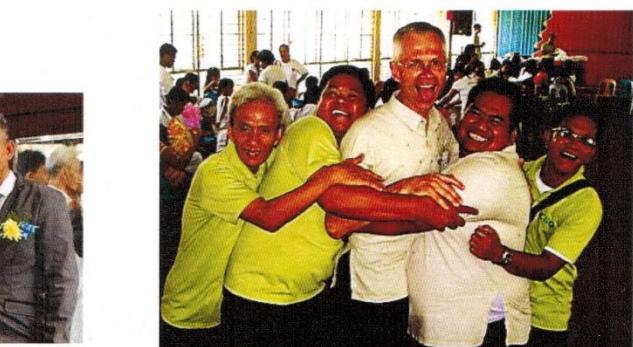


## Book 2

# Basics of God's Training



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**Mike Bergen – Basic Training Manuals**

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# Guidelines for Using the 3 Basic Training Manuals

The best way to use these manuals is to follow the example of how Jesus trained his followers. Here is a summary of what Jesus did to train them:

- Jesus spent a lot of time with his followers.
- Jesus discussed many life experiences with his disciples and helped them apply God's Word to their daily lives.
- Jesus helped them understand the Father and how to grow in relationship with the Father with the Holy Spirit's help.

Jesus Christ not only provided salvation for everyone in the world, but he also taught and exemplified an effective way to help others, and ultimately how to impact the whole world. He did this by focusing on a few disciples who really wanted to learn from him. He could have started a big organization or set up a school with classes, but instead he invested his three years of ministry into the lives of a few followers with whom he spent a lot of time, discussion, prayer, and working together. His influence then multiplied across the globe.

The apostle Paul later said that he followed the example of Jesus for how he helped people (1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1) and then he exhorted us to follow his example in doing so.

This is why the three Basic Training Manuals have been developed. These manuals are tools for helping people learn to follow Jesus' example for helping people, as described in the Bible. Jesus trained his disciples from the beginning of his ministry to the time when he sent them out as leaders, and that is also the purpose of these manuals.

## How to follow Jesus' example by using the Basic Training Manuals

- ***Spend time with disciples.*** Get to know them. Show compassion for what is happening in every part of their lives and learn how they have grown in their life with Jesus Christ.
- ***Pray frequently for disciples.*** Jesus spent many nights in prayer. Also, Paul recorded many of his own prayers in the New Testament. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help the disciples you know to understand more about God and Jesus Christ.
- ***Help disciples focus on knowing God more completely.*** Help them understand more about God and also see what God is doing in every aspect of life. (Book 1)
- ***Help disciples know how to live by God's Word in daily life.*** Ask God to give you wisdom about which things in God's Word would be most helpful for them at the present time of their lives. When you know the content of the three Basic Training Manuals, the manuals will help you know which places in God's Word will be helpful for the disciple. You don't need to go through the material in the same order that it is written. Book 2 is especially helpful for a disciple to make progress in character and habits for the rest of his life. You can pray and decide which things will be helpful for the disciple according to the experiences they are going through.

- **Have many personal discussions with each disciple.** Discuss things they are learning about God. Learn about their progress in living life with Jesus Christ. If possible, include one or two other disciples in the discussions so everyone can learn from each other.
- **Work together and serve together with disciples.** Be an example to the disciple and help them learn from your example and experiences.
- **Follow the instructions for “How to Become a Spiritual Parent”,** at the end of Book 3.

### Other ways to use these manuals

- Resource for teaching, preaching, and leading Bible studies
- Guidelines for training a pastor
- Guidelines for parents to train children
- Overview of the Bible

## The 3 Basic Training Manuals

### Book 1

#### Basics about God

*(A workbook to know God and the Bible)*

- God Greatness Shown in History
- God’s Salvation
- God’s Characteristics
- God’s Promises

### Book 2

#### Basics of God’s Training

- First Steps
- Basics of God’s Training

### Book 3

#### Basics of God’s Family

*(A model for family and church)*

- The Basics of Family
- The Basics of Spiritual Family (Church)
- Practical Steps for Becoming a Spiritual Parent
- Practical Steps for Becoming a Mature Spiritual Leader
- Recognition and Certificates

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# Guidelines for using Book 2

The next section is fifteen areas of “**The Basics of God’s Training.**” God is always at work to help all His children grow in these fifteen basic areas. It is our choice for how much we want to cooperate with Him. Similar to when Jesus lived here as a man, each person had to choose if they would become a follower of Jesus Christ. Many just chose to listen to him occasionally, and some came to Jesus for healing. Each person benefited, but those who committed themselves to be whole-hearted followers of Christ were the ones who benefited most and who also had the privilege of God working through them to help others.

This collection of “Basics of God’s Training” contains fifteen truths from God’s Word that help us understand who God is, how He thinks and works, and how we can cooperate with Him. Each one is so basic and fundamental to life that we will be learning more about it and how to apply it for the remainder of our lives.

God is at work all the time, training us as His children and disciples. When we make commitments to cooperate with Him in every way possible, we grow in our relationship with Him and He is able to use us to help others in many ways. Consider and discuss each of these passages that explain some of this reality. How does each passage explain who God is, His purpose, His work, and how we can cooperate with Him?

- Romans 8:28-39
- Hebrews 12:1-11 (Note: Some translations use the word “discipline” or “chastening” in verses 5, 7, 8, 11. This same Greek word is also used in Eph. 6:4 and 2 Tim. 3:16. As we see in these other passages, this Greek word could be translated “training”. The picture can be thought of as a coach training athletes. The athletes **want** to go into training. The training is often difficult and painful, but the coach knows what will produce a strong athlete, and the athletes willingly cooperate. Consistent with this theme is another Greek word, “gymnazo”, which is used at the end of verse 11, and is often translated as “training”.
- 2 Peter 1:3-11

**God is the one personally training each disciple (His child) 24/7. He is the one for us to know, understand, and cooperate with. All discipleship plans should help the disciple cooperate with God’s continual training.**

## **Maturity comes with consistent practice of the basics**

Spiritual growth is similar to physical growth in many ways. For a person to grow and maintain health, he needs to be committed to regularly practice certain basics. He needs to be committed to get regular rest, which means often re-learning how to do it when circumstances

change. The same is true for eating a balanced diet daily, drinking plenty of water, exercising, practicing hygiene, and maintaining warmth. When our bodies change or circumstances change, we need to relearn how to apply these basics. Spiritual growth and health also require a commitment to practice certain basics. This means often re-learning how to apply the basics when life and circumstances change. This is what this series of Basics is all about.

**Hebrews 5:11-14** "We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the **mature**, who by **constant use** have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." (New International Version)

- The New American Standard Version says, "But solid food is for the mature, who because of **practice** have their senses trained to discern good and evil.
- The English Standard Version says, " But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by **constant practice** to distinguish good from evil."

### **Commitment to practice**

God asks you to make a commitment of obedience to His basic truths. Following is a list of fifteen of the most basic truths which God has asked us to put into practice in our lives. This list can vary in definition and number, but the foundational issue is that maturity in life with God will only come by consistent practice of these most basic truths. It is not enough to know them. Practice is what makes the difference.

### **Returning after failure**

Failure will happen and it will often discourage you, but God, in His grace, always has wide open arms for you to return to Him. This is a major part of the practice - to continually return to God, thank Him for His forgiveness, and again thank Him for His grace to obey Him. It really doesn't matter how often you fail, because as long as you are committed to continually return to Him, you WILL grow in maturity.

### **The best method for learning to practice the basics**

Jesus Christ was the master at training people to practice the basics of life with God. To do so, He lived, travelled, ate, and slept with a few chosen disciples. He trained them in the context of close friendship. They knew that Jesus loved them, accepted them, and totally understood them. Jesus' method of training was much more like a parent training his children than a teacher teaching students in a class. Jesus' training was primarily based on relationships. Jesus' method is still the best example for all people at all times. As He told His first disciples, "teach them (future disciples) to do all that I commanded you." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Training through relationships like Jesus did means that no one can boast of large numbers (such as 100 trained in a year). But when a leader trains through relationships, he can point to deep, lasting changes in people's lives.

Today, it's difficult for people to live together as Jesus did with His disciples, but people can still invest in building close relationships. When three to four people (especially of the same

gender) commit themselves to spend time together for the purpose of helping each other grow in their life with God, the results will be similar to what happened with Jesus' first disciples. Certain ingredients make these small groups of close friends effective for life change. These include:

- Commitment to love and accept each other, no matter what is shared, as Jesus did with His followers
- Commitment to take initiative in being open about every aspect of personal life
- Commitment to not share information with others outside the group without permission
- Commitment to use God's Word as the guide book for all of life
- Commitment to depend on God's Spirit as the primary teacher and leader

### **Guidelines for the small discipleship groups**

The fifteen Basics of God's Training provide a guideline for the small groups to focus on and follow. As previously said, the Basics are not only a list of truths to learn intellectually, but rather a list of principles Jesus wants His disciples to apply to every aspect of their lives.

It's humanly impossible to live by these basic principles on our own – that's why we need the help of God's Spirit. And God's Spirit works through the members of Christ's body. That's why we all need close, loving, open friendships for the remainder of our lives.

Practically speaking, church members will benefit from these close discipleship relationships by participating in three activities each week:

1. Worship and Bible study (including teaching) with others
2. A small group of 3-5 people, preferably the same gender, who discuss and pray about what is happening in their lives, and also discuss and pray about growing as followers of Jesus Christ.
3. Outreach of some kind – activities to communicate God's love, Bible discussions to introduce people to God's word, etc.

When these three activities are done with the same people, much like a family, spiritual growth happens in a similar way to the first disciples with Jesus Christ.

### **Analogy of why practice of the Basics is so important**

Many careers and occupations require a continual practice of the essentials which they learned when they first began their work. Athletes, even professional athletes, are told to repeatedly practice the basics of their sport. Basketball players need to continually practice their shooting, even their free throws, which they've been doing since they began their sport. Runners need to keep running to remain in shape. School bus drivers can easily become lax about practicing the basics of unloading and loading students, and that is often how accidents happen, even causing harm to students.

#### **NOTE**

*The fifteen Basics of God's Training are to be used according to immediate needs, and not always in the order written. A focus on #14 or #15 might be the first place to focus for some people. It is important to pray and ask for God's wisdom to know where to focus.*

## **Diagram of Life**

In the Bible God gives instructions for the practice of certain basic principles that are essential for a growing relationship with God and for relationships with people. The following diagram is an illustration of why these basics are so important for life. It illustrates how the spiritual realities of life affect the physical, material life that we can see and touch.

# GOD

- has all power and is in control of everything

## God's purpose

- Love
- Bring joy and peace
- Give full life
- Give eternal life

## God speaks TRUTH

Through the Bible / Jesus Christ

- Truth about God
- Truth about you
- Truth about everything

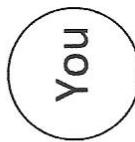
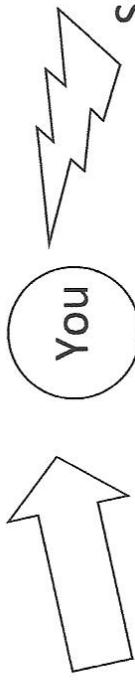
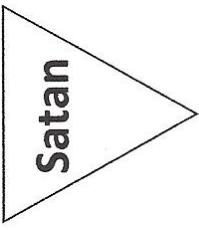
## Satan speaks LIES

Through feelings / desires

- Lies about God
- Lies about you
- Lies about everything

## Satan's purpose

- Deceive
- Destroy
- Bring pain to God
- Bring pain to people



Your choices  
of what you believe  
will affect  
your life with God  
and your life  
with everyone

Your family  
Your marriage  
Your business  
Your church  
Your neighbors  
All people  
ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

# God teaches us from Jesus' example

The heart of our Creator, Savior, and Father is that every person in the world would continually experience the fullness of the life he created us for (John 10:10, 15:9-11). As our Father, he continually teaches us and trains us so we can experience the fullest life possible and help others do the same. One important way he teaches us is through the example of the Lord Jesus when he lived here as a normal human.

Jesus Christ not only paid the penalty for our sin, He also demonstrated how a weak person can live in cooperation with their Father in Heaven. The Lord Jesus gave us a perfect example of how to manage our lives as humans in a very broken world – a world that is full of evil, sin, and selfishness of every kind. There are evil governments that are more powerful than individual people and can destroy thousands of people in many different ways. Spiritual beings that are completely evil affect people and have more power than them. But Jesus lived in the same kind of environment we now live in. By coming in a human body, he demonstrated how a weak person can live in this kind of environment. He did it with the same limitations that all people experience.

Jesus appeared to be an illegitimate child in his culture. He was a member of a race of people oppressed by a powerful government. He held no government position. With so many obstacles to make life difficult, he lived a life full of love and joy while helping many people.

## **The foundation of Jesus' life here**

We read in Philippians 2:5-7, “Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” As a human, he was a weak person like us, yet he lived a life of joy and fulfillment, serving others in a very broken and evil world. He did all this and kept free from sin at the same time. He was able to live that kind of life because of his relationship with his Father. His relationship with his Father was the only way he could live a life of fulfillment in this broken world, and it is the only way we can do the same.

Jesus taught his followers how they could also live this kind of life. For three years he was their example and teacher. Then, during his last evening with his close followers, Jesus summarized how he had lived his life with his Father and how his followers could do the same. We read this summary of his life in the prayer that he prayed to his Father, which is written in John 17. The things Jesus said during this long prayer are extremely important, because they are a summary for how we can live our lives in relationship with the same spiritual Father. Here is a list of key points:

- Jesus knew who his eternal Father was. John 17:1-3. (The one who has all power, who is full of love, perfect in justice, unlimited in knowledge, present everywhere, and who never changes.)
- Jesus knew God's word and obeyed God's word. John 17:6-8.
- Jesus knew his Father was the source of everything he had. John 17:7,10. His Father was not only the source, but also in control of everything – even of Satan and all evil!

- Jesus knew he had come from the Father and that he was sent here for a special purpose. John 17:3,4,8,18,25.
- Jesus knew that his Father is the Protector for everyone. John 17:11-12.
- Jesus knew how much his Father loved him. John 17:23,26.

These realities were the foundation for Jesus living his life here, and they need to be the foundation for our lives here in this broken world. The more you understand who your spiritual Father is, and the more you understand his abilities, his character, his thinking, and his feelings, the more you will be able to live like Jesus did, with the Holy Spirit's help!

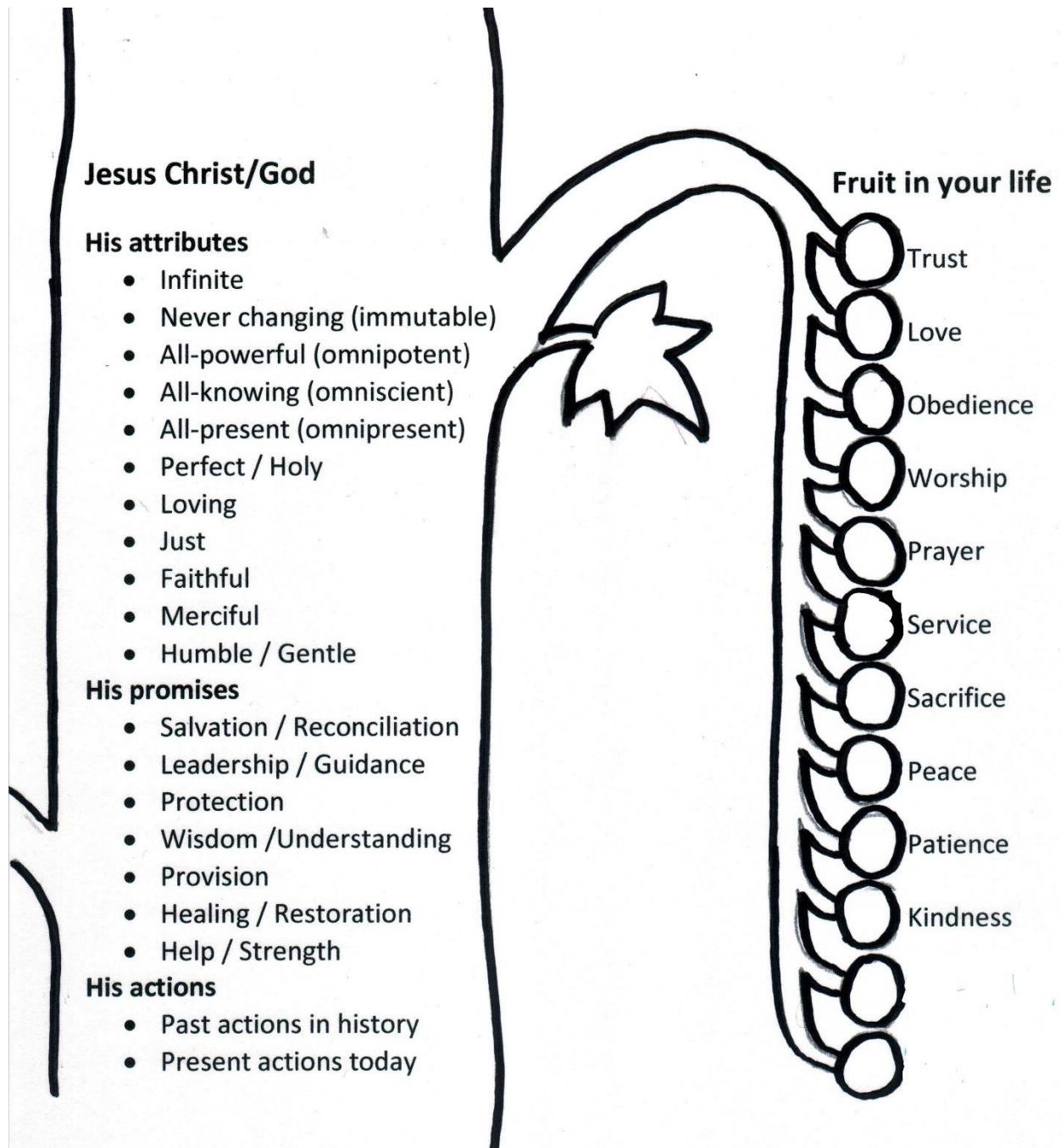
The illustration below shows the practical aspects of focusing on the Lord. In John 15, Jesus said we are like branches and he is like a vine. If we (the branch) place our focus on whether or not we are producing fruit, we lose the joy of relationship with Jesus and all that he has for us. But when we focus on Jesus/God, the vine, focusing on knowing and understanding him more completely – learning to be aware of his presence all the time each day, and cooperating with him – he will be able to accomplish his purposes in and through us. Just as Jesus focused on God, his Father, we focus on our heavenly Father through Jesus, his Son, by the help of his Holy Spirit.

### **We need the same foundation**

These realities are important for you to meditate on and continually learn more about. They were the foundation for Jesus' life and they need to be the foundation for your life. They are the foundation for the fifteen basic principles that Jesus practiced and taught his followers to practice. These are the fifteen basic practices in this manual, Basics of God's Training (Book 2).

The realities of your relationship with your Father (the same realities you have with Jesus Christ) make up the foundation for you to fully practice the fifteen essential principles in this training manual.

At the end of each of the fifteen basic principles (practices) in this manual, Book 2, there is a title, "Learn from Jesus' example –." This is an important section, because it focuses on how Jesus practiced that principle, and Jesus is the most important example for us to learn from!



# First Steps for a New Believer

This first section is the “**First Steps for a New Believer**.” When a person makes the decision to put their complete trust in God to provide for their salvation from sin (as described in “God’s Salvation” in Book 1), they become a child of the Creator of the universe. Their growth in this new life with God takes place step by step, like a child growing up.

A new born baby needs milk, warmth, cleaning, and protection. In a similar way, a new believer has immediate needs for healthy spiritual growth. The following steps are important to help a new believer in Christ begin growing.

There is blank space after each step where you can add more Bible references that help you understand the same subject.

## Assurance of salvation

The truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ are so different than our normal thinking that it is helpful to review them as much as possible. Reviewing the Bible passages in the section titled “God’s Salvation” in Book 1 will be helpful for a new Christian to be established in his understanding of what God has done in his life. The following statements are important to absorb and comprehend:

- John 1:12
- Romans 6:23
- Romans 8:1-4
- 1 John 5:11-13

Because it is so important to develop a strong assurance of our salvation, here are some additional truths to help you understand more about the amazing salvation God has provided.

- In the Garden of Eden, the LORD told the first man and woman that the moment they would disobey him they would die (Genesis 2:17). The consequence of any and every sin is death – not just physical death, but also spiritual death, which means separation from God. Each one of us deserves the death sentence. Because of this, none of us can pay the penalty for someone else because we have our own penalty to pay. But Jesus came and lived life as a perfect human, and voluntarily took on himself the penalty that every person in the world deserves. He did this one time for all the sin of humanity, from Adam to the last person who will live (Romans 6:10). He not only paid the penalty for the sin of all humanity, he also paid for ALL the sin of each person – past, present, and future! That means all your future sin is already paid for when you put your trust in Jesus as the sacrifice for your sin! Isaiah 53:6, 1 Peter 2:24, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13, Hebrews 9:26-28
- When you put your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, he not only forgives all your sin, but he also makes you as pure and clean as Jesus Christ is! 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Corinthians 1:30. This was also predicted before Jesus came as a human person, when

Jeremiah said the LORD would be the righteousness of his people. Jeremiah 33:16. When we are placed into Christ, his righteousness becomes ours! 1 Corinthians 1:30.

- When you put your trust in Jesus Christ as the one who has paid the complete penalty for your sin, the Bible says you are adopted as a child of God into his family forever! John 1:12, Romans 8:16-17, Ephesians 1:5. No matter what you do, your Father will still love you as his child, even more than a human parent loves his child, no matter what they do.
- When you are God's child, there is nothing you can do to decrease his love toward you. Even outright rebellion against him will not decrease his love toward you. All sin has been completely paid for by the death of Jesus Christ. Romans 5:8-10, 8:1.
- If anyone thinks that the complete payment for all sin, even future sin, enables a person to then do any sin they want, they don't understand the cost and suffering that Jesus went through to pay the penalty. When you know the cost and pain that someone went through because of how much they love you, the last thing you will want to do is to offend them in any way.

## Baptism

New spiritual life begins in the heart, where no one can see except God. Baptism is an outward expression of what has happened in the heart.

- Romans 6:3-4 explains that baptism is a personal identification with what Jesus Christ has done for each person. Going underwater symbolizes identification with Jesus' death, and being brought up out of the water symbolizes identification with Jesus' resurrection that gives us new life. Because of what He has done for us, each of us is a new person when we put our trust in Him! Baptism is an outward action that lets others know we are now a new person because of Jesus Christ.
- Matthew 28:19 – Jesus instructed His followers to baptize all future believers in Him. He knew the value of public identification with Himself.
- Acts 8:36-38 – This is an example of what was done when a person made a decision to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

## **Spiritual family relationships (Fellowship)**

- Acts 2:42-47 – After Jesus Christ returned to heaven, the first people to trust Christ as their Savior were quickly accepted into a dynamic spiritual family. Like new children, they needed loving care, spiritual food and encouragement. God's design is for a spiritual family to meet these needs.
- Hebrews 3:12-13 – Without frequent encouragement, the lies of selfish desires will easily deceive us. Focusing on God's truth does not come naturally, and we need reminders and help from other spiritual brothers and sisters as much as possible.
- Hebrews 10:25 – Meeting together with others who want to grow with God is so important that it should become a habit for each one of us.

## **Regular exposure to God's Word (Feeding on God's Word)**

- Matthew 4:4 – God's truth is as important to our spiritual growth as food is for our physical growth and health.
- 2 Timothy 3:15-17 – God's Word is the basis for how we can know God – for how to think and for how to live.
- Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:1-3 – God says that if we continually meditate on God's Word (think over it for understanding and application), we will be successful in every aspect of our lives!

## **Communication with God (Prayer)**

- Luke 11:1-4 – When Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, Jesus responded with a simple example that is now often called “the Lord’s prayer”.
- From many references in the Bible, it’s clear that prayer is communication with God that can happen anytime and anywhere. Prayer does not even have to be verbalized, but it can be an expression of a thought and God “hears” it. God is eager for us to express all our feelings to Him – our joys, pains, questions, and desires.
- Ephesians 6:18 – Prayer is important in the spiritual struggle that is going on around us all the time. Prayer is the means of us opening our hearts to God, and prayer is the means of us asking for God to work in the lives of others.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 – This is a brief summary of what God would like prayer to look like in each of His children’s lives.

# God Trains Us to Believe His Love

## Basic # 1

**God's desire is to help you learn more about His strong love for you.**

God's Word says that "we love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The more you know and experience God's love for you, the more you'll be motivated to respond with deep and strong commitments to Him in every way. This makes it more obvious why Paul wrote, "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:17-19) The result of understanding God's love more is that our desire to love God and to love others increases. We then fulfill what Jesus said is our most important instruction – to love God and to love others (Matthew 22:37-39).

### **Incorrect motivations**

Many people tend to live their lives from a motivation of fear. When Christians think they need to live the Christian life to earn God's acceptance or His approval, they demonstrate a fear that it's possible that God could reject them. Or they think they need to do more to experience God's blessing, which is a fear of missing out on God's best. The motivation of fear shows itself in almost every aspect of life, and in many different forms.

Pride is another incorrect motivation. Whenever we think we don't need God in some aspect of our lives, it's because of pride. Or, it's easy for us to think that God should bless us or help us in some way, because of how we've obeyed him. This is pride. Pride is a motivation that expresses itself in many subtle ways.

### **Motivated by God's love**

Instead of using fear or pride as motivators, we can turn to God's love as our source of motivation.

**Ephesians 2:4-10** God was motivated by love in all He did, and now He wants to show the riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. He knows this will be our greatest motivation for good work.

**Galatians 2:20** Paul said he gave up his personal desires because God loved him so much.

**Titus 2:11-13** God's grace is what instructs us to give up our ungodly desires and live for the One who gave up his life for us.

**2 Peter 1:3-9** God has given us His promises, so we can grow and be effective. If we are not growing, it's because we have forgotten that we've been cleansed from our sin (the greatest demonstration of God's love, Romans 5:8).

