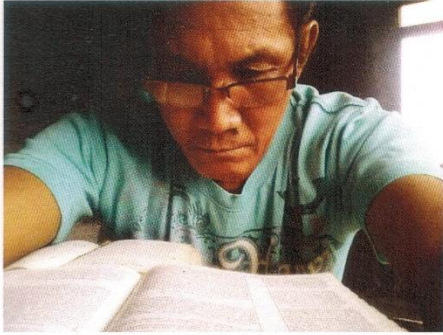




Book 2

Basics of God's Training



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Book 2: Basics of God's Training

A Tool for Using the Bible to Cooperate with God

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Guidelines for Using The Basic Training Manuals

Tools for Using the Bible to Grow with God

There is no greater joy or fulfillment in life than living in a personal relationship with our Creator, who understands everything, has all power, and loves us more than we can imagine. Jesus Christ, our Creator who became a human, said that he came to give us life to the fullest. (John 1:1-5 and John 10:10) During the short time Jesus lived here, he trained a group of followers to know God and to experience life to the fullest by living in cooperation with him. The *Basic Training Manuals* are tools to help make this possible.

Based on God's revelation to us

These *Basic Training Manuals* are based on the Bible, which is God's written revelation of himself. The Creator of this world, and of all galaxies in space, inspired the compilation of the Bible's writings, written by weak and limited people over a period of about two thousand years. **(To better understand this, read Appendix 2 in Book 1.)** In the Bible we learn the character, feelings, and thoughts of this amazing Creator. We also learn his guidelines for experiencing the fulfilling life that he created us for.

Created to love

God is love. (1 John 4:16) God not only created us to live, but also to love. Jesus said that the most important aspect of the whole Bible is love. (Matthew 22:37-40) First, we learn the extent of God's love for us (giving his own life to redeem us forever), and then we respond to that love by thanking him, loving him, and then loving people, all of whom are precious to him.

To love someone means both to know them and to experience them. This is God's desire for us in our life with him. He already knows every detail of our lives, and he wants us to know him so we can experience him more and more throughout our lives.

Christ's death and resurrection made it possible for his Spirit to live inside us because of his gift of forgiveness. (Ephesians 1:13-14) When we choose to respond to God's love, and we open ourselves for his Spirit to live in us, the door is open for us to experience oneness and intimacy with God, which means the potential to experience life to the fullest! When his Spirit comes into us, he also makes us new people. (2 Corinthians 5:17) He, by his Spirit, comes to live in us (Romans 8:9-11), and when he does, he gives us his purity, his heart, and his mind. A new identity!

When God's Spirit lives in us, we have all of God and are united with him forever. This becomes our new relationship with God, and we have opportunity to grow in that loving relationship with him as much as we want. We are already pure in Christ, but our growth allows us to mature into the life that God created us for. Our growth benefits us and also blesses the people around us—and brings glory and joy to God.

Growth in this loving relationship happens as we make choices that will help us grow in knowing God and experiencing him. The *Basic Training Manuals* are designed to help you to

both know him and experience him in every aspect of life. The following chart summarizes how this can happen in your life and how you can help others in a similar way.

CHART SUMMARY OF THE BASIC TRAINING MANUALS

Title	Purpose	Focus	Method
Book 1 – Basics about God	A tool to use the Bible to give understanding of who God is and who Jesus is, as the Son of God	WHO the teacher is—God! (Father/Jesus/Holy Spirit)	Looking for what the Bible says about God’s characteristics, salvation, and promises
Book 2 – Basics of God’s Training	A tool to use the Bible to learn and apply basic lessons that Jesus taught his disciples	WHAT the teacher (God) teaches	Looking for what the Bible says about 16 basic lessons that Jesus taught his disciples
Book 3 – Basics of God’s Plan for Relationships	A tool to use the Bible to understand the basic aspects of living life with God	HOW the teacher (God) has designed us to live life	Looking for what the Bible teaches about God’s plan for the basics of life in families and spiritual families (churches)

These manuals are tools to help you know God as described in the Bible and to know God’s instruction in the Bible for living life to the fullest. By tools, we mean things like a hammer, saw, or pliers. Tools are things we can use in many situations for the rest of our lives. For example, we will never graduate from using a saw to cut things, yet we *can* become more skillful at using it. In a similar way, the three *Basic Training Manuals* are tools you can use throughout your life to know God more fully in the Bible and to grow in life with him.

These *Basic Training Manuals* are tools to help you and others learn and practice the same things Jesus taught his disciples.

