She was sometimes demanding and disruptive. Someone wisely said, “God has brought this person for a reason and we must show God’s love for this person.” As a result the congregation worked together to show this person the acceptance and love of God, and encourage her in her spiritual development. Members of the congregation grew spiritually as they intentionally responded in loving ways and honored the fact that every person is a gift from God. When the church faces difficult times, they can become stronger spiritually, but often today the church seems to get torn apart. Let us make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit.

How do you see Satan attempting to cause division in the church today?

Week 12 - Day 6

Church Membership

Ephesians 4:11-16

Church membership is one way we make an intentional commitment to one another. I (Mary) was visiting with a lady once who had attended a church for many years. She had been active, but had never

taken the step of joining the church. What difference would it make anyway if she became a member? However, she took the step and became a member. In her conversation with me, she admitted that belonging to a church as a member had made a very important difference to her. She became a part of the visioning and realized she was a part of seeing those visions come to fruition. If you take church membership as being obedient to God, there are many benefits.

Becoming a member of a church also brings responsibility. We have mentioned using your gifts to benefit the church. Membership means becoming involved in decision making during business meetings. The church relies heavily on its members taking initiative to see that the church is clean, that child care is provided, that there are finances provided to carry out the ministries they agree to do together. Praying for the ministries, visiting the sick, preparing funeral dinners, supporting your leaders, and financially supporting the needs of the church are just a few of the responsibilities a member finds important. It is not so easy to walk away when things may go through a rough period, if you are a member. A member is willing to find God's way through difficulties. Members have made a commitment to be there for each other and for the good the whole Body.

As new members join the church older members must be willing to mentor them, and then be willing to relinquish some control so the responsibilities are shared. This requires a willingness to accept change and not require perfection of newer leaders who are still learning. However, there must also be a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit to know when new members are spiritually ready to lead, so they are not put into leadership too soon.

Are there ways your church could more effectively mentor new members so they can take on responsibilities of church membership? How have others helped prepare you for church leadership? How does it cause difficulties if older members will not relinquish control or new members are put in positions of leadership too soon?

Week 12 - Day 7

Briefly discuss the questions from this week. Prayerfully consider if God is showing you an area where He is at work and your church can partner with Him.

Group Prayer:

- Enter a time of worship and praise. Praise Jesus for who He is, including that He is Head of the Church
- Move into a period of silence encouraging people to focus prayers on building unity, praying for leaders in the church and laYM, and prayers about working together to fulfill God's plans.
- Continue praying as God leads.
- Have the leader close with prayer.
- If anyone needs prayer ministry, move into small groups and pray for one another.

WEEK 13: We are Radically Surrendered

Declaration: I am totally surrendered, radically obedient and boldly praying for revival.

Week 13 - Day 1

Key Verse: Luke 9:23-25 NIV

“Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”

Life Experience:

My husband and I (Charlotte) lived on a farm in rural Iowa. We never had any desire to go overseas or plans to move from the farm. However, in 1993 we felt God was leading us to move off the farm and live in a small town nearby. God even confirmed because one day as I prayed God showed me a picture of a white house with black shutters and said, “I have a place for you.” At the time that house was not for sale but the day it became available the realtor called me. When I drove by it I knew it was the place God had shown me. My husband, the farmer, thought that living off the farm was a radical idea, and it took him quite some time to be reconciled to it, even though the town was only a few miles from the farm. We lived there 13 years while my husband continued farming, and then we found ourselves considering the possibility of moving 60 miles away to another community. It would mean that my husband would leave the farm in the care of our son and find a different job. Because we had said yes the first time and discovered God blessed us, this second move was easier. My husband learned a great deal in his new job, and we found many reasons to be thankful for our new community.

Shortly after moving, a friend invited us to go with her on a trip to Jamaica to visit missionary friends. We agreed and had a delightful time. Then God opened an opportunity for me to work on a curriculum project in Kenya. When I said yes to this opportunity I had no idea that it would require years of hard work, prayer, cross cultural communication, and many trips to Kenya at our own expense. Nor did I know the many blessings we would receive in terms of new relationships and challenging experiences.