**1 John 4:19** "We love because He first loved us."

### **Analogy of two wives**

Wife A and Wife B both worked hard to please their husbands. When Wife A was asked why she worked so hard to please her husband, she replied, "He's made it very clear that if I don't do everything he wants, he'll send me away and reject me, and I don't know of any other way I can support myself." When Wife B was asked the same question, she replied, "He loves me even more than my parents. I had an affair, and he still made it clear he wanted me back, no matter what! Because of that kind of love, I want to do everything possible to please Him." Both Wife A and Wife B did things to please their husbands, but Wife A was motivated by fear and Wife B was motivated by love.

### **Develop your understanding of God's love**

What is your understanding of God's love? Following is a quick evaluation for you to pray and think over.

Which of the following are you convinced of? Mark the ones you feel the greatest need to understand more clearly. Some Bible references are included, but none are adequate to fully explain the truths stated here. Add references that are helpful for you.

- God, through His Son Jesus Christ, has paid the complete penalty for all my sin. Romans 5:8, Hebrews 10:10-18
- God, the Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ, always have their arms wide open to receive me back, no matter what sin I've done, or how often I've sinned. Luke 15 (whole chapter)
- God is thinking about me all the time. Psalm 139:1-2, 17-18
- Jesus enjoys me so much that He wants me to "hang out" with Him and do everything with Him all the time – in this life and forever! 1 Thessalonians 5:10, Revelation 3:20
- God, my Father, loves me equally as much as His Son, Jesus Christ. John 17:23
- God, my Father, loves me as His favorite child (and He loves all His children this much). John 17:23, Daniel 10:19
- God, my Father, is working out the details of my life for my best, in the same way He did for His Son when He lived here physically on earth. Romans 8:28-29, John 17:23
- God is eager to use all my weakness and all the evil around me to give me the greatest joy possible and to use me to help others in special ways. John 10:10, 15:11, 15:1-5, Romans 5:20-21, 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, Romans 8:28-29
- Jesus Christ loves me as much as His Eternal Father loved Him. John 15:9
- God only allows pain and evil in my life for the purpose of helping me know him better and to make me stronger by building me up. Eph 1: 4-10, 3:10, Luke 22:31-32, Job's example
- It is not possible to exaggerate how much God loves me, no matter what I say or what analogy I use. Psalm 103:11, Romans 11:33, Psalm 36.

### **How God uses pain and evil to help us**

God has all power, he has complete authority over every evil being and person, he has all knowledge and understanding of everything, and he is full of love, mercy, and grace. With all these qualities, God has demonstrated all through history that he is always working for everyone's benefit. That doesn't mean that everyone cooperates with him, though. Many people reject God and his loving work for their benefit because they have other ideas of what they want to do with their lives. God doesn't force himself on people, but he lets them make whatever choices they want. That's what love is all about. God is extremely sad when people

reject him, but when people humbly cooperate with him, he uses every event and everything in their life for their benefit, including all pain and evil. All through the Bible we see examples of how God did this for a person's benefit. No matter what kind of difficulty God allowed to happen to someone, what kind of evil, and how much pain, God always used it for more blessing than each person ever expected! Following are examples of how God did this:

- **Abraham** – Left his homeland, lived as an alien in a foreign land, his wife had no children until age 90. But God had a plan for blessing – Genesis 21:1-7, 24:1.
- **Joseph** – Sold as a slave, and then was unjustly jailed in a foreign country. But God had a plan for blessing – Genesis 45:1-18, 50:18-21.
- **David** – Had to run for his life, living in the wilderness for many years. But God had a plan for blessing – 2 Samuel 7:1-29
- **Ruth** – Lost her husband in death, and went to live in a foreign country. But God had a plan for blessing – Ruth 4:9-22.
- **Esther** – Grew up in a foreign land, without her parents, and was taken to be the wife of an authoritarian king. But God had a plan for blessing – Esther 9:20-10:3
- **Job** – Lost all his children, his servants and livestock in one day, and then soon after was covered with painful sores all over his body. But God had a plan for blessing – Job 42:1-17.
- **Daniel** – Was taken captive by a foreign power (Babylon) and was persecuted in his work for King Nebuchadnezzar. But God had a plan for blessing – Daniel 4:1-37.

### **Knowing God's power and knowledge**

Your understanding of God's power and God's knowledge will affect how much influence God's love has on you. If you're convinced that a powerless person loves you with all his heart, the effect will not be the same as knowing that a person who has all power in the universe loves you with all his heart.

To what extent are you convinced of God's power and knowledge? As you consider each of the following aspects of God's power and knowledge, mark the ones you feel the greatest need to understand more clearly. Some Bible references are included, but none are adequate to fully explain the truths stated here. Add references that are helpful for you.

God and Jesus Christ created everything in the universe, including everything in the material dimension, seen and unseen, and everything in the spiritual dimension. Colossians 1:15-16

God is literally holding everything in the universe together (including your body) at this very moment. Colossians 1:17

Every weather activity is under God's control. Psalm 147:8, Amos 4:7

Every earthquake and "natural disaster" only happens because God allowed it or caused it. Isaiah 45:7, Amos 4:9, Daniel 5:23b

No spiritual being, including the devil, can do anything apart from the permission of my loving Father, who is my Creator and Savior. Luke 22:31-32

God knows every thought I think and every feeling I experience. Psalm 139:2-3

God can bring a thought to my mind at any time, on any subject, including insights on every subject of life. John 14:26

- \_\_\_ God is ultimately in control of every detail that happens in my life, including the outcome of me rolling dice for a game. Proverbs 16:3, Lamentations 3:37-38
- \_\_\_ God demonstrated His awesome, sovereign power by creating creatures who have free will. Isaiah 45:7-10, Ephesians 1:4-10
- \_\_\_ God is using all His power and all the resources of the universe to accomplish His special plan in me and through me, similar to what He did with Abraham, David, Jesus, and Paul. Isaiah 49:1-6, 1 Corinthians 12:12-30
- \_\_\_ God chooses to let my choices have an effect on what He does. Deuteronomy 9:13-19, Romans 1:21-25

Paul prayed, asking God to help the believers know God's love and also to know "his incomparably great power for us who believe." (Ephesians 1:18-19)

### **Learn from Jesus' example – How he believed the Father's love**

Jesus knew that the reason he had come into the world was because of God's love. As John wrote in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world (loved the world so much) that he gave his one and only Son, ..." Jesus knew how much his Father loved him and how much his Father loved every person in the world. Jesus also knew how difficult it would be to give up his life as a sacrifice for people, but his understanding of his Father's strong love gave him the foundation for living his life here and doing all that he did. "For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing." (John 5:19-20)

Jesus was motivated to live his life here on earth, full of love and service to people, because he knew how much the Father loved him and he knew how much the Father loved people living in the world. He believed the Father's love.

During the last meal with his disciples, Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." (John 15:9) Jesus knew that the Father's love for him was the strongest possible kind of love, and Jesus knew that his love for the disciples was the strongest kind of love imaginable.

Because the Father's love was so clear to Jesus, he also knew this was the most important thing for every person to understand. He knew that understanding God's love is a strong foundation for a person to be motivated to love God, to love people, and to want to follow God's instructions. This is why Jesus told his followers, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide (remain) in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide (remain) in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide (remain) in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:9-11)

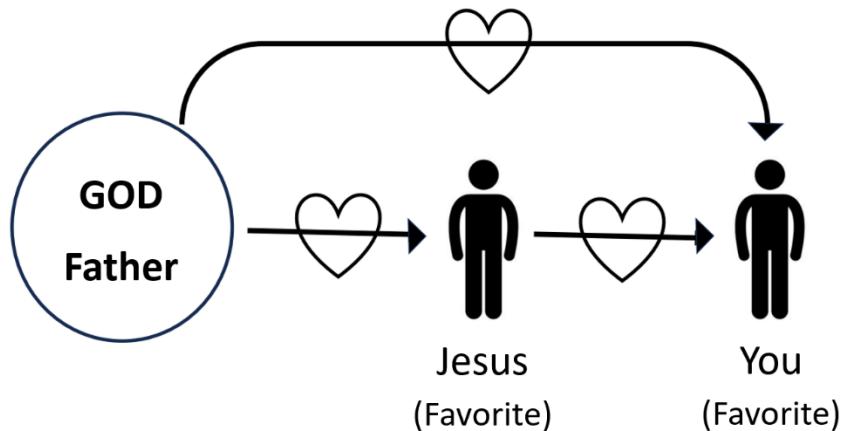
### **Think about how much Jesus and your Father love you.**

This statement that Jesus said to his disciples in John 15:9 is very amazing, "In the same way the Father loves me, I love you." Think about the meaning of this statement.

- How much did the Father love Jesus?
  - Was Jesus the favorite son of God? Yes, we know the Father had the strongest possible love toward his Son, Jesus Christ.

- We know the Father had all power and was eager to protect Jesus every minute of every day.
- We know the Father was full of love and that he was eager to give the strongest blessing to Jesus every minute of every day.
- We know the Father has all knowledge and was eager to help Jesus in every possible way.
- If all these things are true of the Father and the Son, why did Jesus experience so much difficulty in his life?
  - Why did the Father allow him to live in poverty all his life, with no income?
  - Why did the Father not give him a home or any place to live in comfort?
  - Why did the Father not allow him to experience the joy of marriage?
  - Why did the Father allow him to be persecuted and attacked during his whole ministry?
  - ***The Father allowed his Son to go through so much suffering and difficulty because he had a special purpose for him!***
- With these things in mind, think again how much Jesus loves you – in the same way the Father loved Jesus! This means you are God's favorite child (just as all his children are)!
- Do not compare your life with others. God's plan and purpose for you are special and different than the plan he has for others!
- It is also important to know that Jesus said the Father also loves you in the same way that he loved Jesus, as stated in John 17:23.

### John 15:9 and 17:23



YOU CAN BELIEVE THE FATHER'S LOVE THE SAME WAY JESUS DID, WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP!

#### God's grace

Vine's Bible Dictionary says the meaning of God's grace is that which gives pleasure, delight, and favor. Grace is an expression of God's love, and it is stronger than any sin we might have in our life (Romans 5:20-21)! Grace is part of God's character, and there is nothing that can separate us from him and his loving grace (Romans 8:38-39).

If people choose to reject God's love and grace, God will not force himself on them. They will experience his judgment, but he never stops loving them. Examples of this are in Jeremiah 31:20, Mark 10:21, and Luke 13:34.

When you recognize that God is expressing His love all the time, to each person, in all His power, you can say God is pouring out His grace to every person all the time. We are told to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 2:1). This is not instruction to ask for grace, but to be strong in the grace that is already being given!

Even though God is pouring out His grace all the time, on all people, it's easy for us to not recognize it because of all the deception happening in the world. As a result, it's easy for us to not cooperate with God. That is why the warning is given in the Bible not to miss God's grace (2 Corinthians 6:1-3, Hebrews 12:15).

### **The good news of the gospel of Jesus is better than we can imagine!**

The gospel is the good news of God's grace for you. The gospel not only provides salvation from the penalty for your sin, but it also provides salvation from all the effects of sin you will experience for the rest of your life. When you are trusting God, he will use the effects of past sin (sometimes they are painful!) to build you up and bring you closer to himself! Romans 1:16-17. Romans 8:1-17

When you put your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, he not only forgives all your sin, but he also makes you as pure and clean as Jesus Christ is! 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Corinthians 1:30. This was also predicted before Jesus came as a human person, when Jeremiah said the LORD would be the righteousness of his people. Jeremiah 33:16. When we are placed into Christ, his righteousness becomes ours! 1 Corinthians 1:30.

These truths mean that when you are God's child, there is nothing you can do to decrease his love toward you. Even outright rebellion against him will not decrease his love toward you. All sin has been completely paid for by the death of Jesus Christ. Romans 5:8-10, 8:1.

#### **Not a basis for judgment**

The truth that no amount of sin can cause God to reject his child does not provide a basis for us to set ourselves up as judges about who is God's child and who isn't. Just because someone prayed a prayer at some time to receive Jesus does not mean they are actually his child. God only knows their heart, and it is with the heart that a person believes (Romans 10:10), and not only by the words of their mouth. God's truth gives each of us personal assurance, but it is not a basis for us to set ourselves up as judges about everyone else's salvation.

### **God's active love toward you**

God's love is very active toward you. He knows what your most important need is, and He is always doing things to accomplish that need in your life. If He has helped you arrive at the point of wanting to be a whole-hearted disciple of Christ, you can be sure He is doing things at

all times (24/7) to teach and train you. The following passages describe this reality (same passages as used in the introduction of these Basics):

- Romans 8:28-39
- Hebrews 12:1-11 (Note: Some translations use the word “discipline” or “chastening” in verses 5, 7, 8, 11. This same Greek word is also used in Eph. 6:4 and 2 Tim. 3:16. As we see in these other passages, this Greek word could be translated “training”. The picture can be made of a coach training athletes. The athletes **want** to go into training. The training is often difficult and painful, but the coach knows what will produce a strong athlete, and the athletes willingly cooperate. Consistent with this theme is another Greek word, “gymnazo”, which is used at the end of verse 11, and is often translated as “training”.
- 2 Peter 1:3-11

The only thing that hinders you from experiencing God’s love to the fullest is the choices you make. If you try to pursue your selfish desires instead of God’s, he will let you experience the consequences, but only for the purpose of teaching you, or even protecting you from worse evil.

God never forces his love on you. It’s your choice how much you want to accept his love. This doesn’t mean that he will show his love to you in the way you might want him to, but that he waits for you to submit yourself to what he knows is best for you.

When we recognize how much He loves us and how much He is in control, we recognize He is always using every circumstance, every event, and every person we meet, to accomplish His purposes in our life. With this in mind, it is important that we learn what God wants to do through every circumstance, event, and person that he brings or allows into our life. ***Helping each other understand what God is doing and the appropriate way for us to respond, is an extremely important aspect of being His disciple!***

[ **FOR DISCUSSION** - What is an experience you have had that helped make you more aware of how much God loves you?]

#### **Real life stories to illustrate this truth**

- God’s heart of love is shown by three parables of looking for something valuable that was lost, Luke 15
- Zacchaeus was a traitor of the Israelites, supporting their enemy, and taking financial advantage of the Israelites, yet Jesus went to his house and ate with him, which was against public opinion. Luke 19:1-10
- Jesus was the best example of loving His enemies. He was fully aware that Judas would betray Him to death, which troubled Him, yet He showed such strong love to Judas (even washing his feet), that the other disciples had no idea that Judas was a traitor. John 13:1-30

### **For thought and discussion**

The most important thing in your life is to learn more about your Creator, Savior, and Lord and to learn how you can live your life every day with him. Remember to focus on understanding him in every way more than evaluating how you are living your life. Like the apostle John said, the more you understand his love, the more you will want to love him (1 John 4:19). What are some ways that you think you can do this?

### **ACTION STEP**

- Commitment - Tell God you want to learn more of the unlimited dimensions of His love for you, and ask Him to help you believe it more completely.
- From the evaluation above, look at which aspect of God's love you would like to understand better. Ask God to teach you, and ask other Christians for advice in how you can grow in that area.
- When God's Spirit makes you aware of a wrong motivation, simply admit it to Him and thank Jesus for what He did on the cross to pay for your wrong motivation and thank Him that He is alive and able to teach you to be motivated by His love.
- Think of a challenge you are experiencing at present. Pray, think about, and discuss with a friend how understanding God's love makes a difference in your present challenge.

### **For your consideration**

1. What Bible passage stood out to you from those given in Basic 1?
2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about His love?
3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to understand God's love in the past?
4. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do, to learn more about God's love (consider the Action Steps)?

# God Trains Us to Stay Close to Him

## Basic #2

God's desire is to help you live close with Him each day.

From the beginning of the Bible to the end, our Creator is all about relationship. And, out of His deep love, He wants His relationship with you to be as close as possible.

### God's purpose for your life

God has made you for relationship - first of all with Him and secondly with people. He wants you to be close to Him, both now and for eternity (Exodus 25:8, 29:46, Revelation 21:1-4).

Because God loves people so much, He wants them to know Him (Jeremiah 9:24, 31:20, 33:34, 32:36-41, John 17:3).

- **Micah 6:8** "He (the Lord) has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." God is not concerned about abilities or accomplishments, but rather that you walk humbly with Him (staying close), loving mercy, and acting justly (compare Isaiah 66:1-3).
- **Luke 10:38-42** Jesus indicated that being close to Him is the most important thing.
- **Philippians 3:7-11** Paul said he gave up everything in life so that he could know Christ and experience life in fellowship with Him.

**John 15:1-11** Jesus paints a word picture, "I am the true Vine, and my Father is the Vinedresser (Gardener)."

- Verse 4. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the Vine, so then neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the Vine, you are the branches; he who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing."
- Verse 7. "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples."
- Verse 11. "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

Jesus wants every Christian to experience a joy-filled fruitful life, as he said in John 15:11. He knows many people do not have happy lives, and so He explains some of the essential principles to his disciples, which are recorded in John 15.

### John 15:7 A vine and its branches

Everyone knows that a branch cannot produce fruit unless it is connected to the vine. It must be connected in order for the sap (life) of the vine to flow freely into the branch to produce the fruit. Jesus is saying that we also must learn this lesson spiritually. If we do not stay close to God daily, the fruit of his Spirit will not come out of our life, which includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness (Galatians 5:22-23). Jesus simply states, "apart from me you can do

nothing". He didn't mean that we could not be active, and even do spiritual things, but that our life would not have eternal benefit. His kind of love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness does not come out of our lives naturally. We need to be close with Jesus and focused on him so his kind of fruit will come out of us.

### **John 15:7 How we stay close to God**

Jesus said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you". The English word "abide" means to remain or continue with. We can also describe this connection as "staying close". If I choose daily to stay close to God, focused on him, talking to him, and taking God's Word into my mind and heart, then God will be able to lead me, help me, empower me, correct me and accomplish his will in and through me. Joshua, when he was ready to die, said to the children of Israel, "Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve." He told them, if you sincerely love and serve God, he will bless you greatly; if you turn away and serve other Gods, then God will have to discipline you and withhold His blessing (Joshua 23-24). It is the same today. Jesus said, "If you abide in me". This means to daily put God first in our hearts and actions, to reject sin, turn to him, and to keep his Words in our hearts and minds. The Word of God is what reveals God and his will for us. God never forces us to love and obey him. We must make the choice daily. When we choose to stay close to God, he fills us with His joy and blessings. It will be a daily choice and challenge.

### **Your choice**

You can be as close to God as you choose. God has already taken the initiative to be close to you. He has already told you how much He loves you (John 15:9 is one example), and he has told you of his desire to be close to you (John 14:3), and He has already taken care of the sin problem that gets in our way. You are now free to develop your relationship with your Creator and Savior to be as close as you want. It's your choice.

An example of how it's our choice to be close to God took place when Jesus was visiting in Mary and Martha's home. Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to Him, but her sister, Martha, demanded that she come help her. The answer Jesus gave is interesting, "Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:42)

This is what love is. It's based on choice and not being forced to do something. We began our relationship with God when we chose to respond to the Holy Spirit's work in our hearts and accepted Jesus Christ as Savior. Then the relationship grew as we continued to make choices for God. This is how human relationships grow closer and this is how our relationship with God grows closer. It's your choice to continually respond to his unchanging desire to be close to you.

### **How you can grow closer**

Getting close to God is similar to how you get close to another person. For people to have a close marriage, the following three things are important:

- **Time** – Make a lot of time for just the two of you to be together.
- **Communication** – Listening and talking to the other person is essential for a close relationship.

- **Understanding** – The more you understand how the other person thinks and feels, the closer you can be to them.

These are also the things to practice for growing close with God.

- **Time** – Plan times in your schedule to focus on reading the Bible and talking to God. Just as we need physical food each day, we also need daily spiritual time with God (Matthew 4:4).
- **Communication** – Prayer is our communication with God. Basic #4 will help you understand more about prayer.
- **Understanding** – When you read the Bible, ask God to help you understand more about who he is and how he thinks and feels. The first training manual, Basics about God, will help you in this way.

### **God provided a solution for the greatest problem**

Ever since Adam and Eve rejected God's instruction in the garden, people have rejected God's plan and his instruction, causing them to be separated from him. Rejection of God's instruction is called sin. Since the beginning, God gave strong reminders of how sin hurts our relationship with him and also our relationships with people. Here are two examples:

- God gave one reminder when the people of Israel were entering the land God had promised to them. In the battle against the soldiers of Ai, God did not help the people of Israel, and soldiers of Israel lost their lives. God explained to Joshua, the leader of Israel, that one person had disobeyed his clear instruction. As a result, God withheld his help, and all the people of Israel suffered (Joshua 7:1-26).
- After Jesus was here, God gave a reminder about the seriousness of sin to the early church. When Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, told a lie to Peter, they both died immediately (Acts 5:1-11).

God used both of these examples to show the seriousness of sin. Ultimately, the consequences of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Sin keeps us from being close to God. And that's why the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is so important! When Jesus (the only perfect person) willingly allowed himself to be killed, he took on himself the consequences for our sin that each of us deserve to experience. Each of us deserves the same consequences that Achan, Ananias, and Sapphira experienced, but instead, Jesus took the consequences on himself (1 Peter 2:23-24, Isaiah 53:4-5). This is a major truth of the Bible and was symbolized by the lamb that was sacrificed as a substitute at the first Passover (Exodus 12:1-30). Later Jesus became the substitute sacrifice for our sin, as explained in Hebrews 10:1-18.

Today, the serious consequences God gave to Achan, Ananias and Sapphira demonstrate that sin keeps us from being close to God. At the same time, those examples help us understand the importance of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those examples help us have a hatred for sin, and also a strong appreciation of what Jesus Christ did for us when he became the substitute sacrifice for our sin.

### **Application to daily life**

Each time we become aware of sin in our life, it is an opportunity for us to thank Jesus for his death in our place and for his resurrection from death! Because of Jesus' death, God gives no condemnation at all to his children (Romans 8:1)!

Many times we are aware that we have wrong thinking such as anxiety, lust, anger, hatred, etc. When this happens, it's easy for us to think negatively about ourselves, but God wants us to remember that the sacrifice of Jesus' death applies to every wrong thought, word, and action we have. We can continually thank Jesus for his sacrifice and rejoice that we are children of God who will always be loved and accepted by him forever (Romans 8:15-17)!

When we struggle with wrong thinking in some way, it's an opportunity to appreciate Jesus again and to grow in our closeness to him! Instead of concentrating on how to get rid of wrong thinking, we can concentrate on thanking Jesus for what he has done. In fact, that is how the Holy Spirit wants to help us. He wants to remind us of this truth every time we have wrong thinking (John 14:26). You can ask the Holy Spirit to help you in this way, and ask him to remind you to thank Jesus at the same time. In this way, your wrong thinking will cause you to grow in appreciation of Jesus and closer to him!

### **Trials can bring you closer**

Many non-Christians begin a relationship with God because of something difficult that happened in their life. It's also true that many Christians get to know God better and grow closer to Him after He brings them through a difficult time. God spoke of this reality with Hosea when He told him His plan for Israel.

*“I am going to allure her (Israel); I will lead her into the desert (a dry, desolate place) and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt. In that day,’ declares the LORD, ‘you will call Me my husband. You will no longer call me my master.’” (Hosea 2:14-16)*

The next time you go through a trial, it would be good to ask the Lord how He wants to use that experience to bring you closer to Himself.

### **Benefits**

God made us to be close to Him. That is where we experience the greatest fulfillment in our lives, no matter what circumstances we're in. Following are some of the benefits of this kind of relationship.

- Awareness of God's presence, Psalm 84:1-7
- Joy, John 15:11, Psalm 27:4-6
- Peace, John 16:33
- Rest, Matthew 11:28-30
- Fulfillment, John 10:10
- Communication with God, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

### **Testimony of time with God**

At age 61, Mike Bergen explained that extended times with God are definitely one of the most important building blocks for his whole life. He wrote:

"When I was in college I was challenged by another godly man to set aside whole days to sit at the feet of the Lord like Mary did in Luke 10:38-42. He pointed out that people often set aside days to spend with close friends because that time together builds their relationship. Since God is the most important person in my life, it seems logical to do the same with him! So one summer in my early years I spent one day every week outside with my Bible, a notebook, and water. At first these extended times felt awkward and sometimes even void of content. But Jesus promised, "Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and it shall be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7) My convictions of what is important in life were being established and my values and purposes were being clarified. Since that summer I have practiced that principle in one form or other for the rest of my life. On some occasions I took multiple days to get away with God alone. For the past ten years I have set aside a weekly time of three to four hours to read the Bible, think, pray, and write down my thoughts in the form of prayers. As I look back on my life, I have clear memories of life changing decisions and insights that came during those times. Nothing unusual happened during most of the times, but then sometimes truths and concepts came to mind that have dramatically changed the course of my marriage, my ministry, and the whole direction of my life. There is no question that God has used these times to lead me more than any other activity I've done in life. After 40 years of practice, these times have become very enjoyable and something I look forward to."

#### **Real life stories to illustrate this truth**

- Elijah hears God when He hears a quiet voice, 1 Kings 19:1-21
- David's closeness to God saves his family, 1 Samuel 30 (especially 30:6)

**[FOR DISCUSSION –** What person have you had a close relationship with? What things caused you to feel close to them? Do you think there are similarities between that relationship and your relationship with God?]

#### **Learn from Jesus' example – How he stayed close to his Father**

Jesus lived his whole life in close unity with the Father and wanted to please him in everything he did. Jesus explained this close relationship with his Father in the following ways:

- "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. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does." (John 5:19-20)
- "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me." (John 5:30)
- The prayer that Jesus prayed, as recorded in John 17:20-26 reveals how closely he was one with his Father.

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are

one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

This closeness to the Father came out in different ways during Jesus' physical life here on earth.