Eventually God led us to move back to the farm. In many ways this transition was the hardest one of all, for me. God led me to retire from teaching and God from preaching regularly, as well as setting aside other activities and distractions. I was to make prayer my top priority. I found it very difficult to just sit and wait for God. However, each decision was easier because we had been obedient with earlier decisions and found God faithful. God led us gently step by step to the places where He wanted us to be.

When has God asked you to make a change or take on a challenge that was difficult for you?

What would be hardest for you—changing careers, moving to a new place, going to another country, going against your friends and family’s wishes, or something else? Why?

Week 13 - Day 2

Fully surrendered

Psalm 32:8-11

If the church is going to demonstrate the power of God, we need spiritual awakening and revival. To birth and sustain revival the church must practice radical obedience to Jesus Christ no matter what the cost. To surrender to God means that we submit our will to Him. We let Him lead and guide us. We bring our attitudes, our motives, our thoughts and desires into alignment with God’s heart. This is something that is foreign to those who have accepted a comfortable, non-challenging, lukewarm Christianity.

Evan Roberts was a man of radical obedience. When he was 13 years old as he worked in the mines of Wales, he started to pray regularly to be filled with the Holy Spirit and for revival in Wales. After 13

years of prayer, during the spring of 1904, Roberts was awakened repeatedly in the middle of the night and would pray from 1:00-5:00 a.m. Shortly after that he attended a meeting led by Seth Joshua. Seth Joshua prayed, “Bend Me,” as a prayer of surrender. This became a favorite prayer of Roberts. Later, that same day, as he repeatedly prayed, “Lord, Bend me,” he experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The next few days Roberts had several visions, and he began to pray for 100,000 souls to be saved. He felt God was telling him to go back to his hometown of Loughar and preach to the young people there. He went home and asked the pastor to let him preach. After prayer meeting, Monday evening, they invited the young people to stay and hear what Roberts had to say. Seventeen young people stayed and the meeting didn’t end until every one of them was saved. The next night the church was packed and Roberts again led the service. The meetings continued and many were saved or filled with the Holy Spirit. Teams of young people traveled from church to church telling what God was doing. The meetings were characterized by prayer, singing, and testimonies. Roberts would often have a prayer chain where he would repeat this prayer, “Send the Holy Spirit now for Jesus Christ’s sake.” Then he asked each person, in turn, to repeat the prayer one by one. By the time they had all said it, the Holy Spirit’s Presence would come into the church. The Spirit would move and people were convicted of their sins. Prayer and testimonies, rather than preaching, were the main focus and sometimes no one gave a sermon. Often the services went on for hours—as long as 10 hours—and churches would be packed full with people standing outside waiting to get in. In at least one village the crowd got so large in one church they opened a second church and filled it, too.

Note the different kinds of prayer. How can you incorporate these different kinds of prayer in your own prayer life? Do I pray for revival daily?

Week 13 - Day 3

The Lukewarm Church.

Revelation 3:15-19

Unfortunately, the Laodicean Church describes many churches. The typical church in America in 2016 is lukewarm, neither hot nor cold. Pastors and churches have watered down the demands of the gospel to make it more acceptable to people who are unwilling to make sacrifices. Jesus was not afraid to confront those who followed Him with the true demands of discipleship. He knew many would fall away when they realized the cost but He does not need lukewarm followers. Jesus is looking for radical obedience.

John Burton⁴, in an article titled “Good Christian People—affirming a lukewarm culture,” points us to the radical words of Evan Roberts for the requirements of revival. Evan Roberts, a leader of the Welsh Revivals of the early 1900s wrote in response to Frank Bartleman’s question, “What is needed to bring revival?” These are Roberts’ stirring words:

“Congregate the people who are willing to make a total surrender. Pray and wait. Believe God’s promises. Hold daily meetings.”

Bartleman took Roberts’ advice to heart. He joined with William Seymour and others for daily prayer and the result was the powerful Azusa Street Revival which gave birth to many Pentecostal Churches and led to widespread renewal, revival, and missionary activity.

In what ways do we compromise or water down the demands of discipleship to make it more acceptable to more people?