- He spent the night in prayer with his Father before choosing the twelve close disciples. (Luke 6:12-13)
- “Rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.” (Mark 1:35)
- “Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.” (Matthew 14:22-23)
- “So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.’” (John 11:40-41)
- Before his arrest, Jesus cried in prayer, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done.” (Luke 22:42)
- On the cross Jesus cried out, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34) And again he called in a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46)

The close relationship that Jesus had with his Father came from his understanding of his Father. As stated before, here is a summary of what he knew:

- Jesus knew who his eternal Father was. John 17:1-3. (The one who has all power, who is full of love, perfect in justice, unlimited in knowledge, present everywhere, and who never changes.)
- Jesus knew God's word and obeyed God's word. John 17:6-8.
- Jesus knew his Father was the source of everything he had. John 17:7,10. His Father was not only the source, but also in control of everything – even of Satan and all evil!
- Jesus knew he came from the Father and that he was sent here for a special purpose. John 17:3,4,8,18,25.
- Jesus knew that his Father is the Protector for everyone. John 17:11-12.
- Jesus knew how much his Father loved him. John 17:23,26.

YOU CAN STAY CLOSE TO THE FATHER THE SAME WAY JESUS DID, WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP!

#### **For thought and discussion**

Jesus wants you to have this same kind of relationship with his Father in heaven, who is also your Father! In what ways do you think you can make progress in thinking about your Father in the same way Jesus did?

## **ACTION POINTS**

- Commitment - Tell God that you commit yourself to be close to Him.
- Think and pray about choices you can make so that you can stay close to God daily.
- Think and pray about what weakness in your life can help you be close to God.
- Think and pray about a temptation in your life that can help you be close to God.

1. What Bible passage stood out to you from those given in Basic 2?
2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about staying close to Him?
3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to stay close to God?
4. What is something about God that motivates you to be close to Him?
5. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do, to stay close to God (consider the Action Steps)?

# God Trains Us to Feed on His Word

## Basic #3

**God's desire is to help you think about His words of truth daily and apply them to your life.**

### Definition of "feed"

**Joshua 1:8** Meditate means to think about. It's similar to a cow chewing its cud to get the full nutritional value. What is the promised result of daily meditation?

**Psalm 1:1-3** How is this promise similar the promise in Joshua 1:8?

### The guarantee

What is the guarantee promised in each of these two passages? What is the condition of the guarantee?

**Joshua 1:9**

**Psalm 1:1-3**

### Luke 10:38-42

- Verse 41. "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "You are worried and upset about so many things, but ONLY ONE thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."
- What was Jesus teaching his disciples?
- Was "serving" not important to God?
- The issue was, "what is first in importance?"
- Mary was sitting at Jesus feet and listening to His Word. Listening to God speaking to our hearts through His Word DAILY is more important THAN ANYTHING ELSE.

Herschel: "The man who led me to Christ said to me the first day I was saved, "Herschel, you need to make a commitment to God to read His Word every day and let God speak to your heart". I made that commitment, and have been doing that daily, seldom missing a day."

### Eight benefits

Think about these seven benefits of reading and meditating upon God's Word.

1. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 It will prepare your heart to serve God daily.
2. 1 Peter 2:2 It will help you grow spiritually.
3. John 8:32 It will help you overcome sin and temptation in your life.
4. Romans 12:2 It will motivate you to do God's will.
5. John 17:15-17 It will help you to devote yourself to God.
6. 1 John 2:14 It will make you strong and courageous spiritually.
7. Romans 10:17 It will strengthen your faith.
8. Acts 20:32 It can build you up.

### The Word of God is:

- Matthew 4:4 More important than food
- Psalm 19:9-10 More valuable than gold
- Hebrews 4:12 Living and powerful
- Ephesians 6:17 The sword of the Holy Spirit
- James 1:22-25 A great blessing to us, when we obey it.

### **Hearing God speak**

When you read God's Word, how do you know if He is speaking to you specifically about something?

### **Example of George Mueller**

George Mueller, influential Christian leader of the 1800's, was especially known for his faith in managing orphanages in England. In his autobiography he wrote about lessons he learned in feeding on God's word. Under the section, "How to be constantly happy in the Lord", he wrote:

"The point is this: I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished ... Before this time my practice had been at least for ten years previously as a habitual thing to give myself to prayer after having dressed in the morning. Now I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the word of God and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved, instructed; and that thus, while meditating, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord. I began, therefore, to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning early in the morning. The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord's blessing upon his precious word, was to begin to meditate on the word of God, searching as it were into every verse to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the word; not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon; but for the sake of obtaining food for my soul. The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer. When thus I have been for a while making confession or intercession or supplication or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the word may lead to it; but still continually keeping before me that food for my soul as the object of my meditation.

The result of this is that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation and that my inner man almost invariably is almost sensibly nourished and strengthened and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not a happy state of heart.

Now that God has taught me this point, it is as plain to me as anything that the first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is to obtain food for the inner man. As the outward man is not fit for work for any length of time, except we take food, and as this is one of the first things we do in the morning, so it should be with the inner man.

We should take food for that, as everyone must allow. Now what is the food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the word of God; and here again, not the simple reading of the word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts.

By the blessing of God I ascribe to this mode the help and strength which I have had to pass in peace through deeper trials in various ways than I have ever had before; and after having now above forty years tried this way, I can most fully, in the fear of God, commend it. How different when the soul is refreshed and made happy early in the morning, from what it is when, without spiritual preparation, the service, the trials, and the temptations of the day come upon one!" (from John Piper's booklet, "The Marks of a Spiritual Leader", pp. 12-16)

**[FOR DISCUSSION – What memories do you have of when God's written word was especially helpful or meaningful to you?]**

#### **Real life stories to illustrate this truth**

- Moses gave the essentials for a successful king, Deuteronomy 17:14-20, and a Psalm that King David likely wrote, Psalm 1:1-3
- Mary and Martha with Jesus, Luke 10:38-42

#### **Learn from Jesus' example – How he fed on God's word**

Jesus knew better than anyone else that to live life here in a broken world he needed to stay focused on the Father and his truth. The Bible does not explain how Jesus learned Scripture, God's truth, as he grew up, but we see clearly how well he knew God's truth even before he began his public ministry.

- In Matthew 4:1-11, we read that Satan, the great enemy of God, tempted Jesus. Jesus responded to all three temptations by quoting written Scripture. In that situation, Jesus always said, "It is written, ..."

During that event, Jesus made a statement that clearly explains how important God's written Scripture is. He said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4) Jesus said we need God's words for living, and not just physical food!

We see a variety of examples of how well Jesus knew the written Scripture as God's Word.

- In Luke 4:14-21, we read that when Jesus was asked to read from Scripture, he read from a place in Isaiah that described the ministry he was doing at that time. After reading it, he then said that it was being fulfilled right then at that time.
- After Jesus' resurrection, he appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. His conversation with them demonstrates the importance of knowing, understanding, and believing all of God's written Scripture. He told the two disciples, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and

all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:25-27)

YOU CAN FEED ON GOD'S WORD THE SAME WAY JESUS DID, WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP!

**For thought and discussion**

The Bible clearly shows that God's written word was the foundation for all of Jesus life. We cannot overestimate how important it is for our lives also. How can you make it a priority to feed on God's Word every day?

**ACTION POINTS**

- Commitment - Tell God you will meditate on His word daily and ask Him to help you do so.
- Make a simple plan for how you will read God's word daily and fellowship with Him.
- Learn to memorize Bible verses regularly.
- Share with another person something that you have been thinking about from God's Word.
- It is important for you to meet regularly with a small group of Christian friends from your church, with whom you can read, study, and discuss how to apply God's Word.

**REVIEW** - Review experiences and progress with past Action Points.

**For your consideration**

1. What Bible passage stood out to you from those given in Basic 3?
2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about feeding on His Word?
3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to feed on God's Word?
4. What is something about God that motivates you to feed on His Word?
5. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do, to feed on God's Word (consider the Action Steps)?

# God Trains Us to Pray

## Basic #4

**God's desire is to help you communicate with Him about every aspect of your life and the lives of others.**

It's good to notice that the first four Basics are the most important aspects for a friendship with God. It starts with knowing God's love, and then we respond to His love by pursuing a friendship with Him. And then the next two Basics are the essentials for any friendship; listening and talking (Feeding on God's Word and Prayer).

### **God desires communication in friendship**

- With Adam - Genesis 3:8-9
- With Abraham - Genesis 18:1-33
- With Moses - Exodus 33:11
- With David - many of the Psalms

### **"Lord, teach us to Pray"**

Luke 11:1 "One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." From this request Jesus introduced a model for prayer, which we often refer to as "the Lord's Prayer." Many lessons about prayer can be learned from it. Then after the model prayer Jesus told His disciples (Luke 11:9), "So, I say to you; Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

**[FOR DISCUSSION – What is an experience you have had with prayer in your life?]**

### **Jesus example**

- Mark 1:35 "In the early morning, while it was yet dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there."
- Luke 5:16 "But Jesus Himself would often slip away into the wilderness and pray."
- Luke 18:1 "Now he was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart."

### **God promises to answer prayer**

During the last meal Jesus had with His disciples before He was crucified, He talked about prayer repeatedly, and He explained again and again that the Father would answer their requests.

- John 14:13-14
- John 15:7, 16
- John 16:23-24, 26

After reading all these references, what things does Jesus want you to do about prayer?

John, the author of the Gospel of John, also wrote the letter of 1 John. In it, he repeated another amazing promise about prayer. Read 1 John 5:14-15 and discuss similarities there are with the promises in the Gospel of John.

### **God commands us to pray**

- Philippians 4:6-7 "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."
- Colossians 4:2 "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving."
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
- Hebrews 4:16 "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

### **Prayer is GOD'S plan**

God has chosen to work through faith and prayer.

- James 4:2 "You do not have, because you do not ask."
- James 5:16 "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."
- Romans 12:11-12 "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor; serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer"
- Ephesians 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works within us."

### **Prayer is expressing your heart to God**

Psalms includes a large variety of prayers to God, expressing all kinds of emotions.

- **Distress** - Psalm 42:1-11 - The writer of this Psalm was in distress (as in many other Psalms), and poured out his feelings to God.
- **Anger** - Psalm 58:6-8 and context, Psalm 74
- **Trust** - Psalm 85
- **Love** - Psalm 136
- **Thankfulness** - Psalm 107
- **Fear** - Psalm 59
- **Praise** - Psalm 147

God wants your heart, no matter what you're feeling or experiencing. He is honored when you pour out our heart to Him, no matter what's in your heart.

### **Prayer brings glory to God**

God has done many amazing things throughout history, but often many people are not aware of what He does. People naturally think that events (even unusual events) happened by chance or as the result of hard work, ***unless they know the event was a result of their prayer.***

Following are some examples of how this happened:

- Moses, in Exodus 17:8-15
- Esther, in Esther 4:15-16
- Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, in 2 Chronicles 20:1-28

- Hezekiah, in 2 Kings 20:1-21. Compare to 2 Chronicles 32:24-31

When these people felt helpless, they called out to God for help, He helped them, and they gave credit (glory) to Him. Hezekiah's story was different though, when he prayed by himself, and then never gave credit to God when the Babylonians came to see what happened. To give God the greatest glory, we can invite others to join us in prayer when we have a need.

Following are some suggested guidelines for how this can be done:

1. Decide what you understand God wants to do.
2. Plan for who, when, where, and how people will pray about this desire. (Remember that the more people who are regularly praying, the more will give praise to God for His work.)
  - **Who** will pray about this desire? What Bible passages give guidelines?
  - **How often** will each one pray about this desire? What Bible passages give guidelines?
  - **When and where** will people pray about this desire? What Bible passages give guidelines?
3. Be faithful with the plan that is agreed on for prayer.

### **The most effective way to see a life transformed**

Because God knows best what is needed for transformation to happen in any person's life, prayer for the person is the most important ingredient to bring about change. Of all the things Paul said he did for people, prayer seems to be at the top of the list. (Ephesians 1:18, 3:16-19, Philippians 1:3-4, Colossians 1:3,10, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, Philemon 1:4, 2 Timothy 1:3) By looking at these examples you can learn how and what to pray for others.

### **Paul's example**

In the Bible, Paul and Jesus are the only ones who asked us to follow their example. Paul frequently and regularly prayed for the people he ministered to in many different cities. What was his primary focus of prayer? When you study what Paul prayed for people, you discover that his most common prayer focus was **asking God to help people know Him better**. This is THE most important prayer request we can pray for people. You will find this example in the following prayers of Paul.

- Ephesians 1:15-19
- Ephesians 3:14-21
- Philippians 1:9-11
- Colossians 1:3-10
- Philemon vs. 4-6

How **often** did Paul pray, asking God to help people know Him better? You can see his example in the following passages: Eph. 1:16, Phil. 1:3, Col. 1:3,9, 2 Thess. 1:3, 11, 2 Tim. 1:3, Philemon 4

Paul also wanted people to pray for him because he was convinced that God would do things for him in answer to other people's prayer for him. Consider the following examples:

- Romans 15:30
- 2 Corinthians 1:8-11
- Ephesians 6:18-20
- Philippians 1:19
- Philemon 22

**[FOR DISCUSSION – What kinds of prayer have already become habits in your life (before meals? Before bed time? With family With your spouse?)]**

**Real life stories to illustrate this truth**

- Moses defeats the Midianites through dependence on God, as shown by his raised arms, Exodus 17:8-16
- Hannah poured out her heart, made a request, and later praised, 1 Samuel 1:1-2:11

**Learn from Jesus' example – How he practiced prayer**

Jesus knew clearly how much his Father loved him, so he lived in constant fellowship and oneness with him. His Father's love motivated him to be in communication with his Father at all times. We see examples of this during his life here (similar to what was stated before):

- He spent the night in prayer with his Father before choosing the twelve close disciples. (Luke 6:12-13)
- "Rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed." (Mark 1:35)
- "Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray." (Matthew 14:22-23) Later that night, after 3:00 AM (the fourth watch), he went see the disciples on the lake. (Matthew 14:25)
- "So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.'" (John 11:40-41)
- Before his arrest, Jesus spent hours in prayer. (Mark 14:32-42). He asked his disciples to pray with him, but they were too sleepy. Jesus cried in prayer, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42)
- On the cross Jesus cried out, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) And again he called in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46)

Jesus lived his life on earth in complete unity and communication with his Father. Even though his Spirit gives us this desire too, we are not able to remember to constantly communicate with him. This is another reason why we need the Holy Spirit's help, and that's one of the things that Jesus said his Spirit would do for us (John 14:26)! We can ask his help to teach us and remind us how to be in communication with God through each day.

Jesus often spent extended in prayer at night (Matthew 14:22-25, Mark 1:35, Mark 14:32-42 Luke 6:12-13). Why at that time? Was he not able to go to sleep? What things can we learn from this aspect of his example?

**YOU CAN PRACTICE PRAYER THE SAME WAY JESUS DID, WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP!**

### ***For thought and discussion***

How would you like God's Spirit to help you talk and communicate with him? Ask him to help you in that way. He is the one who is most eager to hear your communication with him!

### **ACTION POINTS**

- Discuss with someone the reasons you are (or are not) motivated to pray.
- Commitment - Tell God you would like to (with His help) communicate with Him frequently through each day. Ask Him to teach you more about communicating with Him.
- Develop a plan to pray to God every day about your personal needs and desires.
- Pray with another person (of your same sex) for people and needs in the church regularly. Preferably it would be good if you can regularly meet with a small group of people from your church with whom you can pray.
- Ask God to help you develop a habit of praying for others (Christians and non-Christians).
- In what ways would you like to follow Paul's example in praying for other people?

### **REVIEW**

- Review experiences and progress with past Action Points.

### **For your consideration**

1. What Bible passage stood out to you from those given in Basic 4?
2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about communicating with Him?
3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to communicate with God?
4. What is something about God that motivates you to communicate with Him?
5. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do, to communicate with God (consider the Action Steps)?

# God Trains Us to be Humble Servants

## Basic #5

**God's desire is to help you have the attitude of a servant toward others.**

The world's idea of greatness is to lord it over others and to have authority over them. Power and position are often the measure of greatness in our world system. That isn't the way it is in God's value system. Jesus said, "It shall not be so among you." (Matthew 20:20-28) Whoever wants to become great must be a servant, and whoever wants to be first, must become a slave, or simply serve the most.

### Example of Jesus

Jesus was the best example of a true servant. His amazing example is pointed to in the Old Testament and New Testament.

- Even before Jesus was born, Isaiah wrote a description of a future servant who would suffer. (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) The only one who fits this description is Jesus Christ.
- Jesus himself said that his purpose in coming was to be a servant and to sacrifice his life for the benefit of people. (Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:42-45, Luke 22:24-27)
- Paul described Jesus as the best example of a servant. (Philippians 2:3-8)

If we want to be great in God's eyes, we humble ourselves and serve others. God sees things differently than we and our world does. We need a change of thinking in this area. Humility means to put others before ourselves; to take a low place. This doesn't mean to speak evil of ourselves, but rather to put God first in all things, and also to put others ahead of ourselves. We serve others by putting them first.

### Greatness in God's kingdom

The concept of being a servant to meet the needs of others is so different from our focus on meeting our own desires. Because of this difficult change of thinking, Jesus often discussed this subject with his followers. Read the following passages and discuss the questions.

- Matthew 18:1-4
- Matthew 20:25-28
- Matthew 23:11-12
- Mark 10:42-45
- Luke 22:24-27

Jesus' idea of greatness was not easy for his disciples to understand.

- In these passages, what was the people's idea of greatness?
- What was Jesus' idea of greatness?
- What are reasons that Jesus' way of thinking is so much better than our natural way of thinking?

**John 13:1-17**

- According to John 13:3, what identity and security was established in Jesus' personal understanding, which made it possible for Him to lower Himself as a servant to the disciples?
- Jesus said He washed His disciples' feet as an example for us (John 13:14-15) and then He even gave a command that we should follow His example in how we show love (John 13:34-35). Part of this example was to wash the feet of His close friend who had already betrayed Him to His enemies for 30 pieces of silver. In what ways should we follow His example?

### **1 Peter 5:5-6**

- Peter addresses "all of you". He mentions younger and elder, but challenges all of you to "clothe yourselves" with humility. When we put on our clothes, everyone can see it. Our clothes cover us and identify us. Humility should be one of the greatest goals of a believer in Jesus.
- Someone might think, "but I am a leader, so I don't need this". No, just the opposite. We should be an example of humility, and putting others first instead of ourselves.

**[FOR DISCUSSION –** What are some things you've already learned about serving the members of your family (meeting their needs), such as your wife, children, brothers and sisters, or your parents?]

### **Other related passages**

Psalm 138:6

Isaiah 66:1-2

### **Motivation for humility**

The more that you and I understand how much we are already greatly loved by Jesus and the Father (John 15:9 and 17:23), the more we will be motivated to meet the needs of others. We don't have to prove ourselves to God or to work for His acceptance because we are already loved by God as much as the Father loved Jesus!

Also, the more we recognize that other people are also highly loved by God (no matter what their actions are), the more we desire to treat them with love and respect. This is how we can bring joy to our Father's heart!

Philippians 2:3-8 gives us instruction to be humble in the same way Jesus was, and then gives us motivation by reminding us of what Jesus did for each one of us.

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!" (Used by permission.)

### **Two expressions of humility**

The next two Basics of how God is training us (Basic #6 and #7) focus on two important expressions of humility; 1) humility before God, and 2) humility before people. Both of these require us to recognize the others as more important than ourselves.

### **Thankfulness demonstrates humility**

Giving thanks is a clear expression of humility, both toward God and toward people. When you are thankful, you realize your neediness, and you also recognize and appreciate how someone else has met that need. In the next two Basic Commitments we'll look again at thankfulness.

### **Care for yourself**

Humility and serving others does not mean that we don't care for our personal needs and our personal families. If you are going to be good servant, it is important for you to be healthy and strong in every way; emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Neglecting our personal needs to help others is really unloving. If we are unhealthy in some way, our service of love to others will not be as effective as when we are healthy. We need God's wisdom for how we can be healthy so God can use us most effectively as we serve others. This is one application of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:29-31) and loving others as ourselves.

#### **Real life stories to illustrate this truth**

- Joseph continued to live before God, even when a slave and sexually tempted, Genesis 37:1-36, 39:1-23, 50:15-21
- Naaman humbled himself to dip in the Jordan River, 2 Kings 5:1-19
- Jesus, the Creator and Master, washed His disciples' feet, even the feet of His enemy, Judas. John 13:1-20

### **Learn from Jesus' example – How he was a servant**

An amazing example of Jesus being a servant took place the last night of his life before he was taken to be crucified. Jesus washed the feet of Judas, who had already betrayed him. Jesus did it in such a loving way that none of the other disciples knew anything was wrong.

When the apostle John begins to describe this unusual event, he describes the thinking of Jesus. John knew that the only way a person could practice such humble love toward an enemy would be to have a clear understanding of how much he was loved and accepted by the Highest Authority in the universe – his Father in heaven. This is how John began the description of the amazing act of service that Jesus did (John 13:1-4):

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.”

This kind of love – giving up our reputation, our comfort, and even our life for the welfare of another person – does not come naturally. We might make sacrifices for a friend, but giving up something for someone who has hurt us or caused us trouble is impossible on our own. We must have a clear understanding of who God is, how much he loves us, and how much he will care for us and build us up when others are tearing us down. When this is clear in our minds, we can humbly serve others, even if they are our enemy in some way.

YOU CAN BE A SERVANT THE SAME WAY JESUS DID, WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP!

***For thought and discussion***

What things about Jesus Christ, or which of his qualities, motivate you to want to help other people and serve others? You can thank him now for that and talk to him about your desire to make progress in living your life the way he lived his life here.

**ACTION POINTS**

- Commitment - Tell God you want Him to do whatever is necessary to teach you to grow in humility.
- Think of examples for how you can humble yourself before God and others.
- Pray and evaluate if there are ways you should change your thinking in this important area.
- Are there ways you could be serving your spouse, your family, or your roommate?
- Are there ways you could be serving your co-workers, neighbors, or friends?
- Do you frequently say “thanks” for the things your family does for you?

**For your consideration**

1. What Bible passage stood out to you from those given in Basic 5?
2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about humility?
3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to practice humility?
4. What is something about God that motivates you to be humble?
5. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do, to practice humility (consider the Action Steps)?

# God Trains Us to Humble Ourselves Before God Basic #6

**God's desire is to help you believe that He is always working for your best in every situation.**

"This is what the LORD says: 'Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?' declares the Lord. This is the one I esteem: he who is bumble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." Isaiah 66:1-2

- How great is God? Heaven is his throne and the earth is his footstool.
- God said to Abraham, (Gen. 18) "Sarah your wife will have a son." Sarah laughed. God said, "Is anything too difficult for me"
- God said to Jeremiah (Jer. 32) "Go, buy a field". Jeremiah said to God, "Lord, the country is ready to fall to the enemy" I know that nothing is too difficult for you, but ..." God said, "Is anything too difficult for me?"
- This is a daily question for the Christian as we face many difficulties in this life. Is anything too difficult for God?

God can do anything that is his will and plan. Nothing is too difficult for him. None of us are able to do things like God, but God says, "This is the one I esteem." In other words, "This is the person who gets my attention and blessing; the one who humbles himself and trusts me, and who trembles at my Word. When I promise something, you can be sure that you can trust me."

God has chosen to act upon our faith. Humility says, "If God says it, I am going to believe and trust God to do it." Humbling ourselves before God is yielding to Him and putting our faith completely in Him. ½

## Humble yourselves under the *mighty, loving* hand of God

Peter gives a detailed explanation of what it means to put your hope in God. He does this in his letter written to Christians who were going through suffering (1 Peter).

- 1 Peter 1:13 - Hope in future grace from God
- 1 Peter 1:21 - Hope because of the resurrection
- 2:19 - Hope in unjust suffering
- 2:23 - Jesus' example of putting his hope in His Father
- 3:5 - Wives to hope in God
- 3:15 - Hope in God in unjust suffering
- 4:19 - Hope in God in suffering
- 5:5-7 – Putting your hope in God means you are being humble before God
- **1 Peter 5:6** "Humble yourselves, therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time."

- 5:10-11 - God's promise is the reason to hope in God.

**[FOR DISCUSSION –** Describe a trial you have experienced at some time in your life and what you think God taught you from that difficult experience.]

### **Sarah's example of trusting God during pain and confusion**

Peter commends Sarah in 1 Peter 3:5-6 for trusting God to care for her, even when her husband was doing destructive things. Read Genesis 12:10-20 and Genesis 20:1-18, to understand what happened to Sarah and how God cared for her. Her experience must have been very painful and confusing!

### **Abraham's examples of trusting God during pain and confusion**

Proverbs 13:12 says that hope deferred makes a heart sick. This is what happened to Abraham and Sarah. God had promised them many descendants, and yet God did not even give them one child for at least twenty years! Genesis 15:1-6 describes the promise God gave Abraham, and then in 15:6, it says "Abram believed the LORD." Abram made a decision to trust God, even though he did not know when or how God would work. Hebrews 11:11-12 commends Abraham for this kind of faith.

### **David's example of trusting God during intense pain and confusion**

God had told David, through the prophet Samuel, that he would become king of Israel. David soon killed Goliath, but then Saul became jealous of David and tried to kill him. For at least eight years David had to run for his life, even living outside of Israel (in Ziklag) for several years. You can read about his experience of running for his life in 1 Samuel 22-31. David felt as if God had deserted him, according to his words in 1 Samuel 23:26-29. David also expressed his feelings of pain and confusion when he wrote Psalm 22. But at the same time he was experiencing the horrible pain of rejection and running just to stay alive, he had great confidence in who God is and that God would care for him (read the last half of Psalm 22). David probably also wrote Psalm 31 during this time.

**Matthew 11:28-30** "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

- All of us get tired at times, and feel almost like giving up. This is a part of our human weakness. This is often true of those who really want to serve God and do His will. We set a high standard for ourselves, but often feel our human failure.
- Where Jesus grew up, they used oxen to pull their wagons and plow their fields. They would often put an older experienced ox with a younger one. The younger would learn with the older. Jesus said, 'Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.' He wants us to learn that he is always working beside us. He wants us to learn to cooperate with him and trust him. He doesn't want us to think that we are alone as we live our lives and deal with situations that come up.
- We easily become discouraged, especially when we fail God, or allow sin in our lives. Sometimes, things just seem too hard, and we feel exhausted. We pour out our hearts

and lives to others, and then they turn against us, or leave us, and we easily feel discouraged.

- I have discovered that when I feel like giving up, it's either because I'm trying to do more than God wants me to do, or else I'm trying to do things in my own strength, instead of really trusting and resting in God. Jesus said, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

### **With humility, problems build relationship**

We often view problems in life as our "enemies", but God's plan for problems is that they become avenues of getting to know him better. The whole Bible is filled with examples of people who experienced over-whelming problems, but looked to God, humbled themselves before him (trusting him), and then were taught special lessons, and saw God do special things. Problems are probably the best means for helping us grow in a close friendship with God by learning from experience.

### **Humble yourself as a living sacrifice**

The more you know who God is and how much he loves you, the more logical it becomes to give every aspect of your life to him, allowing him to do anything he wants to do, in and through you, at any time. Some people describe this commitment as making Jesus Lord of your life in every way.

- Romans 12:1-2
- Matthew 16:24-25, Mark 8:34-36, Luke 9:23-25

Have you expressed this commitment to him? If yes, when? and how? Have you done this with every possession he has entrusted to you?

**[FOR DISCUSSION – Has there been a time in your life when you made Jesus Christ Lord in every way? If so, how did that come about?]**

### **Assertive humility**

The Bible says Moses was the most humble man living on earth at that time (Numbers 12:3). In what ways do you think Moses demonstrated humility?

A few verses later (Numbers 12:6-8), God explains why Moses was the most humble person. Using your own words, how would you describe why God viewed Moses as the most humble person living at that time?

1 Peter 5:5-6. There's at least two things we learn about humility in this passage.

- To be humble is a choice we make.
- God gives grace (unmerited help) to the person who chooses to be humble.

In what ways did David show humility when he found out about Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:1-54? Notice that David's brothers accused him of being proud (1 Samuel 17:28).

God said to Eli, "I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind." (1 Samuel 2:35). In what ways would this kind of priest be demonstrating humility? How would this priest learn what is on God's heart and mind?

Acts 2:14, 37-41. In what ways did Peter show humility in the situation described here?

John 14:12-14. Jesus makes some amazing promises in these verses. In what ways does a person show humility by responding to these promises?

When someone lets fear control their actions, how are they acting in pride instead of humility? (A good case study of a proud person living in fear is to study the life of King Saul in 1 Samuel 15-31, and compare him with David living in humility before God in the same chapters.)

### **Thankfulness is an expression of humility before God**

**Psalm 50:1-23** - God, our Creator desires giving thanks to Him more than any sacrifices we could make (vs. 7-14). Giving thanks is the attitude that opens the door for God to work.

**Romans 1:21** - "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave **thanks** to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."

**Ephesians 5:20** - "always giving **thanks** to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

**Philippians 4:6** - "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with **thanksgiving**, present your requests to God."

**Colossians 3:17** - "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving **thanks** to God the Father through him."

**1 Thessalonians 5:18** - "Give **thanks** in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

### **Thankfulness in trials**

Thanking God when you're in the middle of a trial is especially honoring to Him. When you thank Him that He will fulfill His promise when you cannot see how shows that you trust Him no matter what, which is a great honor to Him.

#### **Real life stories to illustrate this truth**

- David and Goliath. 1 Samuel 17
- Elisha gives up his life and career to be God's messenger. 1 Kings 19:15-21
- Paul and Silas sang to God while in the jail at Philippi. Acts 16:16-40

### **Learn from Jesus' example – How he humbled himself before his Father**

Jesus' example of humbling himself before his Father was the strongest when he was going into the most difficult time of his life, which led up to his death and resurrection. The apostle John wrote a lot of detail of what Jesus said and did during this extremely difficult time. The prayer that Jesus prayed when he was with his close followers (John 17) contains a lot of detail about the understanding Jesus had, especially about his relationship with his Father, who is the same Father we now have because of Jesus.

This attitude that Jesus had toward his Father can be described as humility before his Father. He had complete trust and confidence in his Father because of who he is. This gave Jesus the

desire and ability to cooperate with his Father no matter what his Father would bring or allow into his life. This attitude was especially clear when Jesus was crying out to his Father. Knowing that the time of his torture and death was near, Jesus said, "Not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42)

The understanding that Jesus had about his Father is described in John 17. Once again we can remember the following:

- Jesus knew who his eternal Father was. John 17:1-3. (The one who has all power, who is full of love, perfect in justice, unlimited in knowledge, present everywhere, and who never changes.)
- Jesus knew God's word and obeyed God's word. John 17:6-8.
- Jesus knew his Father was the source of everything he had. John 17:7,10. His Father was not only the source, but also in control of everything – even of Satan and all evil!
- Jesus knew he came from the Father and that he was sent here for a special purpose. John 17:3,4,8,18,25.
- Jesus knew that his Father is the Protector for everyone. John 17:11-12.
- Jesus knew how much his Father loved him. John 17:23,26.

This understanding enabled Jesus to go through all his sufferings. This is why he could say, "Not my will, but yours be done."

YOU CAN HUMBLE YOURSELF BEFORE THE FATHER THE SAME WAY JESUS DID, WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP!

#### ***For thought and discussion***

The Holy Spirit will help you understand the same truths about your relationship with the Father, which is the same as your relationship with his Son, Jesus. The more clearly you understand these realities, the more you will experience his grace to go through anything the Lord allows in your life. You will be able to humble yourself before God. Is there a difficult thing in your life at this time in which you think God might be working to help you get to know him better?

#### **ACTION POINTS**

- Commitment - offer yourself as a living sacrifice to the Lord, keeping in mind the most difficult situation you are now in. Because He loves you so much, tell Him that you will always, with His help, trust Him and obey Him in every situation. This commitment can be described as making Jesus Christ the Lord of your life.
- Think of the things that are challenging in your life. How can you put your hope in God in those situations? How can you be "aggressively humble" in those situations?
- Think of some ways you can humble yourself under God's mighty hand daily.
- To increase your confidence in God (which motivates you to humble yourself before Him), you can make a plan to memorize verses from the Bible about His power and love.
- Evaluate (with the Holy Spirit's help) if you've committed all "your" possessions, time, desires, and plans to God.

- One measure of your humility before God is how thankful you are to Him. Do you thank Him often?
- Has your trust in God been tested through trials? If so, what happened and what did you do?

#### **REVIEW**

- Review experiences and progress with past Action Points.

#### **For your consideration**

1. What Bible passage stood out to you from those given in Basic 6?
2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about humbling yourself before God?
3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to humble yourself before God?
4. What is something about God that motivates you to humble yourself before God?
5. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do, to humble yourself before God (consider the Action Steps)?

# God Trains Us to Humble Ourselves Before Others Basic #7

**God's desire is to help you believe He is always using all kinds of people for His good purposes in your life.**

## Two aspects of humility before others

There are two aspects of practicing humility before others, both of which are addressed in this Basic #7. They are –

1. Humility about the struggles, weaknesses, and sin in other people's lives
2. Humility about our own struggles, weakness, and sin in our lives

## Guard our minds and attitudes toward one another

**Philippians 2:2-5** “Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind, let each one regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus...”

- It is very important to guard our thinking and attitudes toward one another. Satan will take advantage of opportunities to cause tensions and irritations among friends and those in the church. The longer that we let a problem remain, the harder it will be to work past the difficulty. Learn to guard our minds and reject irritations and bitterness. Remember that our fleshly nature is proud and selfish. (This is especially important with husbands and wives.) The closer that we are to each other, the more tensions can occur. Continually focus on the attractive qualities of one another, instead of our weaknesses and faults. You cannot keep thoughts from entering your mind, but the thoughts that we allow to remain are there by our choice. (Philippians 4:6-8)

## Work past every tension or problem

**Ephesians 4:2-3** - One aspect of humility is to "be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

- "To be diligent" means to "take immediate action" to resolve problems.

**Matthew 5:23-24** "Leave your gift at the altar" and restore the relationship

**Matthew 18:15-17** "If your brother sins (against you) go and reprove him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax gatherer."

- A humble person will attempt to work past every tension and problem, and not give up to anger and bitterness. If you need help, ask a church leader to help you.

## **When is reproof appropriate?**

According to Matthew 18:15-17 reproof should happen when there is sin. Who defines what a sin is? All of Romans 14 and some of Romans 15 deals with the subject of people calling something sin when the Bible does not clearly say it is sin. God's Word should be the basis of knowing if something is sin and not our opinion or preference. If you can clearly show someone that God's Word says in more than one place that their action is a sin, it might be good to talk with them. If you cannot show them at least two places from God's Word, it is probably not helpful to talk with the other person. You would be setting yourself up as the judge instead of letting God's written Word be the judge.

## **How reproof is given**

None of us enjoys being told that we are wrong in some way. It isn't natural for people to be humble when they are told about a problem in their lives. It's easy to react with defensiveness, anger, rejection, withdrawal, or discouragement. Because of this, when we think of giving reproof to someone, it's important to make sure we are acting in humility and love (1 Cor. 13:1-7 reminds us that anything done without love is useless). Following are some key points for reproof to be done in love:

1. Pray, asking God to expose any pride or wrong attitudes in yourself.
2. Pray for the other person.
3. Make sure you have Scripture to show the other person as the basis for what you say.
4. Do not assume you completely understand the other person's situation. (Jesus completely understood other people and their hearts, but you don't.) Plan to begin your conversation with the other person by giving your observations (without making a judgment call) and then asking them to explain more. When people feel that you understand them, it will be easier for them to listen to what you have to say.

## **Forgiveness**

Knowing God's love and power is the basis for complete forgiveness.

**Matthew 5:43-44** Loving our enemies is possible the more we understand how much God loved us when we were His enemies (Romans 5:8-10).

**Joseph's example** in Genesis is a strong example of how complete forgiveness happens.

Joseph's brothers hated him and sold him as a slave. Then in Egypt, working as a slave he was falsely accused and put in prison. He had big reasons to be angry at his brothers and to be angry at God. But instead, he became convinced God was using all the evil for his good and for the good of his family (**Genesis 50:19-20**). This resulted in complete forgiveness.

**Bitterness** grows in our heart when we do not completely forgive someone and also if we cannot see how God is using the evil for our good. This bitterness will hold us back from understanding how God is really building us up through the painful trial. This is stated in

**Hebrews 12:15**, where it says that we will miss God's grace (help) if we allow bitterness in our life. It then says the bitter root will grow to cause trouble and defile many.

**Ephesians 4:31-32** "Let all bitterness and wrath; and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind, tender hearted, forgiving each other; just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

**Matthew 18:21-22** Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times? Jesus said to him, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven."

**Luke 17:5** In a similar situation, when Jesus said to continue forgiving, the Apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.”

- It will surely test our faith when someone offends us often, but this is what God’s love is like for us. God will give us the grace and power to forgive again and again, if we really trust Him and humble ourselves to God and one another.

### **Forgiveness requires paying a cost**

When we have been wronged, it’s natural for us to want the person who caused us pain to pay for what they did. But Jesus Christ did just the opposite for each of us. We caused Him to have emotional pain by our rejection and rebellion against Him, but He became a man and took the pain and penalty we deserve when He went to the cross. (Romans 5:6-10)

When we focus on what Jesus did for us, it becomes possible to endure the cost from other people who have wronged us. When we focus on what Jesus did for us, we become humble before God and then it’s easier to be humble before other people. At this point we begin thinking and praying about what will be most helpful for the other person. Our motive will be to help them rather than a motive of revenge.

We may have experienced a big loss or a lot of pain because of the other person’s wrong, but when we remember that Jesus paid an even greater price so we would not have to be condemned to hell, our attitude changes. This is when we can see the other person from God’s perspective and ask God to help us love them in the same way He loves us.

### **Forgiveness does not equal trust**

God wants us to forgive each person for whatever wrong they do against us, but that does not mean we can always trust them. Many times it is even unwise to trust someone who acts like a fool, as Proverbs states:

- Proverbs 26:6, “Like cutting off one’s feet or drinking violence is the sending of a message by the hand of a fool.”
- Proverbs 26:10, “Like an archer who wounds at random is he who hires a fool or any passer-by.”

Sometimes it’s not wise to entrust our welfare or our bodies to someone acting foolishly. Even though we forgive them and love them, it might not be wise to entrust ourselves to them. This could mean not living with them, or not giving them responsibility. We need God’s help to give us wisdom for the many factors in relationships.

### **God uses abuse and suffering to help us mature**

In sports, players know that pain and suffering are usually necessary while playing to win. In the spiritual battle we are in, God also says that sometimes abuse, pain, and suffering are included in the path to victory.

God even says that when evil is done against us by other people, such as being falsely accused, or cheated by others, he will use it for our benefit. Romans 8:28-29 explains that God uses all things to help us become like Jesus Christ, who had a very close relationship with his Father. Even when we suffer because of people doing evil things against us, God’s plan is to use that

experience to help us grow in a stronger relationship with him. God wants to help us remember that a close relationship with him is the most important thing in life.

An example of this is when God led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. Deuteronomy 8 describes how God used difficulties in the desert to accomplish good purposes in their lives, such as the following:

- To reveal what was in their hearts (Deuteronomy 8:2, 16)
- To humble them (Deuteronomy 8:3, 16)
- To transfer their hope away from circumstances toward God and his Word (Deuteronomy 8:3)
- To train them through discipline, like a child (Deuteronomy 8:5)
- To help them learn that blessing ultimately comes through God alone and not from their own abilities (Deuteronomy 8:17, 18)
- To teach them to praise God and appreciate him (Deuteronomy 8:10-14)

In the New Testament we read similar explanations of how God works.

- “Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 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.” Hebrews 12:10-11
- “For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” 1 Peter 2:19-21
- “The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.” 1 Corinthians 6:7-8

As we think about God using evil actions of people for our benefit, it's good to remember that God never approves of evil, and there will always be consequences. They will face his judgment at some time in the future. A strong example of this is the awful judgement that God brought against Babylon after God had used Babylon to discipline the people of Israel (as explained in 2 Chronicles 36:15-18). Jeremiah 51 describes the awful judgement, and God tells Israel in Jeremiah 51:24, “‘Before your eyes I will repay Babylon and all who live in Babylonia for all the wrong they have done in Zion,’ declares the LORD.”

God uses abuse and mistakes of other people to build our character, but even though he allows evil to touch us, he does not condone the evil. In God's sovereign plan evil can work toward the good result of drawing us closer to the Lord, but that does not mean that the evil itself is good. Evil brings judgement.

### **With humility, problems build relationship**

We often see problems in relationships as obstacles for the friendship, but in reality, they are just the opposite. When we handle relationship problems in God's way, by humbling ourselves

before others, the result will be a closer friendship than ever before. Many marriages break up because of problems which the partners have not learned to deal with in God's way. If they learn to apply the principles that God has given, they will have a stronger marriage than ever. The same is true for every relationship. (Of course we cannot control how others respond to us. Even though we do everything in God's way, with His Spirit's help, some people will still turn against us, as they did when Jesus lived here and communicated love to people.)

### **Humble openness deepens relationships**

Sam (name changed) had been a faithful church member for years, even participating in small discipleship groups for men. But at the same time he was enslaved to a pornography habit which he had told no one about. He felt guilty and hypocritical, all the time hoping that if he became a strong enough Christian he could conquer the habit. It wasn't until he joined a group of men who were committed to 100% openness and absolute unconditional love, relying on Jesus Christ's forgiveness, that he experienced victory. An additional surprise was that he developed closer deep friendships with these same men than he had ever previously experienced, and beyond what he had ever imagined possible! This same experience has been repeated in many other lives.

God has designed us for unconditional love – both to receive it and to give it. This is the gospel. The more we see the awfulness of our sin, and the unconditional grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the more our love and appreciation for Him grows. The same principle is true in human relationships. If you are humbly open about the awfulness of your sin, with a willingness to learn and grow, and if at the same time others accept you with unconditional love, the deeper your relationships will grow. This is living by the power of the gospel!

### **Pride destroys relationships**

- Pride thinks I can accomplish something by myself.
- Pride thinks I know all that is needed in a situation.
- Pride thinks it is more important to be right than to love.
- Pride thinks my welfare is more important than the welfare of others.
- Pride makes judgements about the motives of others before hearing their explanation.

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 1 Peter 5:5

### **Judging others**

A common form of pride is our natural tendency to look at the actions of another person and then to make a judgement about their motives. Making a judgement about someone's motive can be very destructive. Look at the story in Joshua 22 of the Bible to see the potential for destruction from judging motives.

God's Word has clear instruction about how we should and should not evaluate others. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:5 that we should not judge others. Soon after that statement Paul said, "I have already passed judgment on the one who did this" (1 Corinthians 5:3). On the surface Paul seems to be contradicting himself. But when we study the whole passage closely we see that Paul writes about two different kinds of judgment. It's very important for us to understand these two kinds of judgments.

1. In 1 Corinthians 4:5 we learn about the first kind of judgment when Paul writes, "... judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts." **Judging people's motives** is this first kind of judgment. This is the kind of judgment we are not to practice.
2. The other kind of judgment is written about in 1 Corinthians 5. In 1 Cor. 5:3, it says, "I have already passed judgment on the one who did this." Then he explains that he was judging the sexual immorality that was being practiced by a church member. He also goes on to say that other actions that should be judged are idolatry, slander, drunkenness, and swindling (1 Corinthians 5:11). These are all actions that God's Word clearly states to be wrong. This second kind of judging can be defined as **judging people's actions** as to whether or not they violate a command of Scripture.

Here are examples of wrong motives that only God can see and wrong actions that we can see.

WRONG MOTIVES	WRONG ACTIONS
Proud	Lying
Selfish	Stealing
Jealous	Sex outside marriage
Biased	Idolatry
Hateful	Murder
Lustful	Drunkenness

For both categories, God's Word provides the basis for judgement. For motives, God's Spirit uses His Word to judge our hearts and He uses His Word to convict us about our own motives. But we cannot judge other people's heart motives because we cannot see their heart. Sometimes our guess might be correct, and other times our guess will be wrong. Because of this, God's Word says we are not to judge another person's motives in any way at any time. Matthew 7:1, James 4:11 and Romans 14:13 are other places that make this same statement.

Jesus gave an interesting example of the problem of judging someone's heart motive in Matthew 20:1-15 when He told the story of an employer hiring people at different times of the day and then paying all of them the same amount at the end of the day. Some of the workers then accused the employer of being unfair. They thought he was doing something wrong. They were totally convinced that the actions of the employer were wrong because he didn't do what they thought he should do. And Jesus pointed out that the true motive of the employer was to be generous with people!

How can we know if an action is wrong or not? God's Word is always the basis. To judge an action accurately, we must be able to show a person where God's Word says it's wrong to do the action they did. In the example of the employer, nowhere does God's Word say that it is wrong for an employer to pay employees different amounts of wages. Some employees might not be happy, but the employer is not disobeying God's Word in any way.

Another example of making a judgment of motives is when someone concludes their friend does not like them because the friend ignored them all day and did not say anything to them, even though they were in the same house. Nowhere does God's Word say how much we should

talk to others. The person is being judged as having an unloving heart motive because they did not act the way the other person thought they should.

If you judge someone's motives, you are attacking their character. The person's reputation is made to appear bad when you say they have a bad motive in some way. This is slander. God says slander is always wrong (1 Corinthians 5:11, Ephesians 4:31, James 4:11). Love seeks to build up and not to put down (1 Corinthians 8:1). Even when a judgement is made against a wrong action, the purpose should be to help and not to put down.

In summary, a simple guideline helps us know if an evaluation is a good judgment or a bad judgment: ***If you cannot show someone the statement in God's Word that says their action is wrong, you should keep your mouth closed. And never make a negative evaluation of their motives.***

Does this mean we can't let someone know their actions felt hurtful to us? No, if someone's action does cause you pain, it is often appropriate to let them know your feelings and the effect their action had on you. You then trust God to deal with their motives in whatever way He thinks best. But if you evaluate their motive as wrong, you are the one disobeying God. You are wrong to try to take the role of God!

The opposite of passing judgment on another person is looking for ways to build them up. "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. (Romans 15:1-2)

### **Other examples of humility before others**

The following passages describe different aspects of being humble in our relationships.

**Romans 1:16-17**, "I am not ashamed of the gospel [I am not ashamed of telling about the awfulness of my sin and the amazing unconditional love and forgiveness of God in Christ], because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes [This includes Christians telling other Christians about the awfulness of their sin and the amazing forgiveness of Jesus Christ. To be afraid or ashamed of telling someone about our sin and how we're completely forgiven is to not believe God's unconditional forgiveness.] ... For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written; 'The righteous will live by faith.'"

**James 5:16** - Confessing our sin to other Christians, who love and pray for us will result in healing - especially emotional healing.

**Galatians 6:1-3** - Humbly be open about the burden of your sin, the burden of your weakness, or the burden of your problem, so someone else can help carry it (if they would like to).

Demanding, or even expecting that others will carry your burden is not humility.

**Ephesians 4:15** - Speaking the truth about our sin and weaknesses, in the context of love, will result in growth!

**Isaiah 66:1-2** - God, in His greatness, has high esteem for the person who is humble and broken about his sin, his weakness, and his problems. This is the attitude that builds a close friendship with God and also with people.

### **Listening well to others is an expression of humility**

James 1:19 says to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. When we listen carefully to another person's thoughts and feelings, we are humbly loving them. Poor listening is a form of rejection, diminishing the other person and acting as if they are unimportant.

- Good listening asks perceptive questions to understand the other person better.
- Good listening ministers to them and prepares you to speak words that can be helpful to their actual needs.
- Good listening requires patience. When you listen attentively, you wait to express your own thoughts and opinions.

### **Thanking others is an expression of humility**

All of us need help from others in every aspect of our lives. The more you recognize your neediness, the more you will appreciate other people who God uses to meet your needs.

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

**Ephesians 5:4** - Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather **thanksgiving**.

### **Loving those who don't love you**

The most amazing kind of love is when a person shows love to someone who has caused them pain. It's easy to love someone who loves you. But when someone close to you causes you to have pain, either from mistakes they make or from their selfish actions or words, it is extremely difficult to love them. God has a special plan for these difficult situations, but it's impossible to fulfill without a clear understanding of how God showed this kind of love to us.

This most amazing kind of love that God showed to us is described in Romans 5:8-10. We were sinners who were living as God's enemies, yet God painfully sacrificed His Son so we could be in His family!

#### **[FOR DISCUSSION –**

- What are some other examples of Jesus loving people who didn't love Him? (Remember His action toward Judas in John 13:1-5.)
- Peter refers to Jesus' example in 1 Peter 2:21-23. What did Jesus do when people abused him and caused him pain?
- After reading Luke 6:27-36, discuss ways this instruction can be applied by brothers and sisters in a church. Discuss the same instruction for a family.
- What are reasons that God wants us love those who hurt us?
- If a brother or sister in your church does something to hurt you, or says something to hurt you, how does Jesus want you to respond?
- What did Paul mean in 1 Corinthians 6:7?
- Read 1 Peter 2:19-21 and 3:8-17. In what ways do these instructions apply to relationships in a church, especially when someone is hurt by the words or actions of another brother or sister?
- What are some reasons that Jesus' instructions in John 13:34-35 are impossible to obey if we don't understand the example of Jesus?

#### **Real life stories to illustrate this truth**

- David showed unconditional love to Saul after cutting his robe, 1 Samuel 24:1-22
- Daniel, the king, and the lions' den, Daniel 1 and 6

**[FOR DISCUSSION –** Would you be able to describe a difficult relationship you've had and also some way that you believe God helped you benefit from that relationship?]

### **Learn from Jesus' example – How he humbled himself before others**

Jesus related to all kinds of people in a very special way, whether to a poor person in need, a governing authority, an enemy, someone from a different gender, a rich person, a criminal, or a religious leader. In every situation, Jesus related to people in a way that won the hearts of many. A simple description of all these situations is that Jesus was always humble before them.

How was Jesus able to be humble in every contact with every kind of person? We can learn from his examples with various people. Here are a few of them:

- **A woman who was rejected by Jesus' culture because of her lifestyle and also her race** – Jesus met her while resting by a well of water (John 4). He took initiative with her by asking for a drink, which was culturally unacceptable (John 4:7-9). From the beginning of the conversation, it is clear that Jesus knew that she needed a relationship with God and that he was sent from God (John 4:10). With this awareness, Jesus focused on how he could help her.
- **A man who was a traitor to the Jewish people and abused his relationships with people** – Jesus did not let people's opinion about Zacchaeus affect the way he related to him. (Luke 19:1-10) Jesus was well aware that God loved every person (John 3:16) and that his mission was to rescue those who were separated from the Father (Luke 19:10).
- **A man who had the authority and power to have Jesus killed** – The Roman governor, Pilate, had authority over Jesus. When Jesus was brought before him, Jesus was more concerned about helping Pilate understand the truth of God than defending himself. (John 18:28 – 19:16) Initially, Jesus was silent before his accusers when they brought him to Pilate (Matthew 27:11-15). Jesus' goal was to help Pilate understand who was really in control of all that was happening in the world (John 19:11). Peter later wrote that the reason Jesus stood before Pilate without trying to defend himself was that Jesus was entrusting himself to his Father (1 Peter 2:23).
- **A close friend who denied him** – Peter was one of Jesus' closest followers, yet after Jesus' arrest, Peter publicly denied he knew Jesus three times. This kind of rejection by a close friend is one of the worst pains people experience. But Jesus was focused on the work that God was doing in the heart of Peter, and not on his own comfort. Days later Jesus had a conversation with Peter to encourage him about his future role as a leader. Even though Peter had denied him, Jesus did not forsake Peter but rather humbled himself to help Peter (John 21:15-19).

There are common factors in all these examples.

- Jesus knew his identity with his Father. (John 13:1)
- Jesus knew his Father loved every person (John 3:16), and that God was working to help every person find him (Acts 17:26-27).
- Jesus knew his Father had a special purpose for him and for every other child of God. (John 17:6-8)

We know these realities from God's Word. You can ask the Holy Spirit to help you better understand and remember these truths of reality. As a result, you will also be able to act in humility before other people, no matter what they do!

YOU CAN HUMBLE YOURSELF BEFORE OTHERS THE SAME WAY JESUS DID, WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP!

***For thought and discussion***

Do you have a difficult friendship in which you would like God to help you understand how he is working? You can talk to God about that now, and ask him whatever questions come to your mind.