⁴ Burton, John, “Good Christian People—Affirming a lukewarm culture,” June 16, 2015 from *johnburton.net* This excellent article inspired this lesson.

What do you think would happen if churches demanded radical discipleship like Jesus did? What does it mean if we are unwilling to sacrifice for Jesus?

Week 13 – Day 4

Total Surrender

Read Luke 14:25-27 and Matthew 8:18-22. *As you read these scriptures, consider what they mean in the context of Jesus' call today for radical discipleship and Roberts' call to "total surrender".*

The first requirement for revival, according to Evan Roberts, is "total surrender". We will look at several things which often keep us from obedience. Then we will see what Jesus said about each one. Jesus frequently challenged his disciples to put Him first, even above family. Many people who serve God faithfully have had to make the choice of God or family first. Sometimes family members do not understand this and become angry or even estranged, but a true disciple will put Jesus first no matter what the cost. I (Charlotte) remember one time when I felt God leading me one direction and my husband pulling another direction. As I prayed God clearly asked me, "Who is your Lord?" When I answered, "You are." He responded, "Then follow me." I stepped out to follow what I believed was God's will in the situation. After just a couple of weeks my husband changed his mind and came into agreement with me. However, I had to step out in obedience first. If you ask someone why they don't come to prayer meeting or even to church, often the answer will be related to family activities or the objections of a family member. We need to seek God's will in each situation, and ask Him what He would have us do. Family is certainly important, but if it keeps us from obedience to the Lord, we have elevated family above God.

When and how does family conflict with fully following Jesus? When have you been challenged to choose Jesus over family? Explain.

Day 13 – Day 5

The offense of the gospel

Mark 4:16-19, Mark 10:21-23

Sometimes we are so afraid of persecution, giving offense, or suffering for the gospel that we do not boldly share the good news of Jesus with others. We may back away from what we know God is calling us to do because of the opinions of others. Jesus said that many would fall away because of trials and persecution. We will have to accept that many people are insulted by the cross of Jesus Christ and our radical obedience offends them. To talk about the power of the cross is to invite their scorn and even, at times, hatred. The world wants to believe that there are many ways to heaven, but Jesus says there is only one. He is the way and no man comes to the Father but by Him (John 14:6). This offends the world. If we are to radically follow Jesus, we will, at times, offend others and suffer scorn and persecution. The church is in need of bold disciples who make pleasing God their only priority.

Wealth, comforts and the pleasures of life can also easily become our main focus. We can get so focused on our own comfort that we don't want to hear a sermon that challenges us. We may become so satisfied with our comforts that we won't inconvenience ourselves to go to prayer meeting or to help a neighbor. We may pour all our energy into our work, or we may spend every free moment focused on our favorite form of entertainment—sports, shopping, parties, or "screens" (Internet, TV, cell phone, and so on). Sadly, many people are like the rich, young ruler. They see what discipleship will cost and they turn away from Jesus. They give up the wealth of heaven for the pleasures of earth.

*When and how have you been challenged to choose Jesus over pleasure, wealth, or convenience?
When have you struggled with “not offending” others? How can we boldly proclaim the gospel
without fear of man?*

Week 13 – Day 6

Pray and wait

Luke 21:33-36

Evan Roberts’ second requirement for revival was “pray and wait.” Burton writes this about “Pray and Wait.” (*Good Christian People—Affirming a lukewarm culture*, June 16, 2015 from *johnburton.net.*)

“This next phrase will eliminate even more people...Finding those who will actively participate hour after hour in prayer is a tough task, though it’s a non-negotiable one. The church is a house of prayer, and it’s an indictment on today’s leadership that people can participate in church activities and call themselves Christians without having a fervent, devoted life of continual prayer.”

It is important that as we pray, we practice Roberts’ third piece of advice, “Believe God’s promises.” Our prayers are meaningless unless we attach faith to them. We must declare the promises as statements of faith and cling to them, even if they are a long time in coming. Hanging onto our faith even when it is challenged is the spiritual warfare that brings victory.