**ACTION POINT**

- Pray and evaluate if there is any issue affecting your relationship with anyone.
- Decide when and how you will take action to reconcile the problem (maybe getting advice from more mature Christians).
- Have you found someone who loves you unconditionally, who you trust and can share 100% of your sin, weaknesses, and problems? Are you doing this? If not, ask God to help you find such a person. Preferably, it would be most beneficial if you could do this regularly with two or three others of your same gender, meeting together as a small group.
- Commitment - Tell God you are willing to humble yourself in the most difficult relationship you now have and ask Him to show you what to do. It's usually wise to get advice from a mature Christian who has experienced similar problems.

**REVIEW**

- Review experiences and progress with past Action Points.

**For your consideration**

1. What Bible passage stood out to you from those given in Basic 7?
2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about humbling yourself before people?
3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to humble yourself before people?

4. What is something about God that motivates you to humble yourself before people?

5. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do, to humble yourself before people (consider the Action Steps)?

# God Trains Us as Members of His Church

## Basic #8

**God's desire is to teach you to be a strong member of His body, the church.**

### What is the Church?

**Ephesians 1:22-23** “And He (God) put all things in subjection under His (Jesus) feet, and gave Him as Head over all things to the Church, which is HIS BODY, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

- It is the spiritual body (family) of Jesus Christ.

### The church is the body of Christ

**1 Corinthians 12:12-30** describes the body of Christ and its purposes

1. The first purpose of a body is to do the will of its HEAD. Let's say that you and I get up tomorrow morning. We wake up and remember that we need to go to work today. What do we do? Well, our head says that we need to get out of bed. I signal my feet and legs to get out of bed and stand up. What if my feet say to me, “Not me.” I want to stay in bed.” We now have a problem. Our feet and legs should simply obey and do whatever my Head says to do. If my hands say to me, “I want to stay in bed also. I'm tired from all the work yesterday.” There would be no way that we could accomplish our purpose and mission. Our body simply obeys and fulfills whatever our head wants to do. Jesus Christ is our Head, if He is our personal Savior and Lord. We are each a part of His body (family), and our purpose and reason for being alive is to do His will. He could have taken us home to be with Him in heaven the moment that we trusted Him as our Savior. He left us here on earth to be His body (servants), and to do His will and carry out His plans and purpose. 1 Corinthians 12:27-28. A local church, where you meet each week, is simply an example of His whole body, which is a spiritual unity, and never meets in one place on this earth. It will someday meet altogether in heaven.
2. The second purpose of the body is for the members to help each other. 1 Corinthians 12:14-26 explains how each of us needs all the other members, and that we are all to serve each other. Ephesians 4:11-16 is another good explanation of this purpose.
3. The third purpose of the body is to carry out the purpose and desire of its head. When Jesus was here, His purpose was to find and save the lost (Luke 19:10). His purpose for His body today remains the same (Matthew 28:18-20).

### Testimony

Mike Bergen grew up in a Christian environment and attended church meetings and services of many kinds and in many locations. He wrote about his early experience in this way:

“As I was growing up, and even through my time in school, all the way through Bible college, church was a good thing to do, but it was never something exciting or something I had a passion for. Then when I was a student at the University of Kansas I began meeting other students who thought and acted like missionaries. I also met some families who lived near the campus and acted like missionaries. Those who weren't students had jobs,

but their desire was to invests their lives with Jesus Christ. All of them attended the same church, which motivated me to make an appointment with one of the leaders to learn why the members of his church seemed to be different than most Christians I had known over the years. Paul's answer changed my concept of church for the rest of my life. With his Bible, he explained that what Jesus did with His followers is our best model for church. Wow, I had never thought about that before! The things Jesus did with His disciples were the same things his disciples continued to do with each other and the new disciples after Jesus left, as described in places like Acts 2:42-47. Church is made of people and not a building! The things Jesus did with His disciples are also the model for what church members do with each other. With this new understanding, a fire began to burn in my heart. What Jesus did with his disciples was much more exciting to me than my previous concept of church. Since that original fire was lit, my marriage, my career, and my whole life direction took on a different form, and I have never been disappointed. For me, there is no other lifestyle more exciting than living as a follower of Jesus Christ in unity with others who are doing the same. And this is church!"

### **The church exists in two aspects on earth**

1. The spiritual or universal body, which includes every believer. (Romans 12:4-5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27, Ephesians 4:4-6) We are placed into the universal body the moment that we receive Jesus as our Savior (Ephesians 1:13-14).
2. A local church or congregation. We "join" a local church when we commit ourselves to meet together and serve Jesus with that group of believers. (1 Corinthians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1) Acts 2:42-47 describes the activities of this group of believers.

### **The foundation of the church**

**Matthew 16:18** "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."

- What is Jesus talking about when he says to Peter, "upon this Rock I will build my church"? Did Jesus mean that Peter was the Rock or something else?
- It is always important to look carefully at the verses before and after any passage, in order to clearly understand the meaning of the Scriptures. Just before this verse, Jesus asked Peter (verse 13), "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Some said one thing and others said another. Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to Peter, "My Father has revealed THIS to you." He went right on to say, "You are Peter, (his name means "a little rock"), and upon THIS rock I will build my church.". What is He saying? Is the Rock (foundation), what Peter said about Jesus, or is the rock Peter, whom some traditions have claimed was the first Pope?
- How can we know for sure? One way would be to ask Peter. That, of course seems impossible, but not really. Listen to Peter talk to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. (Acts 4:10-12) "Let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. HE IS THE STONE (Rock) which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." The foundational truth that Jesus wants Peter to preach and the world to know, is that Jesus alone is the foundation and

the only way of salvation and eternal life. Peter makes this very clear. He does NOT tell the Jewish leaders, "I am the Rock, the way of salvation and eternal life." The foundation is Jesus alone. (See also 1 Peter 2:5-8)

- "I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."

Jesus clearly says that He will build HIS Church. The church is NOT Catholic, or Baptist, or Methodist, or Pentecostal. A local congregation may be that or anything else, but the Church that Jesus talked about, which is really His spiritual family on earth, is HIS CHURCH, and no one else's.

### **What did Jesus teach about the church?**

Jesus (now the Head of the Church) taught and exemplified **what** He wanted to be accomplished on earth and **how** He wanted it to be accomplished. He made it clear that life is all about living with Him. He spent time with His followers continually, He frequently taught them Scripture, He talked with them and listened to them frequently, and He taught them about sharing life together in every way. Then, just before He ascended to heaven, He told all His followers, "Teach others to do everything I have taught you." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Soon after Jesus ascended to heaven, we read in Acts 2:42-27 that His followers continued the same priorities He practiced with them. The main difference was that they couldn't see Him anymore. This is what church is all about - growing in a relationship with Christ!

### **God's plan for you and His church**

The church and your family are the most crucial places for you to apply the Basic Commitment of humbling yourself before others. The church is the environment God plans to use to help you grow and to use you to help others.

### **Ephesians 4:1-6**

- Make every effort to be united with the body of Christ (the church) (Eph 4:3-6)
- God's plan for your growth to maturity is within the context of a church. (Eph 4:11-13, 16)

The church is God's instrument or body to carry out His will, plans and purpose on this earth. HE has a great plan, as we will see later, and each one of us is a part of that plan. As each of us love God and obey His Word, we will be an important part of accomplishing the Will of God in our world and in our generation.

### **The church is THE BASIS OF TRUTH in the world**

1 Timothy 3:15

### **The only organization that will last**

**Matthew 16:18** The gates of Hades SHALL NOT overpower it. Jesus is at work through His Church, or spiritual family every day and in every place. As you and I respond to the Holy Spirit and do God's work, God accomplishes His will in our world. Satan will try daily to distract and cause us to love this world more than God. He will try to stop whatever God wants to do. HE WILL NOT STOP JESUS. Each of us may fail, become discouraged or even give in to sin, but the powers of evil will not stop God. The gates of Hades (Hell) shall not overpower Jesus and His church. HE will be victorious. His power is greater than any power on earth or heaven. Praise God!

## Members have different roles

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 teaches that God has made the members of His body (His church) differently for different purposes. Read through the lists of gifts in Romans 12:3-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, and discuss with others what gifts (abilities, tendencies, desires) God has given you to be a help to others.

## Tithing

Before Jesus Christ came, God instructed the spiritual leaders (Levites) of His people (Israel) to be supported by a tenth of all the income (profit from work, crops, livestock, etc.) that was made by all the other Israelites. Numbers 18:20-21 summarizes this principle (read).

Tithing taught people to give honor to God in a practical way (Deuteronomy 14:22-23, Malachi 3:10). This was done by always setting aside a tenth of the earnings for God, no matter what the circumstances were.

When there are financial difficulties, and a tithe is first given to God, we are saying that our trust is in God to care for us and that we are not trusting our ability to make money or to control money. This is one reason why a tithe was to be the “first fruits” of our profit and not from the leftovers (Exodus 23:19, 34:26, Numbers 18:12-13, Deuteronomy 18:4-5).

Even though tithing is not a command in the New Testament, the principle of honoring God with a tithe still applies for all time.

- Jesus commented about tithing in Matthew 23:23 (read), recognizing that it was a Godly practice.
- Paul then referred to this Old Testament principle and recommended that it be applied to the leaders of the church (1 Corinthians 9:13-14 – read).
- James 1:16-17 reminds us that every good thing we have is from God. When we recognize that **everything** we have comes from God, it becomes easy to give back a little of what He has already given. A father came home from work and greeted his little son eating a bowl full of little crackers. After asking his son about his day, the father asked, “Can Daddy have one of your crackers?” The son responded quickly, “No – mine!” Little did the son understand that he had a bowl full of crackers because of his hard working dad. In fact, all the son had was because of his dad’s job. He did not understand that his dad was eager to not only give him more crackers but everything else to make his life enjoyable. Later when the son would understand, he would be eager to give a cracker back to his dad when he asked! 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 addresses this attitude.

Tithing can be an expression of our trust in God to use His church to carry out His purposes.

### Real life stories to illustrate truth about the church

- We see how Jesus’ followers continued to follow Him, even after He ascended. Acts 1:1-14, 2:42-47. This is what church is all about.
- Churches were the plan to help people know Jesus and grow with Him, as Paul demonstrated on his missionary journeys, Acts 13:1 – 14:28 (especially 14:23)

**[FOR DISCUSSION – What are some ways that God has used people in a church to help you?]**

### **Learn from Jesus' example – How he lived as a member of God's family**

God could have designed a plan in which he would accomplish all his purposes by himself, or he could have designed a plan to use angels to rescue and help people. But he designed a plan to use weak people with many problems to accomplish his purposes. And then God became one of those weak people and lived among them. Other people even provided for his needs while he was here. In Luke 8:1-3 we read the names of three women who provided for the physical needs of Jesus and his other followers.

Jesus' ministry also required the work of other people. Whether it was handing out food and collecting it (Luke 9:16-17) or communicating love and truth to people (Matthew 10:1-42), Jesus depended on others for his ministry. That is the way he lived and worked in this world, and that is the way he continues to live and work in this world through his Spirit. Jesus needed the other members of his family when he lived here, and he continues to need the other members of his body when he is not physically here. (Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31)

In God's unlimited greatness, he created a plan in which limited, weak, failing people have an essential part. Even when Jesus lived here, he explained that people are an essential part of God's plan, which is his plan. Jesus used the analogy of a grape vine to illustrate how essential each person is. In John 15:1-8, Jesus explained that he is the vine and we are the branches, which are essential for bearing fruit.

**YOU CAN LIVE AS A MEMBER OF GOD'S FAMILY THE SAME WAY JESUS DID, WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP!**

#### **For discussion and thought**

It's amazing that Jesus wants to use weak people with a lot of problems as part of his body (team) to accomplish his important eternal work! As you have probably already experienced, it can be very difficult to work with people who have different ideas and who don't even interpret the Bible the same way you do! What do you think are some benefits of this plan of using weak people to accomplish his eternal work?

#### **ACTION POINT**

- Commitment - Tell God you are committed to do whatever it takes to be united closely with His church, so His purposes can be accomplished in and through you.
- Decide the next step you can take to grow in your involvement with the Lord's church.
- Are you satisfied with how you are using the gifts and abilities God has given you to serve His church?
- Are you tithing regularly?

#### **For your consideration**

1. What Bible passage stood out to you from those given in Basic 8?
2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about His church?
3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to understand God's church?
4. What is something about God that motivates you to participate with His church?
5. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do, to serve God's church(consider the Action Steps)?

# God Trains Us to be Leaders

## Basic #9

**God's desire is to help you learn more about helping other people.**

God's desire for all his children is that they would learn how to help others. And when we help others, we are acting as leaders in some way. We all appreciated the help that our mothers or fathers gave us when we were young. In that way, we appreciated how they were leaders in our lives. As we grow up and mature, God wants us to learn to help others in every kind of way – physically, spiritually, emotionally, and relationally.

### In this section

In this section you will consider the subject of leadership from several perspectives;

- Working under leaders
- Understanding church leaders
- Becoming a leader
- Partnering with another leader

### Working under leaders

When you grew up as a child, you probably learned to cooperate with your parents, who were the primary leaders in your life. God's instruction for you was to "Honor your parents," (Exodus 20:12) and to "obey your parents" (Eph. 6:1-3). What you learned or didn't learn from your parents carried over to your practice with future leaders in your life, such as teachers, coaches, and employers. The thinking God wants you to have toward leaders in your life was addressed in Basics 5, 6, and 7. Following are ways God helps **children** learn and practice these basics:

- **Basic 5 – God Trains Us to be Humble Servants.** If a child develops a desire to please their parent by serving, that is a Christ-like quality that will help the child for their rest of his/her life, in every situation where they are under a leader of some kind.
- **Basic 6 – God Trains Us Humble Ourselves Before God.** If a child learns that God is the one who put him/her in that family for a special purpose, and trusts God to show them what that purpose is, they will bring joy to their parents and every leader in their life.
- **Basic 7 – God Trains Us to Humble Ourselves Before Others.** When a child understands that God is using the parent to accomplish a good purpose in his/her life, even when the parent has many weaknesses and problems, that child will be ready to work under every kind of leader in every aspect of life.

God will continue to teach you more about the lessons in Basics 5, 6, and 7 for the rest of your life. Whether you work for an employer, or you are a member of a church, or you live as a citizen in a city or a country, God will use many kinds of leaders to help you grow in your relationship with him.

These are also the same qualities that will help you be a good leader. When you help another person, you are a leader for that person in some way. If you become a parent, you are a leader

for that child. If you organize an activity for people, or if you are assigned to lead other people in some way, you are a leader in those situations. As said previously, the kind of leader you will be is determined by how you practice Basics 5, 6, and 7. Following are ways that God trains **adults** to practice these basics:

- **Basic 5 – God Trains Us to be Humble Servants.** A good leader learns to serve the people the people he/she is leading by sacrificing his/her time, energy, and resources to help them become successful and stronger as individual people.
- **Basic 6 – God Trains Us Humble Ourselves Before God.** A good leader understands that God allows every circumstance for a special purpose, and trusts God to give wisdom to accomplish his purposes in every situation.
- **Basic 7 – God Trains Us to Humble Ourselves Before Others.** A good leader understands that God has a good purpose for bringing each person into his/her life, and the leader depends on God to show his purposes in every relationship.

Jesus is the best example of a good leader. You can read more about his example at the end of this section.

God is training you in many ways to be a Christ-like leader. As you grew up in a family, he was training you. Hopefully you are now in a church family. Your relationship with church leaders in your life is similar to your relationship with your parents, but not exactly the same. Your church family also has similarities to your physical family, but it is not the same.

### **God wants you to become a leader**

God's normal plan for children is that they become parents. Parents are leaders. God's plan for His spiritual children is that they also become spiritual parents. Jesus clearly explained this to all His followers after His resurrection when He said, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:18-20) When you introduce another person to Jesus Christ, you are leading that person to Christ. When you help someone grow in their life with Christ, you are doing the work of a leader in that person's life.

God's plan for all of His children is to continually learn more about effectively helping others to make progress in their lives. Another way to say this is that He wants all his children to continually learn more about leadership. You don't need a title to be God's leader. When you serve him by serving other people from your heart (meeting their spiritual, emotional, and physical needs), you are a leader. As you learn to do God's will daily, you are growing as His leader. He will give you his grace and power to make a difference in the world as you make a difference in the lives of other people.

### **The many aspects of leadership**

The purpose of a leader is to serve other people. This was Jesus' example when he lived here, as he said in Mark 10:43-45, "Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, ... for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, ..."

Anyone who takes steps to meet the needs of another person is doing the work of a leader. This can be done in many ways. God has made each of us in different ways so that different people

see different needs. For example, in a group of people one of them might see a need for them to be organized so they can effectively accomplish some work together. Another person in the group sees that one of them is very tired and discouraged and begins to talk with the person to find a way to encourage them. Still another person sees a need to provide food for the group and looks for how it can be provided. And another person remembers that it is important to be asking God for his leadership in the group.

The different ways that people in the group see needs relates to how God has made them. Some places in the Bible describe this as God giving different gifts to people. This is described in Romans 12:4-8, “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”

The more that a person learns to effectively meet the needs he sees in the lives of others, the more they learn to be an effective servant leader. God has designed people to function in many different aspects of leadership.

### **Churches are similar to families**

In the New Testament, those who gave their lives to Jesus Christ often referred to each other as brothers and sisters. Jesus, himself, called us his brothers and sisters (John 20:17). Our true Father is God, himself, but more mature brothers and sisters are to teach and care for their younger brothers and sisters (Matthew 28:18-20).

### **Pastors are like parents in the church**

Similar to parents, pastors are responsible to spiritually nurture, care for, and teach those under their care. (John 21:15-17, Ephesians 4:11-16)

**Hebrews 13:7-8** “Remember those who led you, who spoke the Word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today and forever.”

**Hebrews 13:17** “Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

**1 Peter 5:1-5** Mature Christians carry out a role with many similarities to parents. Christians who have matured in the life with Jesus, and who are helping a group of others grow in their life with Jesus, are designated as elders (overseers, pastors, shepherds are interchangeable terms).

Imagine what family life would be like if the parents or the children moved to live with a different family whenever problems came up in their own family. To counteract this tendency, every Christian needs to see the importance of being loyal to their own church and to trust God to use the leaders of that church to build into their lives, even though those leaders are not perfect.

Imagine what it would be like if parents focused on trying to get as many children as possible to eat at their house, and even built bigger houses to accommodate more children. In such an environment, training children could not be done very effectively. But this is the way that many church leaders think. They often focus on making the church like an organization or a business and not like a family where the leaders give personal attention and training to each child.

### **Jesus is the best example**

The Lord Jesus, himself, is the best example for being a spiritual leader. He had every ability and every gift, and he wanted to help every person in the world, but he did not establish a large organization or a large school. He demonstrated that the best method to help the most people is to focus on training a few people very well, and then train them to train others. His example of leading and training his few disciples is very similar to a parent leading and training his/her children.

### **Two kinds of leaders in the church**

There are only two kinds of leaders in the New Testament church; pastors and deacons. For pastors, there are three names given to describe the same person.

- **Elders:** Focuses on their spiritual maturity. They are “older” spiritually.
- **Overseer:** Focuses on their responsibility. They “watch over” the church.
- **Pastor:** Focuses on their work. They serve Christ and the Church. They Shepherd, teach, guide, correct, counsel, encourage, help and serve all.

Two Bible passages reveal these are names of the same person; Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5.

**Acts 20: 17** “From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the Elders of the church. (This group of men were all called Elders)

**Acts 20:28** “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd (Pastor) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

- The group of leaders, a plurality, were all called Elders, Overseers, and Shepherds (Pastors). Each leader of a church needs to function in all three ways. He should be spiritually more mature, take the responsibility, and do the work of shepherding the church.

**1 Peter 5:1-4** All three names are mentioned for pastors

### **Plurality of pastors**

In the New Testament, pastors always occur in plurality. There is no example of just one pastor of a church. It is not a matter of right or wrong, but a matter of health for the church. One pastor is better than no pastor, but a plurality of leaders has many advantages.

One pastor can easily become controlling instead of being a servant. In a plurality, each leader can focus on his strengths and spiritual gifts more. When there is only one pastor, the tendency is for him to try to meet every need, which is very difficult. When two or more pastors are working together, their collective wisdom is valuable for making decisions.

Teamwork among leaders does not happen easily, and usually requires extreme humility and sacrificial love (as will be discussed in Basic 10 – Commitment to Teamwork). The fruit of such humility and love is what God desires, and it is how He works to build His church.

There are also dangers of a plurality of pastors who are not motivated by their relationship (similar to a marriage). If two or more pastors are united together in plurality because of their close friendship (like a marriage should be), there is a good possibility they will be a strong team. But if two pastors are united in plurality because they were hired for that position (taking the job because of pay), there is a greater risk that one will push for his own way, instead of lovingly sacrificing for the other.

### **Qualifications for pastors**

In I Timothy 3 and Titus 1, the apostle Paul gives us qualifications for pastors. In these instructions, there is no age requirement. There is no educational requirement. There are no religious titles given. There is no salary mentioned. Character and experience are the primary qualifications for a church leader.

### **The second kind of church leader**

The second kind of leader in the New Testament is that of a deacon, (servant).

**Acts 6:3-4** “But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom., whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word.”

- Pastors are responsible for the church, while deacons are responsible for a task.
- The deacons serve the church, and are under the direction of the elders, pastors.
- A deacon, or team of deacons is put in charge of a task or responsibility.

### **Leaders are never to be dictators**

Jesus Christ is the HEAD of His church. Pastors are under-shepherds, and deacons lead in carrying out different tasks and needs of the church.

A pastor has no right to demand that someone do something that the Word has not told them to do. A Pastor should not tell a member that they should take or not take a certain job, or live in a particular place. It is fine for a Pastor to point out different reasons why an action might be better or not best, but he should not demand a member to do something. There are times that a member must be told to no longer be in fellowship with the church because of sin, and an unrepentant spirit, but it should always be in obedience to the Word of God, not man.

We looked earlier at 1 Peter 5:5, where we are told to “submit” ourselves to the elders. This is an attitude of humility, which God honors greatly. Submission is to be the person’s own choice. Pastors cannot demand people to submit to them. They should teach God’s word about humility, but should not insist on submission. (The same is true for husbands.)

Obedience to the Word of God is the ultimate evidence of humility and love of God. This attitude and spirit is one of the most important attitudes to develop in our new life in Christ. It will always go against our natural desire for selfishness and pride. It will be an important test in

the development of a leader in God's church. Some will struggle more with this than others. God wants to give grace to each of us as we grow and develop.

### **Partnering with another leader**

God has made all of us with limitations, and His plan is for us to learn to work together in unity with others in every aspect of our lives. This is true for children doing a project at home, a married couple, church leaders, employers, governing leaders, and even for the one preparing a meal in your home. As you will see in the next Basic Commitment to Teamwork, teamwork is important in all situations, and especially in the role of leadership.

**[FOR DISCUSSION –** What memories do you have of parents or other leaders who have made a difference in your life? Can you describe some way that God has already used you to be a help to someone else (family member or anyone)?

#### **Real life stories to illustrate this truth**

- Jesus and Peter had a talk about what it means to love Jesus and Jesus told about what it means to feed the Lord's sheep. John 21:1-20
- God calls Moses to leadership, Exodus 3:1- 4:31

### **Learn from Jesus' example – How he practiced leadership**

In many ways, Jesus was the most special person and special leader who has ever lived on this earth. Yet at the same time he showed his followers that God's plan for every person is to be a leader in some way. He taught his followers that a leader is someone who meets the needs of others. This is possible for every person to do in one way or another. Jesus was the example for how this can be done.

Jesus taught that a true leader is a servant (Matthew 20:25-28) and he modeled it by meeting the needs of his followers in a variety of ways, including washing their feet at his last meal with them. (John 13) Each of us can also serve in a variety of ways, including prayer for others.

Jesus taught and practiced that a leader is concerned about all the needs of a person; physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental. Sometimes he met physical needs (healing people), and other times he met relational and emotional needs (Zacchaeus, Luke 19:1-10, and the woman at the well, John 4). He also taught that the needs of every kind of person are important, including children (Mark 9:35-37) and people who are different than us (John 4).

Jesus taught and modeled that a leader will often be misunderstood, ignored, abused, and treated in all kinds of ways. He told his followers that they should expect to be treated in all the same ways that people treated him. (Matthew 10:24-25)

To be a strong servant leader, Jesus had a clear understanding of his relationship with his spiritual Father. This is vividly described in John 13:1-5, when Jesus washed the feet of his followers, including those of Judas, who had already betrayed him. To review, here is a summary of the things Jesus understood about his Father:

- Jesus was secure and confident in his relationship with his Father. (John 13:1,3)

- Jesus knew the Father had a special purpose for everything happening in his life. (John 13:3)
- Jesus knew that his life on earth was just temporary, and that his relationship with his Father was most important. (John 13:3)

YOU CAN PRACTICE LEADERSHIP THE SAME WAY JESUS DID, WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP!

***For thought and discussion***

What are some situations in which you see a need? You can ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand what he might like to do in that situation and what part you can have.

**ACTION POINTS**

- What are some of the ways you have already been helping other people make progress in their lives?
- Commitment - Tell God you are trusting Him to work through the church leaders in your life and that you will seek to support them in every possible way.
- If you are a husband, is there a way you can improve the way you are taking responsibility (leadership) for your marriage and family?
- Are your children the priority people you are investing your life into, besides your wife (or husband)?
- Is there something you can do to make it easier for your church leaders to help you grow?
- Discuss with a mature Christian the struggles you experience as you seek to work closely with others in your church.

**REVIEW**

- Review experiences and progress with past Action Points.

**For your consideration**

1. What Bible passage stood out to you from those given in Basic 9?
2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about leadership?
3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to practice leadership?

4. What is something about God that motivates you to practice leadership?

5. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do, to practice leadership (consider the Action Steps)?

# God Trains Us in Teamwork

## Basic #10

**God's desire is to help you be more effective by working closely with others.**

**[FOR DISCUSSION –** What is a good example of teamwork you have seen – either in sports, family, business, or any place? What aspects of teamwork impressed you?]

### **Difficult challenge**

Teamwork is one of the most difficult principles to practice. We see people failing in teamwork when we see marriages fail. Many business leaders resign or are fired because they fail at teamwork. In the news we regularly hear of fighting among government leaders who have difficulty practicing teamwork.

Teamwork produces so many benefits, but it's impossible to practice thoroughly without the help of God's Spirit. In fact, the Basics #1-7 are essential foundations to practice good teamwork.

### **Teamwork**

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they may keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.”

- Two get more done working together than one alone.
- If one falls down, the other can help him up.
- Two can keep each other warm, but one by himself will get cold.
- Two can help each other fight battles, while one can be easily overcome.

### **Jesus' example**

Many people think Jesus was a leader who worked by Himself. Read John 5:19 - 30 to learn how Jesus practiced teamwork with His Father.

What did Jesus teach His followers about working together?

- Mark 6:7
- Luke 10:1

### **Paul's example**

In Romans 16, we see how well the apostle Paul practiced teamwork. He commends Phoebe for being “a helper of many and of myself as well.” He calls Aquila and Priscilla “my fellow workers” in Christ Jesus. “Greet Urbanus, my fellow worker in Christ” and then many more who served the Lord with him. He closes the letter saying, “Timothy, my fellow worker greets you.”

Did Paul ever work alone? Read in 2 Corinthians 2:12-13 what Paul did when he could not find his friend and co-worker. Notice that there was an open door for the gospel in this city! What was more important - the open door or what his friend and co-worker had to offer?

### **Common Goal**

**Philippians 1:27-** The apostle Paul commends the believers for “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, **striving together** for the faith of the gospel.” (NASB) Many think that “one mind” means that we have to agree on everything. That’s not true. But what is necessary is agreeing (being of one mind) about the goal. Having a common goal is the beginning of teamwork. Then, working out the different ideas of how to reach the goal, and compromising with each other, is how teamwork is accomplished.

### **Marriage is a team**

Genesis 2:20-24 describes the first team that God designed. What are the benefits of teamwork in a marriage and family?

### **The church is a team**

**1 Corinthians 12:12-30** - A body is the best example of teamwork. After reading this passage, write down the similar ways that a body functions and a church functions.

Obviously the members of a body are efficient at working together, caring out their different roles, and caring for each other. The New Testament is full of instruction for how this can happen. Here are just some of the many “one another’s” in the New Testament:

- Encourage one another. –Heb. 3:13
- Serve one another -Gal. 5:13
- Carry one another’s burdens -Gal. 6:2
- Forgive one another -Ephesians 5:32
- Be concerned for one another -1 Cor. 12:25
- Be kind to one another -Ephesians 4:32
- Bear with one another -Colossians 3:13
- Teach one another -Colossians 3:16
- Build up one another -1 Thess. 5:11
- Pray for one another -James 5:16
- Be devoted to one another -Romans 12:10
- Honor one another -Romans 12:10
- Be patient with one another -Ephesians 4:2
- Love one another (21 times in the New Testament)

### **Churches working together are a team**

Churches need each other just as much as individuals need each other. 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 applies equally to churches as to individuals. It is Satan’s lie for church leaders to think their church does not need other churches. Satan, the great deceiver, wants to do everything possible to keep churches from being united together to accomplish our Lord’s will on earth, which is to help every person know of His greatness, and especially to know of His love and salvation.

### **The high priority of UNITY**

- How many times did Jesus pray for the unity of His followers in His last prayer with them? (John 17:11, 20-21, 22, 23) What does this tell you about the importance of unity?
- Ephesians 4:1-3 - What did Paul say about the importance of unity?
- Discuss the ways that unity is built. How important is understanding each other to unity? Taking time to listen and ask questions to gain understanding is extremely important to unity. This is important in every relationship, and especially in marriage.
- Since unity is so important (especially in marriage and in the church), what should you expect your enemy, the devil, to do about it?
- Unity does not require that both people think the same way about everything. The key is understanding and accepting each other, including their differences. Romans 14 is an important chapter on this subject.

### **Essential attitude**

Philippians 2:1-5 describes the essential attitude for teamwork. Read and discuss what this passage means.

### **Essential action**

To work closely with another person, it is essential to understand them. In reality, the better you understand another person, the easier it will be to work with them. But it takes work to understand another person. Proverbs 20:5 says the heart of a man is like a deep well that requires work to draw it out and understand what is there. A lot of communication is the work that is needed.

Good communication requires careful listening and asking questions to more clearly understand. As James 1:19 says, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak ...” When the other person can tell you, “You understand how I think (or how I feel),” you know that you have accomplished a valuable goal in the relationship.

### **What if others don't value teamwork?**

For a variety of reasons, not all people value teamwork. What should you do if your partner or team member has no desire to work together as a team?

- **1 Corinthians 7:12-16** gives clear guidelines for married people who have an unbelieving spouse.
- **Acts 15:36-41** - Paul’s example with Barnabas and Mark shows that unity with co-workers in the church is not the same as a marriage. The goal is unity, but each of us has to seek God as to when the point is reached that it is not wise to continue trying to work together.

**[FOR DISCUSSION –** Can you describe a time when you think that teamwork helped you be more effective in some way?]

**[FOR DISCUSSION –** If you’re married, what is a way that you think you and your spouse are good at working together?]

### Real life stories to illustrate this truth

- Many workers and materials were necessary for the construction of the tabernacle, Exodus 35:10 – 40:38
- Example of the body members working together, 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

### Learn from Jesus' example – How he practiced teamwork

When the Lord Jesus lived here in person, he put together a group of disciples who practiced teamwork. Even though his disciples had many problems (stealing, doubting, arguing about who is most important, betrayal, and denial of Jesus), he built a strong team for ministry. To do that, Jesus practiced teamwork with his Father in heaven. Christ's teamwork is an example for us to follow in our marriages, work places, families, churches, and every place where we have relationships with people who will benefit from working together.

As we seek to practice teamwork with other people, we quickly experience difficulties. These difficulties come in many forms, including the following:

- Differences in ideas
- Differences in values
- Differences in personalities
- Selfishness

We know that Jesus experienced all these same difficulties with his disciples, so how was it that he could practice teamwork with them? The most important thing that made it possible to practice teamwork with them was the way he practiced teamwork with his Father. We see this clearly described in John 5:19-30. Here are some of the highlights of that section:

- 5:19, 30 – Jesus was committed to only please his Father.
- 5:20 – Jesus understood how much his Father loved him.
- 5:20-21 – Jesus watched and learned what his Father was doing.
- 5:22-26 – Jesus trusted his Father, and his Father entrusted his work to him.

Jesus knew that his Father was accomplishing a special purpose in a world that is full of broken, sinful people. Jesus knew that everything that happened to him was part of his Father's purpose. Because of this strong relationship with his Father, Jesus depended on his Father to lead him and to work out every problem that came up. This is how Jesus was able to build a strong team of disciples.

Today, we have a very similar opportunity as Jesus had. When we have the Holy Spirit living in us, we are brothers of Jesus Christ with the same Father. As we live our lives closely with him, he will accomplish his purposes in and through us. The stronger our connection is with our Father, the better we will be able to practice teamwork with people in our lives, even with the many differences and problems each person has.

YOU CAN PRACTICE TEAMWORK THE SAME WAY JESUS DID, WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP!

***For thought and discussion***

What opportunities for teamwork do you have in your life? In what ways do you think the Holy Spirit (representing Jesus and your Father) is working in your life and in their lives to help you make progress as a team?

**ACTION POINTS**

- Commitment - Tell God you are committed to grow in unity with each of the close relationships He has given you.
- Evaluate who are your “fellow workers” in your church?
- Think if there is one or more brothers or sisters (same gender as you) whom you have told that you are committed to work with them to help each other and to help others. If not, pray and discuss with another mature Christian how this could happen.
- If married, evaluate how well you are practicing all the “one-another” Scripture passages listed in the Basic.
- If married, ask God to help you learn how you can grow in unity with your spouse. Have you discussed with each other how you complement each other and how you work together as a team?
- If married, ask your spouse how well she/he thinks you understand her. Find out the ways in which she thinks you can make progress in understanding her.

**REVIEW**

- Review experiences and progress with past Action Points.

**For your consideration**

1. What Bible passage stood out to you from those given in Basic 10?
2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about teamwork?
3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to practice teamwork?
4. What is something about God that motivates you to practice teamwork?
5. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do, to practice teamwork (consider the Action Steps)?

# God Trains Us to Influence People

## Basic #11

**God's desire is to use you to make a difference in the lives of others.**

**[FOR DISCUSSION – Who is a person who has had an influence in your life? In what way?]**

Jesus said his followers are like salt and light in the world. He knew that the world is broken and dark, and he knew that he, himself, is the Savior of the world. His followers would be the people whom he would work through for reconciliation and restoration. His followers would bring the hope and help that everyone needs – they would be the salt and light for the world.

**Matthew 5:13** Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth.”

Salt is probably the most common flavoring that people use in their food around the world. Salt is also used around the world to preserve food. Jesus told his followers that they are the salt of the world. Jesus knows that his followers have a greater influence in this world than we realize.

- Salt flavors food. It often makes us thirsty, so that we desire to drink water. God wants to change our actions and attitudes so that people see that God's ways for us are better than the selfish lives that we lived before we trusted Jesus.
- When people see our example and when people hear our stories of how God has helped us and made a difference in our lives, they will more likely want the same for themselves.

**Matthew 5:14** Jesus said, “You are the light of the world.”

Light is the source of life for all people, animals, and plants on this planet. Without the sun, nothing would live. Jesus told his followers that they are the source of life for this world. Jesus, himself is the light of the world (John 1), and here he says his followers are also lights, because his Spirit lives in us! Jesus is the answer for all the darkness in the world, and we are his representatives to bring that light.

- People do not understand that God's ways and plan for us is so much better than the devil's plan. His light is the Bible, and we need to grow in our understanding of the Bible, so we can share it with others, and help them to know how to turn to God, receive Jesus as the one who died for all their sins, put their faith in Him and have eternal life.

### **The first thing Jesus said to future followers**

Matthew 4:19, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." What did Jesus mean by saying this? Why is this so important to Him?

### **God's heart for lost people**

- Luke 15; Look at the three parables in this chapter. What is lost in each parable? What is the result when the lost is found in each parable? What can you conclude about God's heart for lost people, from these three parables?

- 1 Timothy 2:4, What is God's desire in this statement?
- 2 Peter 3:9, What is God's desire in this statement?

### **What Jesus valued**

#### **1. Jesus' food was reaching the lost**

John 4:34. What was Jesus' food, according to the context before this statement (John 4:4-33)? What was Jesus' food, according to the context after this statement (John 4:35-38)?

#### **2. Jesus went to other villages to reach the lost**

- Matthew 4:17, 11:1
- Mark 1:38-39, 2:2, 6:6
- Luke 3:3

#### **3. Jesus trained and sent His disciples to reach the lost**

- Matthew 10:1-7
- Mark 3:14, 6:6-13
- Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-17

### **The loving thing to do**

One weekend the church leaders had a meeting in Steve and Sue's home. While we were eating a meal together, Sue came in and told her husband that their two year old son, Peter, was nowhere in the house, and the door to the street was open. Steve excused himself, saying, "I've got to help Sue find Peter." A lost son trumped all other plans. As the rest of us heard the news, we didn't debate how to spend our time. A lost child is extremely important and urgent. We all stood up with Steve and made ourselves available to look for Peter. Being a good leader, Steve gave directions, "Sue - look through the house again. Mike - you and Richard go down the street, each taking one side. Herschel and I will go up the street." In about ten minutes Peter was found playing in a culvert beside the street.

### **Becoming all things to all men**

**1 Corinthians 9:19-20** "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews, I became like a Jew, to win the Jews...(Verse 22b) I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some."

- God wants everyone to be saved, and He wants to use each of us to help people understand the gospel and help them come to Jesus. A key word in this process is the word "become." It means that we must "change" in some ways, so that we can relate to others and their needs and help them to believe and receive Jesus Christ as their Savior.
- "I became like a Jew". The apostle Paul did not say that he needed to become a Jew to win Jews, but that he needed to become LIKE the Jews. In other words, he needed to be able to understand how the Jews thought and believed. This is true with every person. We need to understand how different people think and feel about God, life, and the Bible, if we are going to be able to share God's good news with them.

**Philippians 2:3-4** “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit. Do not merely look out for your own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

- Find ways to serve and help others with their needs and problems, and God will give you opportunities to share God’s truth with them.

### **The message every person in the world needs to hear**

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13). Jesus is the only hope for the rescue of each person in the world from the consequences of sin. The message of what God has done for us through Jesus is what every person needs to hear. This message is often referred to as the “gospel”, which means “good news.” Following is a simple outline of this message. It is wise to memorize it and to be prepared to share it in any situation at any time. Obviously the situations will be different, but once you know this basic outline, you can adjust it according to the need at the time.

## **Gospel Outline**

### **An important tool for every disciple**

This outline is very simple and very powerful. You only need to know one verse to use it. This verse is Romans 6:23. Memorize it so you can always use it wherever you are, even when you don’t have a Bible with you.

Of course you can also use other verses to help people understand the gospel. Three of these other verses are included, but there are many possibilities.

Here are the steps you can use to help another person understand the most important message in the world. ***Notice there is a diagram that follows these instructions in this manual.***

1. Ask a person if they would like to know what the Bible says how someone can become a child of God and live forever with Him. If they say “yes”, then tell them you have an outline to show them.
2. Find a piece of paper and write “People” on the left side in the middle. Write “God” on the right side in the middle.
3. Ask the person to read Romans 6:23 from the Bible. If you do not have a Bible with you, then write the verse at the top of the piece of paper (using your memory).
4. Ask the person, “According to this verse, what is the payment for sin?” – The answer is “death”. Explain to them that death is physical and spiritual. Spiritual death is when we are separated from God. This is what happened to the first man and woman in the world (Adam and Eve), and has happened to everyone since that time. On the paper, write “Sin” under “People” and make lines on the paper to illustrate a gap between People and God, as shown. Write “Death” at the bottom of the gap between People and God.
5. Explain that God has made us to have life with Him. Because of this, people try many things to make a bridge to God. Many people think that religion will help them reach God. Draw an

arrow part way across the gap and write “Religion” above the arrow. Many people also think that being a good person will help them reach God. Draw another arrow part way across the gap and write “Doing good things” above the arrow.

6. Explain to them that the Bible says that every person deserves death because every person has sinned in many ways. It does not matter how many good things we do or how religious we are, we still deserve death even for one sin. God is perfect and cannot allow sin into His presence. No matter how many good things we do, we cannot make ourselves perfect.

7. Ask them to read Romans 6:23 again. Ask them, “According to this verse, what does God want to do for us?” – The answer is “Give us the gift of eternal life.” Then write “Gift” under the word “God”. Also write “Eternal life” under “Gift”.

8. Ask them, “According to this verse, how do we get eternal life?” – The answer is, “Through Jesus Christ.” Then write “Jesus Christ” in the middle of the paper, between “People” and “God”. Explain the reason that Jesus Christ is the way to God. The Bible says God became a human like us and lived a perfect life. That’s who Jesus was. Not only did He live a perfect life, but He chose to give up His life as a payment for our sin. Ask them to read Mark 10:45 and then write “Mark 10:45” over the words, “Jesus Christ”. Ask them if they know the meaning of “ransom” and discuss the meaning with them. Draw a cross that makes a bridge between “People” and “God”.

9. Tell them that after Jesus was killed he was put in a grave and on the third day he came back to life and left the grave even though there were soldiers guarding the grave. He then appeared to hundreds of people for 40 days and then some of them watched as he went up into the clouds. One of the last things he said is that he would return in the future as king and judge of the whole world.

10. Tell them, “This verse tells us that God gives eternal life through Jesus Christ, but it does not tell us how to receive the gift. So I will ask you, -- How do you receive a gift?” Let them explain. If you like, you can also offer a small amount of money as a gift to them as an example at that very moment. Explain that people are not required to accept a gift. They can reject it or accept it. That’s the same way with God’s gift.

11. Tell them, “Here is another verse that talks about receiving Jesus Christ.” Ask them to read John 1:12. Then ask them, “What does this verse say will happen when we receive Jesus Christ?” – The answer is that we become a child of God.

12. Tell them, “I will now show you another verse that tells us how to receive God’s gift.” Ask them to read Romans 10:9-10. Ask them, “According to these verses, what is necessary to be saved from death?” – The answer is to believe in your heart and to tell God what you believe.

13. Ask them, “Would you like to receive God’s gift?” – If they say, “Yes,” then explain that they can receive Jesus Christ right now by talking to Him. Explain that all they need to do is tell Jesus Christ “Thank you for dying to pay for my sin. I accept you as my Savior. I want you to live in me and be my leader.” Tell them that you will pray a short prayer first and then they can talk to

God and tell Him their desire to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. – If they say they are not ready at that time, or they have other questions, you can discuss whatever their desire is. Your goal is to help them according to their desire.

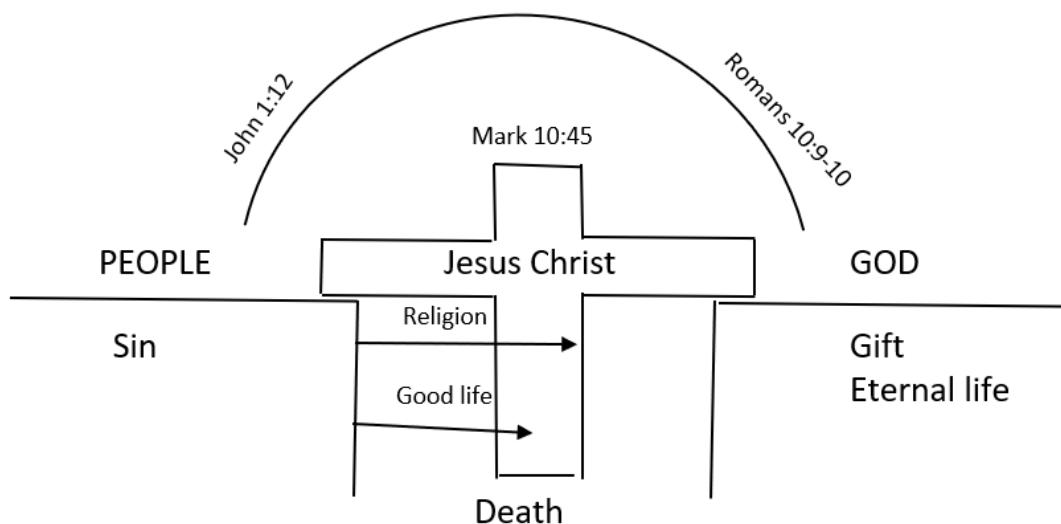
14. After they pray to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior, ask them, “According to the Bible, do you have eternal life now?” You can ask them to read 1 John 5:11-13. Ask them, “According to these verses, who has eternal life?” – The answer is the one who has Jesus has eternal life.

All these things can seem complicated the first time you read them. But first of all focus on the one verse, Romans 6:23. Learn to draw the diagram by only asking questions about that one verse. You can also explain how to receive Jesus as the gift without reading any other verses. Practice this much with a friend. After you know how to explain the diagram by only using Romans 6:23, then you can add one more verse to your explanation. Practice with one more verse. Then you can add another verse. With more practice, you will become more comfortable and more effective in explaining this important message!

**FINAL NOTE:** Do not be afraid of telling someone about Romans 6:23 even if you remember very little about the diagram. Just ask God to help you, and tell another person whatever you remember. God will use whatever you explain to someone, and then He can use other people to help them understand more. Or maybe you can have a second discussion with your friend and you can explain more after you have reviewed your notes or after you have talked to someone else to help you know what other verses to explain to the person.

Learn to draw this diagram, step by step, as you explain the Gospel outline.

## Romans 6:23



## **God – the One who brings people to Himself**

God's Spirit is definitely the most powerful influence in the universe! No matter how hard we work, or how smart we are, we cannot influence the heart of another person like the Holy Spirit can. He works through two primary avenues; His Word (Hebrews 4:12) and through prayer. With this in mind, the following principles outline the importance of prayer for influencing others.

1. Our Lord Jesus **instructed us** to ask Him to do whatever we want, according to His will. (John 14:13-14 is one example.)
2. Our Lord Jesus **promised us** He will take action when we ask for something according to His will. (John 14:13-14, 1 John 5:14-15)
3. Our Lord Jesus **promised us** action will be accomplished when two of us agree about a request. (Matthew 18:19)
4. Our Lord Jesus **gave us the model** of asking DAILY for our most important desires. (Matthew 6:11)

## **Praying according to God's will**

We know that it's God's will that every person become His child (but He can't force them to make that decision), 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9. We also know it's God's will that every Christian get to know Him better, Jeremiah 9:23-24, Philippians 3:7-10.

## **God's will in the lives of people**

You know that God will take action every day, in every person you ask Him to do the following things!

1. **Convict** people of their need for God, and help them understand more about what Jesus has done for them. John 16:8-11 (Suggestion: Ask God to do this for one person, and then include the names of others who fit the same request.)
2. **Help** people know God better. John 16:13-15 (Suggestion: Ask God to do this for one person, and then include the names of others who fit the same request.)
3. **Help** us find people whose hearts are prepared by God. Acts 17:26-27

No one will force you to ask God's Spirit to work in other people's hearts, but logically it could be the **most important way you can love another person!** And as you regularly ask God's Spirit to work in other people's lives, you will see Him do amazing things!

## **What about confrontation and exposure of sin?**

Some Christians say that it's important to confront non-Christians with the awfulness of their sin, and to expose how wrong they are. Their reasoning is that if non-Christians don't see the awfulness of their sin, they will not see their need for Jesus as their Savior. The best way for us to know when and how to confront or expose sin is to look at the example of Jesus. The four accounts of his life give many examples of conversations he had with people who did not believe in him. In all those conversations, the only non-believers he confronts with their sin or exposes their sin are the religious leaders who were against him. Besides them, he only confronted his close followers about their wrong thinking. He did teach people about sin (Matthew 5:21-32), but he did not confront individual non-believers about their sin.

This is a big reason why we read more than once that the sinners and tax-collectors wanted to be with Jesus (Matthew 9:10, 11:19, Luke 15:1-2). Most people are not eager to be with

someone who points out their sin. In fact, most people want to listen to someone who they feel understands them and accepts them. Whether a non-Christian or Christian, most people are not open to get advice or help from someone who they think does not understand and love them. It is rare for a person to feel understood and accepted by a person who confronts their sin. This does not mean that Jesus condoned their sin, but it does mean that Jesus related to non-believers in many other ways, and it's good for us to learn from his example.

#### **Real life stories to illustrate this truth**

- God used a kidnapped girl to reach Naaman, 2 Kings 5:1-19
- The woman at the well, who went and told the people she knew, John 4:1-42

### **Learn from Jesus' example – How he influenced people**

Jesus said he was sent by God to rescue lost people. (John 1:29, 3:17, 12:47, Luke 2:11, 19:10) Rescue from the consequences of sin is the greatest need for every person. It's a matter of life and death, including eternal judgment and damnation to hell. Because Jesus was fully aware of this need in every person's life, he had no fear of what people would do to him (Matthew 10:28, Luke 12:4-5).

The importance and urgency of finding and rescuing lost people was shown to be intensely on the heart and mind of Jesus when he told three parables consecutively on this subject. (Luke 15) Each of these parables tells of the urgency to find something lost and the joy of finding what was lost. In these parables, Jesus compared the stories to the joy in heaven when one lost person is found, or when a lost person returns to God.

The four gospels about the life of Jesus Christ are full of examples of how he related to people separated from God. John 3 records a conversation with Nicodemus, who was looking for answers, and John 4 records a long conversation with the woman at the well. Luke 19 tells about Jesus visiting Zacchaeus. Jesus cried for the people in the city of Jerusalem, answered people's questions, helped hurting people, met all kinds of needs, and patiently talked with his enemies. In all these situations he remembered his Father's love for all people (John 3:16) and he was always alert for ways he could cooperate with his Father's work in each person's life (John 5:17).

Paul summarized the way Jesus lived his life when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." Paul said that everything he did was toward the goal of saving people (helping them have a relationship with Jesus Christ), and that he learned this from the example of Christ.

**YOU CAN INFLUENCE PEOPLE THE SAME WAY JESUS DID, WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP!**

### ***For thought and discussion***

In what situations would you like God's Spirit to help you understand what He is doing in a person's life, so you can cooperate with him?

### **ACTION POINTS**

- Commitment - Tell God you are committed to follow Him closely so you can work together with Him to bring others to Christ.
- If you are not praying regularly for the non-believers you already know, decide on a plan for how you can develop this habit.
- Ask your leaders to help you learn how to share your faith with another person.
- Learn and practice explaining and drawing the Gospel outline.
- Are you regularly talking and praying with others about how you can help people know Christ? Doing this with other members of a small group is usually the best way to be doing this.

### **REVIEW**

- Review experiences and progress with past Action Points.

### **For your consideration**

1. What Bible passage stood out to you from those given in Basic 11?
2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about influencing people?
3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to influence people?
4. What is something about God that motivates you to influence people?
5. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do, to influence people (consider the Action Steps)?

# God Trains Us to Fulfill the Great Commission

## Basic #12

**God's desire is to use you to help reach all people in the world with His love and truth.**

### **The subject Jesus emphasized most after His resurrection**

After His resurrection, whenever Jesus was with a group of His followers, He almost always discussed one certain subject. This was His instruction to reach all people in the world with the gospel of who He is and what He has done. Christians often call this instruction the “Great Commission.”

### **The first day of His resurrection**

Mark 16:14-15 “That day He appeared to them. Later Jesus appeared to the eleven as they were eating. He rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”

- What? How could those eleven go into other countries all over the world and preach the gospel to every human being? Impossible! How could they go to other countries? How could they speak the languages? How could they get the money to go? They owned no ships, had no money, knew no important people. What did He mean?

### **At the appointed meeting in Galilee**

This was probably the large crowd described in 1 Corinthians 15:6.

Matthew 28:16-20 “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him they worshipped Him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

- They thought that surely He would explain what He had meant when He told them to go into all the world and preach the gospel, but now He told them even more. It was almost impossible to understand. Yes, He was the Lord, and He had the authority to command them to do this, but HOW was it possible? He had given them one promise. **“Surely I am with you!”**
- This promise reminded them of God sending Moses to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt. God said to Moses, I am sending you to deliver my people out of slavery in Egypt. Moses thought, HOW can I deliver a million people out of slavery? I am 80 years old, and running for my life from the police of Egypt. It is impossible! HOW God? God said, **“I will go with you.”** Moses didn’t understand it at that time, but God had given him the answer. God was saying, I will go with you, and meet your every need if you will just believe and trust Me. He was saying the same thing to the eleven, and also to us.