Are we willing to even consider Roberts’ final piece of advice—“daily meetings”? Is revival important enough that we would lay aside other activities and make time daily to gather with others and pray? History shows that daily prayer precedes and accompanies revival. In Acts 2 we are told that the early church gathered together daily (Acts 2:46). Daily prayer meetings were essential for the Welsh Revival and the Azusa Street Revival. During the 1850s there were daily noon prayer meetings in New York City and other major cities in the U.S. There were also week-long camp meetings in the west. Nearly always when revival does break forth, there are, at least for a time, *daily* meetings. What could possibly be worth this much sacrifice—total surrender, prayer, waiting, standing in faith on the promises and meeting daily? There is only one thing and that is Jesus Christ. When prayer meetings become an encounter with the Living Christ we are eager to return regularly to pray together. When the Holy Spirit is moving among us, we are drawn together to be filled and refilled. When there are salvations, healings and deliverances occurring in our meetings we will want to be there. However, if a mighty move of the Spirit is to come, someone must be willing to make the sacrifice BEFORE the encounter. Someone must be willing to surrender ALL before they are filled with the new wine. Someone must be willing to WAIT and PRAY when nothing seems to be happening. Someone must have the FAITH to stand on the promises until the fullness comes. Are you willing to totally surrender, radically obey, and watch and pray with uncompromising faith until the power of God comes? Who is willing to pay the price?

What hinders radical obedience and total surrender in your own life? In the life of the church? Do Evan Roberts’ words seem radical to you? Why or why not?

Ask God if there is anything or any way that you have not fully surrendered to God? Ask God to give you the courage to yield fully to Him.

Week 13 – Day 7

Briefly discuss the questions and how this lesson has challenged you to more radical obedience.

Group Prayer

- In small groups, pray for one another.
- Praise God for His good plans for the church and for your life.
- Pray together for revival.

Additional Resources for Intimacy and Purity

Adoration Prayer Book by Bob Hartley (2010) gives a list of names of God in alphabetical order and gives at least one verse for each name. I highly recommend this book to help you learn to offer adoration prayers. It is available at bobhartley.org or as a Kindle book from Amazon.com. Start your prayer time each day with prayers of adoration and praise. (Theme: Intimacy)

PRAISE: Six Ways to Empower your Prayer Life —PRAISE is an acronym for Praise, Receive grace, Align our hearts with God, Intercession, Say what God says, and Encounter God in the Word. This is a short spiral bound book for revitalizing one's own prayer life. (Theme: Intimacy)

Becoming Like Him – A weekly study for small groups. Each lesson focuses on one name or characteristic of God and considers how we can become like him. 13 lessons. Available as PDF. (Themes: Intimacy & Purity)

UNITY - Intimacy and purity lead to UNITY in the Body of Christ. This study explores important themes related to unity such as Responding to Conflicts, Praying Together, Discerning God will and Radical Surrender. Designed to be used for individual daily study and weekly group discussion and prayer. 13 lessons. Written by Mary Glenn Hadley & Charlotte Stangeland. Available as PDF. (Theme: Unity)

Pursuing Pentecost – An overview of Intimacy, Purity, Unity and Power with many stories of revivals. This book is designed to help individuals and churches prepare their hearts for revival. The book has daily readings for individual study and weekly questions for discussion and prayer. Written by Charlotte Stangeland. (Theme: Intimacy, Purity, Unity and Power)

Pursuing the Power of God – This book focuses on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and God's plan for 5-fold leadership in the church. Available by late 2017. (Power of God)

Additional resources

Peacemaking for Beginners: A Biblical Approach to Peacemaking for Children (K-2nd)

Each lesson includes a Bible Story, game, craft idea and several activities to teach peacemaking skills such as listening, staying calm, problem solving together, using kind words, being fair, asking forgiveness, and valuing differences. *Profits from this book go to peace curriculum for Kenyan Schools or for scholarships for girls in Kenya.*

Workshop. Charlotte Stangeland is a recorded minister in the Friends Church and is available to teach, preach, or lead a workshop about Intimacy, Purity, Unity, and Power. She can bring with her a gifted team to offer prayer ministry.

For more information or to order books contact Charlotte Stangeland

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