**Luke 24:46-48** “He told them, this is what is written, The Christ will suffer, and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” Jesus taught many things during those 40 days after He appeared on earth after His death, but the only teaching that is recorded is this Great Commission – His instruction to reach all people in the world with the gospel of who He is and what He has done. This was His last will and testament. It was His final orders to His disciples.

**Acts 1:8** Finally, on the day that He went up to heaven, He said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

- Many have asked the question, “did He mean this for all Christians at all times, or only for those eleven disciples at that time? Remember what He said in Matthew 28:20 “teach them (those who will become disciples of Jesus) to obey ALL that I have commanded.” Would that not surely include what He had just commanded? I think that it would include all that He commanded, including this important command. **This means that each one of us is commanded to obey His will to take the gospel to every person on the earth, in every nation.**

#### **Does God really love every person on earth and want them to be saved?**

- John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that **whoever** believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
- 1 Timothy 2:3-4 “This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants **all** men (people) to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.”
- 2 Peter 3:9b “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but **everyone** to come to repentance.”

#### **God's plan – love people by reaching the lost**

**Romans 10:14b** “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

- God has left each of us who know Jesus Christ as our Savior, to do His will on earth and take His good news to everyone possible. God could have taken each of us immediately to heaven the moment we were saved. That would have been the best. He left us here because He had a purpose. He wants us to tell as many as possible how to have eternal life and live our lives for Him.
- **God wants ALL believers to communicate His life-saving message** of love and truth. He knows that as we do so, we will get to know Him better and we will share in His joy of another person being saved from eternal separation from the Father (Luke 15 parables). Jesus trained all His followers to communicate the gospel message, as we see in Luke 9:1-9 and Luke 10:1-16.
- Who are the non-Christians you are praying for and reaching out to?

#### **God's plan – love people by training disciples**

The heart of our Creator, Savior, and Father is that every person in the world would continually experience the fullness of the life they were created for (John 10:10, 15:9-11).

How can this happen? Our Creator modeled the answer to this question when He lived here physically with us. Jesus strongly emphasized and practiced personal discipleship. And before He left, He instructed His disciples to teach others to practice the same things He taught them. Our Lord Jesus knew this was the most effective way to see the world rescued and helped.

Paul practiced Jesus' principles of discipleship and said his spiritual children were the joy of his life (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, Philippians 4:1).

With this model and exhortation from our Lord Jesus Christ, and the example of Paul, we can make it a priority to practice the Biblical principles of personal discipleship for the remainder of our lives.

As you continually practice the basic principles of life in Christ, you will experience more of the fruit of God's Spirit (love, joy, peace, ...), and more of God's blessing in many ways. Intimate life with your Creator is what He made you for! You will also experience more of the joy of being used by God to help others experience the same. No other lifestyle can come close to the fulfillment of living in whole-hearted adventure with our eternal Father and Lord of all!

The result will also bring the greatest change in our broken, fallen world. Following Jesus' example of reaching the lost and training disciples will result in the most people experiencing the greatest joy possible in life. That is what God created us for! Helping people return to their Creator and walk closely with Him is at the center of the heart of our Lord Jesus. That's why He gave the commission to His followers in Matthew 28:18-20 just before He left to heaven. You and I can now join Him in the most important purpose we can live for!

#### **NOTE**

These three Basic training manuals have been produced to be used as tools to help train disciples in the way that Jesus taught His first disciples to do. There is no certain order to use these tools. Pray and ask God to show you where to focus for your own benefit and where to focus to help another person. The last pages of Book 3 also have some good suggestions for how to begin training disciples. Read the section titled, "Practical Steps for Becoming a Spiritual Parent."

#### **God's plan – work with others**

The work of reaching people with the gospel and teaching Christians to understand and practice everything you have learned is much more than any of us can do on our own. This is why God has designed us to work with the other members of His body (family).

- To what degree are you and your spouse able to work together to reach people and train them?
- How close of a partnership do you have with one or a few others in your church, to pray, strategize, plan, encourage, and work together to reach people and train them to do all that you have learned to do?

- Are you receiving training and mentorship from a more experienced person in your church? God's plan is also for you to receive training from others (if at all possible).

### **God's plan – experience joy with His disciples**

God has delight in His people, and they bring joy to us also. God values people and loves them deeply.

- Psalm 18:19, "He rescued me, because he delighted in me."
- Zephaniah 3:17, "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

The more we are in tune with Him and His heart, the more joy we also experience from people. This is similar to the joy parents receive when they have children. God has designed people to be enjoyed – from their first day of birth, their first smile, their first steps, and on through failures and learning lessons the hard way.

This is what Paul experienced as he helped disciples grow with the Lord.

- Philippians 4:1, "My brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."
- 1 Thessalonians 2:20, (Written to the Christians at Thessalonica) "You are our glory and joy."

Helping people know God and grow in their life with Him brings joy to our hearts. This is God's plan: to enjoy people unconditionally. We have the awesome privilege of learning to enjoy Him and learning to enjoy each person He has made!

#### **Real life stories to illustrate this truth**

- Diseased lepers found great treasure and knew they should share it, 2 Kings 7:1-20
- Paul's desire was for all people to hear the gospel, including Rome. Romans 15:17-24. Because this is God's desire, He sovereignly led Paul to Crete, on his way to Rome. Acts 27 - 28

**[FOR DISCUSSION –** In what ways was Jesus a model and an example of doing what is necessary to reach the whole world of people with His love and truth? What are some ways He was limited in His resources (as many Christians are also limited)?]

### **Learn from Jesus' example – How he fulfilled his commission**

#### **Following Jesus' example for the plan**

Jesus wanted every person in the world to know of God's love, but he did not talk to every person. Why not? It was because he had a special plan that would be the most effective. Jesus knew that his Father loved every person in the world and that his desire is that none of them die apart from him (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9). Jesus also understood the work that God's Spirit is always doing throughout the world to get people's attention and to help people find

him (Acts 17:26-27, Romans 1:18-20). Jesus said that his passion was to rescue lost people in the world (Luke 19:10, John 12:47) in the world, yet there were millions he never even talked to in his lifetime. He never personally met them, but he followed a plan that he knew was the best way to reach every lost person, and he knew it was his Father's plan.

Jesus' plan was to focus on training a few strong disciples. While he did this he introduced many others to a relationship with God, but he focused on training a few.

Jesus began his plan at the beginning of his ministry when he chose twelve men to be with him for three years while he trained them (Mark 3:13-19). Then, after his resurrection, Jesus gave instructions to his followers to continue the plan. He told them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20) In other words, Jesus told his disciples to do the same things he had done with them, which would also include training the new disciples to do the same things Jesus had done with his first disciples.

What were those things Jesus did with his disciples? He taught them many things about his Father, many things from God's Word, how to live with God continually every day, and how to reach out to lost people. He gave them a lot of personal attention for three years, in a way that was very similar to parents giving personal training to their children while they grow up. Jesus did not start a school, an organization, or a program for hundreds of people. Instead he spent three years primarily focused on training twelve disciples in a very personal way. Then after the three years, he told them to go and do the same thing with others!

That was the plan Jesus followed for reaching the whole world with God's love and truth. Since he instructed his followers to do the same thing, we know the wise thing for us to do is to follow the example of what he did with his followers.

This does not mean we have to find twelve disciples, but it does mean that it would be good for us to learn how to give personal help to another person so they can grow in their life with God. The more we can follow Jesus' example in how he did that, the more effective we will be.

### **Jesus' example for motivation and courage to follow the plan**

Jesus knew that most people in the world did not want to hear about God and that Satan and all demons with him did not want people to hear about God. He knew his commission to his followers would cause all kinds of problems and hardships for them. He knew he was instructing them to go into a very serious war, so he knew his followers needed to remember why they are in a war and how they would get help in the war. That was why Jesus said at the beginning of his commission, "All authority has been given to me." And at the end Jesus also said, "... and I will be with you to the end of the age."

- The relationship Jesus had with his Father was the basis for him to give the commission. And Jesus knew that our relationship with him is the basis for us to carry out his commission.

- Jesus had a perfect understanding of his Father and he knew how much his Father loved him, and how his Father wanted to use him as a weak human to carry out God's purpose in the world.

This was the foundation for him to give the commission. Really this is the foundation for us to also obey his commission.

- The more we understand the One who gave the commission and the more we understand our Father, who gave him the commission, the more meaningful it will be and the more motivated we will be to carry out the commission.
- At the end of Jesus' commission, he also said, "... and I will be with you to the end of the age." This was what motivated Jesus and gave him courage – knowing that he was carrying out his Father's desire and that his Father was always with him. Jesus also knew that we need the same motivation.

Jesus' commission relates to his promise, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." Jesus is building his church, and he has given us the privilege of being involved with him by giving us the commission to go and make disciples of all people groups.

YOU CAN FULFILL CHRIST'S COMMISSION THE SAME WAY JESUS DID, WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP!

**For thought and discussion**

What plans can you make to follow Jesus' example of helping every person in the world hear of God's love and truth?

**ACTION POINTS:**

- Commitment - Tell God that, because He loves all people, you are committed to work together with Him and others to help every person in the world to know about Jesus Christ.
- If you are a parent, how are you helping your children to know Jesus and to grow in their life with Him?
- Are you in a small group that is helping each other reach the lost?
- Who are the Christians you are training in your church?
- If you're a leader in your church, pray, discuss with others, and decide how your church can work together with others to reach all the people in the world with the gospel.

**REVIEW**

- Review experiences and progress with past Action Points.

**For your consideration**

1. What Bible passage stood out to you from those given in Basic 12?

2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about His great commission?

3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to practice the great commission?

4. What is something about God that motivates you to practice His great commission?

5. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do, to practice Jesus' great commission (consider the Action Steps)?

# God Trains Us to Believe and Have Faith in God

## Basic #13

**God's desire is to help you believe God's promises and His truth  
in every aspect of your life.**

### Definition of faith

From these two passages, how would you define faith, according to the Bible?

- Hebrews 11:1
- Romans 14:23

### Hebrews 11:1-40

- Hebrews 11:1-6; Recognize God gives reasons and evidence as a basis for faith (trust) in Him, but there are many things in life He does not explain – especially things that He will do in the future.
- In Hebrews 11, notice that some people commended for faith experienced great victories, while others commended for faith experienced torture and destruction (as happened to Jesus Christ).

**[FOR DISCUSSION – What observations do you have about the statement that non-Christians and Christians all have faith, but they are just putting their faith in different things or people?]**

### God wants you to live by faith

God gives you salvation by faith, and then He wants you to live by faith every day for the remainder of your life. Obviously this is an important principle, since it is stated four different places in the Bible.

- Habakkuk 2:4
- Romans 1:17
- Galatians 3:11
- Hebrews 10:38

### We receive eternal life and are saved by grace through faith.

God's action of sending Jesus to die on the cross for all our sins was grace. He chooses to forgive and save us WHEN we believe His promise and confess Jesus as our own Savior. "It is by grace you have been saved through faith" Ephesians 2:8-9. God acts upon our faith when we trust Jesus as our Savior, and we are saved and are given eternal life.

### Living by faith

God wants to teach us to live every day with the same kind of faith that we acted on to begin our relationship with Him at the time of our salvation.

**Colossians 2:6** "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, SO walk in Him." In the same way that we were saved, by grace (God's provision) through faith, (our belief, trusting and obeying Him) we can **live daily** by His power and grace.

**Romans 1:17b** “As it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.”

- It is impossible to please God when we are not willing to believe and trust God. (See Hebrews 11:6) “Then Moses prayed”. Moses faced many very difficult situations, even impossibilities. Each time Moses prayed. God consistently led Moses to victory as he believed and obeyed God. God will do the same for us today if we will just learn to develop the habit of believing God’s promises, trusting and obeying Him.
- This is what Paul meant when he said, “I have learned the secret.” “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:12-13 Have you learned the secret?
- Last week, last month, last year, when you faced needs and difficulties, did you pray? Did you really cast yourself upon God? Did you really trust God? God still acts upon our faith. It is not enough to say, “Well, I believe that.” How does it affect your daily experience? Paul was talking about “any” and “every” circumstance. Am I willing to really believe and trust God in any and every circumstance? Then, we can say, “I know how” and “I have learned the secret.”

**Ephesians 6:16** “In addition to all this (spiritual armor), take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

**We don’t see God at work when we are not believing and trusting Him**

**Matthew 17:19-20** “Why could we not drive it out?” He replied, “Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain,” move from here to there”, and it will move. NOTHING will be impossible for you.”

A father brought his son to the disciples, because he was possessed with a demon. The disciples prayed for him, but nothing happened. They asked Jesus why they could not cast out the demon. Jesus said that it was because of their little faith. **God has chosen to act upon our faith.** He doesn’t always act on our faith, in answering our requests, because there may be other reasons, but He delights to act when we believe His promises and choose to trust Him.

**When we daily choose to trust God, it pleases Him.**

**Hebrews 11:6** “And without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him, must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.”

- Am I believing? If so, I will earnestly seek Him. I must believe that He is really there, but also I must believe that He *responds* to me when I earnestly seek Him.
- When I know He is there, and I believe His promises, I will trust Him to keep His word.

**1 John 5:14-15** “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” We should not ask carelessly, just because we want something, but when we know that it is God’s will, we should confidently pray and trust Him to answer in His wisdom to do what is best .

**God’s plan is best for us, even when we do not understand it.**

**Romans 8:28** “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him...”

**2 Corinthians 12:7-9** The apostle Paul prayed that God would take away his thorn in his flesh, and God answered “NO”. God had another plan for Paul that was better. We cannot see things

as God sees them. His plan is always best, and we need to trust Him, even when we cannot see things as He sees them.

### **Misconceptions**

People have many different ideas of what it means to live by faith. Here are some false concepts of living by faith:

- Some say that living by faith is when you don't know what will happen in the future. For example, a person setting out on a mission without any source of income is "stepping out in faith," whereas a Christian who has a job with a reliable income is not living by faith.
- Some think that if we have strong faith we can tell God what to do. They think we can gain control of circumstances if we have strong enough faith.

### **Two views of faith**

Following is a summary of two different views Christians have about faith in God.

- One way of thinking says "Faith should expect a miracle." This way of thinking can lead to discouragement or feelings of guilt.
- The other way of thinking says "Faith will expect God's will to be done." This way results in inner peace, even during pain and suffering.

#### **First view: Faith should EXPECT A MIRACLE**

This is the thinking that our prayers of strong faith (belief) will bring about God's powerful actions. This thinking emphasizes that God's power is limited by our unbelief.

People with this theology think that true faith **SHOULD** result in:

- Prophetic signs that come true
- Miracles (supernatural events)
- Miraculous healing

If the supernatural event doesn't happen, or if someone continues to suffer, they conclude:

- You didn't truly believe God
- Your unbelief limited God's power

This way of thinking can lead to discouragement or feelings of guilt.

Other factors not included in this theology:

- Scripture has numerous examples of men of faith who suffered. (Hebrews 11:36-40)
- False prophets can also do miracles, healings, and prophetic signs. So a miracle doesn't prove that it was God who was did it. (Matthew 24:24)

#### **Second view: Faith will EXPECT GOD'S WILL TO BE DONE**

This is the belief that God is powerful and can do anything that He desires. This belief emphasizes that God's will is often broader than our understanding, and because He is completely loving, we can trust Him to decide what is best in every situation.

People with this theology believe that:

- God delivers us (either now, or later, or in heaven).
- God does miracles (supernatural events) sometimes.
- God allows suffering and death sometimes.

If the supernatural event doesn't occur, or if someone continues to suffer, they conclude:

- God has a good reason, and I will continue to believe Him.
- God always loves me and is powerful enough to work his will.
- God is powerful enough to use sin and suffering to accomplish His purposes.

The knowledge (expectation) that we will suffer at times, does not mean that we are limiting God's power. God is powerful, but we don't always know His greater plan. "Though He slay me, I will hope in him." (Job 13:15 ESV) Faith can be shown by believing God's promises, even while suffering.

### **Base your faith on God's Word**

Doing miracles and demonstrating spiritual power does not always mean that Jesus Christ is at work in that person's life. Jesus stated in Matthew 7:21-27 that many people will do miracles in His name, but in the future He will tell them to depart from Him. The reason He will ask them to depart is that they were not hearing His words and putting them into practice. Listening to God's Word is the measure of a wise person – spiritually mature, living by faith. Here are other passages that also communicate this principle:

- **Romans 10:17**, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."
- **2 Timothy 3:16-17**, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."
- **2 Peter 1:3-4**, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."
- **Hebrews 4:12**, "The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."
- **James 1:25** "The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it, he will be blessed in what he does."

It is so important to keep God's word in our hearts, and develop an attitude to do and obey it at all times. This takes faith, but God is pleased and He delights to bless and help us in everything.

### **Don't limit your faith**

Don't limit your faith according to what you see others doing around you. Sometimes the example of others living by faith in God will motivate you, but it's also possible that God is ready to use you as an example to motivate someone else. The more you learn to live according to God's promises, the more you will be an example to others to do the same.

**John 14:12** (Jesus speaking) "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

**2 Corinthians 12:9** "He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

**1 Samuel 17** David knew that God wanted His people to remove the Philistines from the land. When he saw a Philistine giant threatening God's people, David became convinced that God would not want that to happen. So David stepped out and risked his life in order to act on what he knew God has said. There is no evidence that God gave him a special dream or gave him special instruction, he simply knew that God's written instruction to Moses was to destroy the Philistines in the land and that God had promised to help His people to remove them. So David took action.

Life can become an amazing adventure as we step out to take action according to what we understand God would want done in a situation or to meet a need in the world!

### MAKING DECISIONS

Every day we make many decisions, and sometimes we need to make decisions that will affect the rest of our lives. God is eager to help us make each decision, but He does not force Himself on us. *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you."* (Psalm 32:8-9) It is your choice how much you want God to lead you in making decisions.

First of all, have you ever made the decision to become a whole-hearted follower of Jesus Christ? Very similar to the first disciples (such as Matthew, Peter, James), you need to decide if you want to become a complete follower of Jesus, or do you just want Him to help you at certain times? Until you tell Jesus Christ that you want to be His follower 100%, it's often confusing to make decisions according to His will. You still want to follow some of your own desires, even though you see some of the benefits of following Jesus and His desires for you.

Jesus Christ is not visible with a physical body right now, but He has sent His Spirit to live in us and take His place, which is to our advantage (John 16:7). Even though we can't hear Jesus' voice with our physical ears, Jesus told us that the Holy Spirit will help us in the same ways Jesus helped His first followers. (John 14:15-21, 25-27, 16:5-16)

When Jesus was here, His followers would ask Him questions about what they should do, such as in Luke 9:54. He would answer them, and they would know what to do as His followers. Today, the principles are the same, even though we can't see or hear Him physically. Following are three basic principles for learning what Jesus Christ would want us to do in any situation.

(Many people will say there are four principles for making decisions; Prayer, God's Word, Counsel, and Peace of God, but here we are combining two of them into one principle.)

**1. Pray** – Ask God the questions you have and tell Him the thoughts, desires, and feelings you have. Ask Him to help you know what to do. John 14:13-14

**2. Hear His Words** – Since Jesus Christ isn't here physically, He speaks through His written Word (Scripture) and through the members of His body (1 Corinthians 12:12-30) who can explain God's written Word. Take as much time as possible to allow God to speak to your mind and heart through His Word as you read and study it and as you learn it through the Christian leaders in your life.

- Through God's written Word (Scripture) – Psalm 119:105, 1 Timothy 3:16-17
- Through other leaders you trust who can explain God's Word and explain how it applies to you in your situation. – Ephesians 4:11-16

**3. Peace of God** – God's Spirit, who lives in you, will give you peace when are following His direction for your life. When you can tell the Lord, "I am trusting You and following You to the best of the understanding You have given me," He will give peace in your heart. This is one of the fruits (results) of the work of His Spirit (Galatians 5:22). If you do not have this peace in your heart, it is probably a sign that you still need to learn something else or take care of some issue.

When Jesus Christ was living here, He also spent time talking to His Father and listening to Him. Before making the decisions of who would be His closest followers (future apostles), it's interesting that He spent most of the night talking and listening to His Father (Luke 6:12-16). Taking extra time to apply these principles before making a decision is a very important practice.

If you are a committed follower of Jesus Christ, and you apply these three principles to making decisions, you can be confident that Jesus will lead you just as much as He led His first followers that we read about in the New Testament!

### **Growing in faith**

**Romans 10:17**, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

#### **Real life stories to illustrate this truth**

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trusted God's promise to care for them, no matter what the outcome might be. Daniel 3:1-30
- Joseph continued to have faith in God, even though things got worse; going from abuse, to slavery, and to prison, Genesis 37- 50:15-21

**[FOR DISCUSSION – Do you remember some experience you've had when you saw God work because you were trusting Him?]**

## Learn from Jesus' example – How he lived by faith in his Father

Jesus came to this earth as God in the form of a man. He was still God, but he had the limitations of a human. In this way he showed us how to live as people with many weaknesses. Jesus, himself, said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing." (John 5:19-20) We see that Jesus had complete trust in his Father. Jesus knew that his Father has all power, has all knowledge of everything, is perfect in all he does, and Jesus knew how much his Father loved him (John 5:20). As a result, Jesus wanted to trust his Father, cooperate with his Father, and obey what his Father said in every way. We can describe this relationship of trust by saying that Jesus lived by faith in his Father. This was the only way Jesus lived, and this life of faith in his Father was the basis for everything he did. (John 5:19-23 and 5:30)

After you have become God's child through Jesus Christ, you have the same Father Jesus has, and you have his Spirit living in you. You now can live your life in a similar way that Jesus lived his life here. Jesus already knew his Father, but you are just now getting to know Him. The more you know and understand your spiritual Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, the easier it will be for you to put your trust in him. He is able to help you in every way, and he is eager to teach and to lead you in every way, but most of all he is so happy that you are his child and he wants you enjoy him in every way.

YOU CAN LIVE BY FAITH IN THE FATHER THE SAME WAY JESUS DID, WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP!

### For thought and discussion

In what ways would you like to make progress in living your life of faith in your spiritual Father and in Jesus Christ?

### ACTION POINT:

- Commitment - Tell God you will trust and obey Him in every situation because of who He is and not because of how well you understand each situation.
- Ask God to help you be aware if there is some area of your life in which you are not trusting God to fulfill one of His promises.
- Recognize that negative feelings and negative thoughts are signals that you need to consciously thank God for a promise that would relate directly to that issue. If you are not aware of a promise that would apply to the issue at hand, ask God to show you one.
- Ask God if there is a way you can step out in obedience to Him which you have never thought about before.

### REVIEW

- Review experiences and progress with past Action Points.

### For your consideration

1. What Bible passage stood out to you from those given in Basic 13?
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about putting your faith in God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to put your faith in God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What is something about God that motivates you to put your faith in Him?
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do, to put your faith in God (consider the Action Steps)?

# God Trains Us to Love

## Basic #14

**God's desire is to help you learn more about His love for you so you can love others with His kind of love.**

**1 Corinthians 13:1-3** – According to this passage, how important is love?

### **Love one another, as I have loved you**

**John 13:34-35** "A new commandment give I to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

- Jesus commanded many things of His disciples, but this is the only "New Commandment" that He gave his disciples. It is a challenge to love one another, but an even greater challenge to love as He loved us.
- Jesus gave this instruction to His disciples immediately after He had washed the feet of Judas – a very close friend who totally betrayed him for some money! When Jesus was experiencing the awful pain of betrayal by a friend, He washed the feet of the one who caused it! He is an example for us to love those who hurt us.
- Jesus could have emphasized that His disciples should love the lost, or to love their enemies, but instead he emphasized that they should **love each other**. He probably did this knowing that those who are closest to us are often the ones who hurt us most deeply. (At those times, our close friends can also feel like our enemies.)
- John later said, (1 John 3:16) We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

### **Our motivation for love**

**1 John 4:19** – "We love because He first loved us." The more we know how much God loves us, in spite of our sin, the more we are motivated to love others with the same kind of love. God demonstrated His love for us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

### **God's love is practical**

**1 John 3:17-18** "Whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."

- All of us have needs, some physical, emotional, spiritual and material. It pleases God when we reach out to those in need and give sacrificially to help them. True love is always costly. God's love sent His Son to die for you and me, so that we might have eternal life with God in heaven. Sharing what we have with one another is small compared with what He did for us.

### **God's love is sacrificial**

**John 15:13**, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

**Romans 5:5-10**, "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, ... when we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly. ... While we were still sinners Christ died for us. (vs 8) ... when we were God's enemies we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, ..."

(Can you imagine sacrificing YOUR life for the kind of person described in Romans 5?!)

**Philippians 2:3-8**, Here is the most amazing example of sacrificial love!

**Sacrificial love** means that we give more than we receive, or even give and expect nothing in return. (Philippians 2:3-11) Because God made us to need love and desire love, it is humanly impossible to continually give out more love than we receive. So how can a person continually live a life of sacrificial love? The only reliable way is to learn how to continually receive and enjoy God's love for you. The more you learn how to receive and enjoy His love for you, the more you will be motivated to love others. This is the key to sacrificial love in a marriage and in every relationship.

**[FOR DISCUSSION –** Can you remember a time when someone showed love to you in a sacrificial way?]

#### **God's love was great to us, ours should be for one another**

The more we know how great God's love is for us, and the more we know how undeserving we are, the more we will want to show that same kind of love toward others.

**1 John 4:11** "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

- All of us have needs daily. As the family of God, we can help one another, and show God's love to our world.

#### **We show God's love when we forgive one another**

All of us have personal weaknesses. We can show the compassion of Christ when we love others in their time of failure or sin in the same way Christ has loved us. Colossians 3:12-14, 1 Peter 2:23-24.

**Ephesians 4:31-32** "Let all bitterness and wrath; and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind, tender hearted, forgiving each other; just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

**Matthew 5:43-44** Loving our enemies is possible the more we understand how much He loved us when we were His enemies (Romans 5:8-10)

**Complete forgiveness** is evidenced when we are convinced God is using (or has used) the evil that someone did toward us to be for our benefit. Joseph is a strong example of this (Genesis 50:19-20).

**Bitterness** grows in our heart when we do not completely forgive someone, and we cannot see how God is using the evil for our good. This bitterness will hold us back from experiencing God's help in our life, as stated in Hebrews 12:15.

#### **We show God's love by not taking His place as the Judge**

**Romans 14:1** "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters." Paul gave us this instruction in the context of giving other instructions about loving Christians (Romans 13:8-13).

Paul was convinced this (Romans 14:1) was very difficult instruction to follow. In the book of Romans he used 30 verses to explain this statement. His explanation about this point is far more lengthy than any of the other instructions he gives about love in Romans. So Paul was evidently convinced that this instruction was more difficult or more easily misunderstood than other aspects of loving people.

In summary, Romans 14:1-15:7 explains the problem of tending to set ourselves up as the judges of what is right and wrong for other Christians. Paul makes this statement in the following places:

- **Romans 14:1** “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing **judgment** on disputable matters.” (sometimes translated “without quarreling”)
- **Romans 14:4** “Who are you to **judge** someone else’s servant?”
- **Romans 14:10** “You, then, why do you **judge** your brother?”
- **Romans 14:13** “Therefore let us stop passing **judgment** on one another.”

In chapter 14 Paul explains that every Christian should live life to please the Lord (especially Romans 14:4-8). So the loving thing for each of us to do is to help other people pray, study God’s Word, and seek God about what He wants them to do in each issue of life. When we only tell them that they should do what we have learned, then we are encouraging them to follow us as their leader instead of helping them keep their focus on Jesus as their leader. When we give instruction to other Christians about what to do or not to do, without helping them develop their personal convictions about God’s will for them, we are setting ourselves up as their authority. It is a big problem to set ourselves up as the judge for another person instead of helping them focus on the only Judge they are responsible to, which is God!

None of us understands everything. Many good Christians have differing ideas about the meaning of certain parts of the Bible. Many good Christians have differing ideas about the application of God’s commands in the Bible. Many churches have split when Christians think their conviction is the only correct one. Many friendships between Christians have been broken because one of them thinks he is right and the other is wrong.

Yes, the Bible does teach what is right or wrong, but we are all at different levels of understanding and application. We need to help each other depend on God as our teacher and judge. Even the most famous preacher in the world does not understand everything correctly! He is still learning.

**Romans 15:7** is a good summary statement for the end of this section, “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” Jesus is our example. Jesus continued to patiently love His followers when they had different ideas and were sometimes wrong in their ideas. He knew the Holy Spirit would continue to teach them, and no person can learn everything at one time.

Jesus taught His followers to always search the Bible for God’s answers and to pray and trust Him to teach them. Jesus showed love to them by helping them depend on God as their teacher, leader, and judge, and not any other person. Jesus wants us to do the same thing. *One*

*of the most important ways that we can love other Christians is by helping them to personally learn from God without us getting in the way, no matter how good our understanding might be.*

### **Having a loving relationship is more important than other things you do for God**

**Matthew 5:23-24** – reconciling a broken relationship is more important to God than many forms of worship that we value highly.

**1 Corinthians 13:1-13** – Anything we do that is not motivated by love is useless. God knows that love builds up (1 Corinthians 8:1), and He wants everything we do to be building in the lives of others (Ephesians 4:29).

### **Keep on loving one another, and don't give up.**

**1 Peter 4:8** Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins."

- When we love, we can overlook the things that are imperfect in one another. We're not in heaven yet.
- This is the way God loves us; not holding anything against us.

### **When we walk with God, focusing on His love for us, we will love others with the same kind of love.**

**Galatians 5:22-23** "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

#### **Real life stories to illustrate this truth**

- David made a covenant of love with Jonathan. He said he would not destroy any of Jonathan's descendants, 1 Samuel 20:11-17. Later, David carried out his commitment of love with Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth. We also see how Mephibosheth loved David in response. 2 Samuel 4:4, 9:1-12, 16:1-4, 19:24-30.
- The whole Bible is the story of God's love for people, from Genesis 3:8-10, when He wanted to be with the first man and woman in the garden, to Revelation 19:6-10, when we'll have the marriage feast of the Lamb, and be with Him forever.

### **Learn from Jesus' example – How he loved**

Jesus loved all kinds of people. When a rich young man came to him with questions, Mark wrote that Jesus loved him (Mark 10:17-22). When Jesus looked over the city of Jerusalem, he wept because he loved the people living there (Luke 19:41-44). Jesus even loved his enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). How could Jesus have this kind of love? Is it possible for you and me to have the same kind of love?

John's description of how Jesus loved at the end of his life, just before his crucifixion, helps us understand a lot about his love.

"Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all

things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.”

It was possible for Jesus to love in this way because he “knew that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God ...” (John 13:3) We must have a clear understanding of who God is, how much he loves us, and how much he will care for us when others are tearing us down. When this is clear in our minds, we can humbly love others, even if they are our enemy in some way.

To think this way, we need the Holy Spirit’s help, and we need the Holy Spirit’s help to *remember* to think the same way Jesus thought. But that is how God’s love is produced in us. John summarized it well in 1 John 4:19 when he wrote, “We love because he first loved us.”

YOU CAN LOVE THE SAME WAY JESUS DID, WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT’S HELP!

**For thought and discussion**

In what ways would you like the Holy Spirit to help you think the way Jesus thought, so that you can love the way Jesus loved?

**ACTION POINT**

- Commitment - Tell God you are committed to love every person in your life, with the help of His grace.
- Evaluate, if you are married, would your mate say you are in love with her/him?
- Think of ways you are showing honor and love to your parents (no matter what age you are), and evaluate if there is something more that would be good to do.
- Think if there is there a person who has caused you suffering and pain. Evaluate and pray if you are showing love to him or her.
- Think and pray if there is anyone who is unhappy with you in any way. What can you do to restore the friendship?

**REVIEW**

- Review experiences and progress with past Action Points.

**For your consideration**

1. What Bible passage stood out to you from those given in Basic 14?
2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about loving others?

3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to love others?

4. What is something about God that motivates you to love others?

5. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do, to love others (consider the Action Steps)?

# God Trains Us to Live in Victory

## Basic #15

**God's desire is to help you live victoriously in every aspect of your life.**

### **Warfare before Jesus Christ came**

Before Jesus came, people thought more about physical war than spiritual war. David wrote Psalms about being rescued in war, such as Psalm 18. He wrote, "He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the Lord was my support." (Psalm 18:17-18) David learned he needed to trust and obey God so God could give him victory. Jesus taught the same principle, but He taught us to apply it to spiritual warfare more than physical warfare. As Jesus said, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28)

### **The greatest war**

Satan is out to steal and kill in every possible way, but Jesus Christ is at work to give a full abundant life to people (John 10:10). Satan wants us to believe that the good life comes through selfishness, such as impatience, drunkenness, cheating, or sex-on-demand. The Bible calls selfish living "sin." Jesus changes our perspective, and His Holy Spirit reminds us that the good life comes through believing God. The choice is ours for who we will listen to and believe. When we choose to believe God, we live in victory. (Refer to the one-page diagram of God and Satan at the beginning of this manual.)

Paul describes this war going on inside us in Romans 7:14-23. It is also mentioned in James 4:1, 1 Peter 2:11, and 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

### **Continual warfare**

**Ephesians 6:10-18** "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ..."

**1 Peter 2:11** "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul."

**2 Corinthians 10:3-5** "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

**[FOR DISCUSSION –** What are some battles you've experienced (mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually, with someone else, or any other kind)?]

## **God has provided daily spiritual victory for every believer**

1 Corinthians 15:57-58 “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”

- This verse tells us that victory is possible and provided by God. He gives us the victory, and victory is through Jesus Christ.

## **Paul shares “the secret” of victory**

Philippians 4:12 “Not that I speak from want; for I **have learned** to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I **know how** to get along with humble means, and I also **know how** to live in prosperity; in **any** and **every** circumstance I **have learned the secret** of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I **can do all things through Him** who strengthens me.”

- Daily victory is only possible as we “**learn the secret**” and “**know how**” to live in any kind of circumstances. Paul tells us that the secret is to do **everything through Christ**.
- You will remember in an earlier study we saw how God empowered Moses in each challenge as God sent him to rescue the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. The principle is the same here, but we need to look at the details again.

## **The secret is Jesus Christ, not rules**

Colossians 2:20- 3:3 “These [rules] are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but **they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence**. Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ... For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”

## **Specifically, it's the shed blood of Jesus that provides victory**

Revelation 12:11 states that the believers will overcome their enemy by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. Our tendency is to think that we overcome opposition and problems by our hard work. When we read about the seven churches in Revelation 2 – 3 who were instructed to “overcome”, we naturally think of working harder in the area of weakness. But the key to overcoming our enemy is the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11).

- Focusing on the shed blood of Jesus helps us focus on the reason for His shed blood, which is our sinful hearts. Whether it's pride, lust, or hatred, the sin of our hearts is the root problem in the struggles we experience.
- Focusing on the shed blood of Jesus helps us understand the strong love that God has for us, which motivated Him to go through the agony of the cross so we could be adopted into His family.
- Focusing on the shed blood of the Lamb helps me know that I don't have enough strength in myself to fight against my enemy's lies.

## **Recognize the work of your enemy**

Recognize that Satan and his demonic beings can influence your thoughts. There's no evidence that Satan knows all your thoughts, as God does, but Scripture shows that somehow he's able to influence your thoughts.

- Ephesians 6:10-18 - Christian believers WILL be influenced by Satanic beings.
- Mark 8:31-33 - Jesus accused Peter of being influenced by Satan, which Peter was totally unaware of. Peter just thought he had some "good ideas" for Jesus.
- Luke 22:3 - Satan entered into Judas. The probability is high that Judas didn't even know what was happening in the spiritual realm; he was just making plans in his own mind.
- Luke 22:31-34 - Jesus said that Satan asked permission to sift Peter, which God granted. According to the context, the way Satan sifted him was to tempt Peter to deny Jesus. Somehow Satan could influence Peter's mind, without Peter knowing who was doing it!

### **Recognize Satan's primary strategy is deceit.**

Satan influences people's mind by tempting them to believe lies. This is deceit. It is making one thing look like something else, when it's not actually the real thing.

- Genesis 3:13 - Satan deceived Eve.
- John 8:44 - Jesus called Satan the father of lies (deceit).
- Revelation 12:9, 13:14, 20:10 - Satan is the deceiver of the world.
- Matthew 4:1-11 - Satan suggested ideas to Jesus that were contrary to God's truth, similar to what he does with us.
- 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 - Satan sets up arguments and pretensions against the truth.

God has created His people to enjoy His creation (food, sex, and many other things), and most of all, to enjoy Himself. But all through history Satan has been presenting ideas, plans, and things that appeal to the senses God has created, yet with little deceiving twists that take us away from the real thing. Initially, Satan's deceit is very attractive and enjoyable, but the eventual result is always pain, misery, and destruction. (Refer to the one-page diagram of God and Satan at the beginning of this manual.)

**[FOR DISCUSSION –** Can you recall some way that you were deceived in your thinking – either about God or about some other person or thing? How did you find out the truth?]

### **How to do battle against demonic thoughts**

The issue is not really whether or not the thoughts are from your selfish nature or from demons. They need to be dealt with in the same way.

- Revelation 12:9-11 - Satan is the one leading the whole world astray, and "they (the Christians) overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." There's a reason that Jesus is called the "Lamb" 31 times in Revelation. His sacrifice of Himself is the basis for of victory for all people, for all time, against their greatest enemy!
- 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 - Taking thoughts captive to Jesus Christ is the solution. This can be done by talking directly to Jesus Christ about the thought (out loud or in your mind). Ask Him to give you His perspective on the thought, which will likely be a truth from Scripture that relates to the thought you have.
- Ephesians 6:10-18 - The spiritual armor is all made up of the attributes of Jesus Christ; truth = Jesus, righteousness = Jesus, salvation = Jesus, gospel = Jesus, word of God = Jesus, faith = faith in Jesus. In summary, Jesus Christ Himself is our armor for warfare!
- Romans 1:16 - the gospel (that Jesus died to defeat the penalty of sin, the power of sin, the presence of sin, and our enemy who promotes sin) is the power of God for the

salvation (rescue from our enemy, the power of sin, the penalty of sin, and ultimately the presence of sin) of everyone who believes.

- Romans 1:21 - Recognizing God's greatness (glorifying Him) and giving thanks to Him is the opposite of pursuing selfish desires.
- Ephesians 4:26-27 - (anger is the context) Don't give the devil a foothold, but instead deal with the anger immediately. In war, when you see your enemy coming your direction, you do whatever it takes to stop him immediately. It's unwise to wait and see what he'll do. It's even worse to open the door and talk to him, because you know he'll immediately put his foot in the door, and then you've essentially lost the battle. Your enemy needs to be stopped as soon as you see him coming. Anger is often a signal of something that your enemy wants to take advantage of to get you focused on yourself instead of God. When this happens, the door is more open for him to do other things.

The solution to all struggles with sin is Jesus Christ, not in the work of trying to change ourselves! Whenever we're aware of a selfish thought, we "put on" (like clothing in Romans 13:12-14) Jesus Christ by thanking Him for His shed blood for that sinful thought. And even when we're not struggling with sin, we "put on" Jesus Christ and enjoy Him!

#### **Romans 13:12-14**

"Let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, CLOTHE YOURSELVES WITH THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." This is done by admitting your problem and thanking Jesus for shedding His blood for your sin.

#### **The truth will set you free**

In John 8:32, Jesus says that the truth will set you free. He, Himself, is the Truth (John 14:6). Jesus set the example for how we use the written word of God as the truth that will set us free. In Matt. 4:1-11, when Jesus was tempted, He always responded to the temptations by focusing on a truth from God's written word that applied to the situation Satan brought up. This is how we need to respond to the lies of Satan and the world that come to our minds on a daily basis. We always go to Jesus Christ and focus on some aspect of truth about Him.

#### **The Holy Spirit will remind you**

You will forget to go to Jesus and thank Him in every temptation and sin, and that is why the job description of the Holy Spirit is to remind you (John 14:26). Tell Him you will go to Jesus in thanks for His shed blood, **every** time He reminds you! Put the burden of memory on Him, since that's His job! Your responsibility is to respond to Him.

#### **Warfare when your enemy already has a foothold**

The sad reality is that many people have already allowed the enemy inside the door of their life, and often for long periods of time. This will require serious changes in environment, circumstances, schedules, and relationships. It's not easy, but it's worth everything it takes!

Spiritual warfare happens at different levels.

1. Thoughts in your mind

2. Stimulation and circumstances affecting your body
3. Habits and activities that bring more stimulation
4. Relationships to promote actions
5. Lifestyle

In many ways, the battle in our mind is the most intense. Once this battle is lost, the enemy gradually takes over the other levels. Many people are already living in defeat at the lifestyle level, without ever being aware that they had a battle at the thought level.

Whatever level you are at, that's where you need to do battle. Find someone who has been winning the battle through the power of Jesus Christ's blood. Ask them to help you bring the battle back to the level of your thoughts, and then keep it there. ***You cannot fight the battle at any level by yourself.*** God has made you to need help from others (James 5:16, 1 Cor. 12: 21-22). This is part of His plan for relationship.

Your enemy will be there the rest of your life, but by the power of your Savior's shed blood, you can live without giving him even a foothold in your mind.

Recognize that your enemy is out to kill and destroy you. There's not an ounce of love or compassion in him. Don't let him deceive you for one second, causing you to think that his way is enjoyable, comfortable, or satisfying. Sugar coated arsenic poison is never worth eating for the initial pleasure of sweetness.

#### **ONLY one way for victory over the world and our enemy**

**1 John 5:4-5**, "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? ONLY he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

**Psalm 25:15**, "My eyes are ever on the LORD, for ONLY He will release my feet from the snare."

**Revelation 5:2-6**, At the climax of history, no one will be found that is worthy to open the scroll with seals. John wept, "then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, HAS TRIUMPHED. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.' Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, ..."

**Revelation 12:11**, "They overcame him (Satan, who leads the whole world astray, 12:9) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."

#### **Real life stories to illustrate this truth**

- Achan is an example of how one sin, kept hidden, can hinder victory and hurt many people. Joshua 7:1- 8:35
- Gideon didn't feel like a mighty warrior, but as he stepped out in obedience and trust, God used him for great victory, Judges 7:1-25.

#### **Learn from Jesus' example – How he lived in victory**

Jesus experienced intense attacks from his greatest enemy, who is also our greatest enemy. Before Jesus began his public ministry, he was tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1). We can be sure that Satan was using the strongest tactics he knew of to cause Jesus to fall. Then at the end of Jesus' public ministry, Satan came again in a very powerful way. We know this from what

Jesus said during the last night with his disciples, “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here” (John 14:30-31). After Jesus made that statement, he went to the garden with his disciples. Peter, James and John saw Jesus become sorrowful and troubled (Matthew 26:37). They heard Jesus say, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death” (Matthew 26:38). That is a lot of stress! Jesus knew Satan was coming to do something that would cause tremendous agony and suffering for himself. How did Jesus make it through these attacks from the most horrible, powerful enemy?

Jesus gave a summary of the answer, recorded in John 16:32-33. “Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.” Jesus said that he knew his Father was with him! Jesus knew that the One who has all power, all knowledge of everything, the One who is perfect in all he does, and the One who has complete love for him was with him (John 5:20). It was a simple truth – that the Father was with him – but it is the most profound, powerful truth! It is the most profound and powerful solution to the worst kinds of attacks we can experience in our lives because it is focused on the One who is the source of all life on this earth and in the universe. He is the One Jesus knew and the One who Jesus focused on for every aspect of the battles he went through, and he is the One for us to focus on in every battle we go through!

YOU CAN LIVE IN VICTORY THE SAME WAY JESUS DID, WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP!

#### **For thought and discussion**

Is there an area of your life where you would like the Lord to give grace for victory? How could Jesus' example of knowing and trusting in the Father be applied to your life?

#### **ACTION POINTS**

- Commitment - Tell Jesus Christ you are committed to go to Him in every situation, sin, and temptation, thanking Him for the victory of His shed blood and resurrection. Tell Him you will do this every time He reminds you to do so.
- Ask God to reveal ways in which you are believing lies. Ask Him to show you which truth (promises) He wants you to focus on instead of each lie.
- Evaluate and pray about the degree you are experiencing victory in your thoughts.
- Talk these things over regularly with a mature Christian whom you trust. Preferably this should be done with a gender-specific group of 3 – 4 who meet regularly to share all aspects of life and to pray for each other.

**REVIEW** - Review experiences and progress with past Action Points.

#### **For your consideration**

1. What Bible passage stood out to you from those given in Basic 15?

2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about living in victory?

3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to live in victory?

4. What is something about God that motivates you to live in victory?

5. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do, to live in victory (consider the Action Steps)?

# **Characteristics of a Christ-follower who is practicing the Basics**

Those who have completed study and discussion of the Basics of God's Training, and are practicing them, should be making progress in the following areas. They...

- Are baptized, have assurance of salvation and have regular fellowship with the church
- Feed on God's Word daily
- Enjoy God's love and are not burdened by fear and guilt
- Pray regularly for non-Christians they know and for Christians they are helping
- Know how to explain the gospel and lead someone to accept Christ as Savior and are doing things to communicate the gospel
- Receive regular help and encouragement from a spiritual mentor
- Have chosen Jesus Christ as Lord of their life in every way for all time
- Help one or two others to practice the Basic Commitments and grow as Christ-followers
- Serve their spouse in many ways, keeping family as top priority among relationships
- Honor their parents
- Choose to trust God in every kind of situation
- Support their pastors whole-heartedly, which means being an integral part of their church
- Respect and cooperate with authorities at work and in government
- Practice close and regular communication with other mature believers (open about everything in life, including thoughts and feelings, with same-gender mentor or friend)
- Are victorious in personal purity
- Practice teamwork with co-workers in ministry and at every other place they work
- Are following a vision for how they, their family, and their church can be involved in fulfilling the Lord's desire for all people in the world to know Christ

# **The Basics of God's Training**

## **Categorized in the 5 C's**

Below is an outline of how the 15 Basics of God's Training will help a person grow in four of the five C's essential for healthy spiritual growth.

### **CHRIST**

- # 1 God Trains Us to Believe God's Love
- # 2 God Trains Us to Stay Close to God
- # 3 God Trains Us to Feed on God's Word
- # 4 God Trains Us to Pray
- # 13 God Trains Us to Believe and Have Faith in God

### **COMMUNITY**

- # 8 God Trains Us as Members of His Church
- # 9 God Trains Us to be Leaders
- # 10 God Trains Us in Teamwork
- # 14 God Trains Us to Love

### **CHARACTER**

- # 5 God Trains Us to be Humble Servants
- # 6 God Trains Us to Humble Ourselves Before God
- # 7 God Trains Us to Humble Ourselves Before Others
- # 15 God Trains Us to Victory

### **CALLING**

- # 11 God Trains Us to Influence People
- # 12 God Trains Us to Fulfill the Great Commission

### **COMPETENCY**

# Keys for Training Others

## Jesus' example

Mark 3:13-15

## Paul's instruction and example

**2 Timothy 2:2** Paul's desire was to reach as many people as possible with the gospel and to train disciples in all the world, as Jesus clearly commanded in Matthew 28. This is why he instructed Timothy to train other men who would be able to train others. Multiplication of disciples will happen most quickly by choosing to train disciples who already have the most maturity and show the greatest potential for helping others. After they train others who will train others, who will train others, the most people with the greatest weaknesses will ultimately be helped.

## Train in the context of close friendships

As explained in the introduction of these 15 Basic of God's Training, people will benefit from close discipleship relationships by participating in at least three activities each week:

1. Worship and Bible study (including teaching) with others
2. Small family-style groups of all ages and sexes. (These can frequently give time for discipleship training in even smaller groups of 3-4, gender specific.)
3. Outreach Bible discussions or other outreach activities

Doing all these activities with the same people, similar to a family, results in the most effective growth.

## Decide who you will train

Pray and discuss with your co-workers about who to train. Following Paul's example in 2 Timothy 2:2, the priority is normally to find someone who demonstrates the following qualities:

- Already trusting and obeying God
- Already helping others

## Train in groups of three to four

One-to-one discipleship is helpful, but if small groups of 3-4 (gender specific) work together as a team to help each other, the training is more effective. The reasons for greater effectiveness are similar to the reasons that two parents are better for training a child than one parent.

When a group gets larger than four, it becomes increasingly difficult for each person to share and discuss the details of what's happening in his life. If a person is not able to share and discuss in detail what is happening in his life, his ability for application and practice will be greatly decreased. **Note:** It's important for the trainers to also be open about their personal lives. Their past experiences and present example will be extremely important in providing personal training.

These gender specific groups of 3-4 are very healthy when they are also part of a larger co-ed group. And if the larger co-ed group is multi-generational, it has even more advantages!

### **Trainers need continued help**

As trainers invest to help others practice God's truth, the trainers will be most effective if they can receive continued advice and encouragement from those who trained them. Because of this, it's important for mentoring relationships to continue even after spiritual generations have multiplied.

A physical family tree is probably the best analogy of how healthy spiritual multiplication can take place. Two people become parents, and then after training their children, they will likely become grandparents. The grandparents continue to give encouragement and input to their children, but not as frequently as when they were young. And when great grandchildren arrive, the Great Grandparents will still have input into their children's lives, who are now learning to be grandparents.

## **Discipleship Vision**

The heart of our Creator, Savior, and Father is that every person in the world would continually experience the fullness of the life they were created for (John 10:10, 15:9-11).

How can this happen? Our Creator modeled the answer to this question when He lived here physically with us. Personal discipleship was a strong emphasis He practiced. And before He left, He instructed His disciples to teach others to practice the same things He taught them. Our Lord Jesus knew this was the most effective way to see the world rescued and helped.

Paul practiced Jesus' principles of discipleship and said his spiritual children were the joy of his life (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, Philippians 4:1).

With this model and exhortation from our Lord Jesus Christ, and the example of Paul, we can make it a priority to practice the Biblical principles of personal discipleship for the remainder of our lives.

As you continually practice the basic principles of life in Christ, you will experience more of the fruit of God's Spirit (love, joy, peace, ...), and more of God's blessing in many ways. Intimate life with your Creator is what He made you for! You will also experience more of the joy of being used by God to help others experience the same. No other lifestyle can come close to the fulfillment of living in whole-hearted adventure with our eternal Father and Lord of all!

The result will also be the greatest change in our broken, fallen world. Following Jesus' example of reaching and training will also produce the greatest number of strong Christ followers throughout the world. It is how His commission in Matthew 28:18-20 will be fulfilled.

By God's grace you also can say at the end of your life, about all the people you have helped, "They are our hope, our joy, and the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes." (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20)



# Recognition and Certificates

When a person also completes the requirements for each of the following, they will be given a certificate:

1. Book 1 – Basics about God
2. Book 2 – Basics of God’s Training
3. Book 3 – Basics of God’s Family
4. Read the complete Bible
5. Practical Training to Become a Spiritual Parent

Women who complete the following requirements can be recognized as a ***Godly Woman Trainer***, and will also receive a certificate.

1. Book 1 – Basics about God
2. Book 2 – Basics of God’s Training
3. Book 3 – Basics of God’s Family
4. Read the complete Bible
5. Practical Training to Become a Spiritual Parent through Step 10 (at the end of Book 3 – Basics of God’s Family)
6. Approval from the leaders of her church, her husband (if married), and the members of her church to be a trainer of women

Men who complete the following requirements can be recognized as a ***Commissioned Minister of God***.

1. Book 1 – Basics about God
2. Book 2 – Basics of God’s Training
3. Book 3 – Basics of God’s Family
4. Read the complete Bible
5. Practical Training to Become a Spiritual Parent and continues to lead a group that is growing in their life with Christ (at the end of Book 3 – Basics of God’s Family)
6. Approval from the leaders of his church, his wife (if married), and the members of his church to be a pastor
7. Approval from the pastors who know him well that he meets the qualifications of an elder in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1

Men who meet all these requirements will be recognized as a ***Commissioned Minister of God*** and will be given a certificate stating this recognition.