- He helped them understand God more fully – Book 1
- He helped them learn how to live the life that God has planned for our joy– Book 2
- He helped them learn God’s design for living life in relationship with others – Book 3

Jesus is the example for HOW to teach

It was no accident that Jesus focused his three years of public ministry on the personal training of twelve men. He knew his investment in those twelve men would make a greater difference in the world than establishing a large seminary that could train thousands of students or establishing a large synagogue (or church) where he could preach to thousands each week.

Jesus’ strategy was very similar to that of a father and mother who invest years of their lives to train a few children. We know that children who grow up in a healthy home—under the leadership of parents who provide love, encouragement, instruction, and training on a daily basis—are the ones who are best prepared for life. We also know that even the most effective parents cannot provide this kind of personal care and training to 100 or more children living in their home. Jesus invested his life into the lives of a few like a parent would. That is his model and example, and that is the best method and strategy for using these *Basic Training Manuals*.

Practical application

In the accounts of Jesus, we find 71 times that he had conversations with his personal disciples. Jesus asked questions 307 times, and people asked Jesus a question 185 times. In the recorded Gospels, Jesus used personal discussions more often than lectures to help his disciples and others learn. This is the primary way parents teach children, and this is the method for which the *Basic Training Manuals* were designed. They are designed to help people follow Jesus' example of training in the following ways:

- ***Spend time with disciples.*** Get to know them. Show compassion for what is happening in every part of their lives and learn what they are experiencing.
- ***Pray frequently for disciples.*** God is the most important teacher for every person. Prayer asks God to work effectively in people's lives. Jesus prayed for people and Paul prayed for people. Many of Paul's prayers are recorded in the New Testament. Learn to follow Jesus's example and Paul's example in praying for people.
- ***Help disciples focus on knowing God more completely.*** Help them understand more about God and what he is doing in every aspect of life. This is the purpose of Book 1.
- ***Help disciples know how to live by God's Word in daily life.*** God is always working every day and, in every circumstance, to help us know him and live life with him. Book 2 is a tool to help us know which parts of the Bible will be helpful in each circumstance we experience in life. As you become familiar with the content of Book 2, it will help you know which places in God's Word will be helpful for you and your friends. 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.
- ***Help disciples focus on relationships.*** God works through relationships, and families are his design for close, strong relationships. God has designed marriage, families, and churches for these close relationships, and jobs are an additional context for growth in relationships. Book 3 is a tool to understand God's design for families and churches so people can develop strong relationships with him and with each other.
- ***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."*** (Appendix 1)

Training for new Christians and for pastors

In summary, these manuals cover the basics that Jesus (and his disciples) taught all followers of Jesus Christ.

- The training manuals are good for helping a new Christian and for training mature Christians.
- The manuals can help people become strong parents and strong leaders.
- They have all the basics for someone to become a pastor, and they can help pastors become more effective.

Instructions for using Book 2

Jesus continues to train his followers today

When Jesus lived here as a man, he was continually helping, teaching, and leading those who followed him. Today he is doing the same, but not in exactly the same way. Jesus himself told his followers that when he left them physically, he would always continue to be with them by his Spirit. (Matthew 28:20) Jesus explained to his followers how his Spirit would work after he physically left. (Read John 14:25-26 and John 16:5-15.) But we tend to forget his presence because we don't see him. Another reality we tend to forget is how much Jesus loves us. He told his disciples, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love." (John 15:9) This remains true, even today!

But even though we don't see him, there are other ways that Jesus is working in a more complete way than when he was here physically. For example, today he is not only with us, but he also lives inside each person who has placed their belief and trust in him. (Romans 8:9-11) Here is a list of things Jesus is doing now, as stated by his first followers:

- He, as God, is always at work in us. Philippians 2:13, "... it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." And Philippians 1:6, "... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus [when he returns]."
- The Lord Jesus is speaking to us now. Hebrews 12:25, "See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks." ["is speaking" ESV]
- The Lord Jesus is helping us now. Romans 8:26, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness."
- The Lord Jesus is praying for us. Romans 8:26, "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."
- The Lord Jesus is always working everything out for our good, which is to conform us to be like Jesus. Romans 8:28-29, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, ..."
- The Lord Jesus is always building us up. 1 Peter 2:5, "You, also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

Today, Jesus is at work to teach us, as his disciples, the same things he taught his first disciples. Our response is to cooperate with him. This manual, Book 2, is a tool to help us learn those same things. It contains sixteen basic things Jesus trained his followers to think and do. That's why Book 2 is called "**Basics of God's Training**." All sixteen Basics are important things that the Spirit of Jesus wants to help every person to understand and practice for all their lives.

Use Book 2 as a tool for the Holy Spirit to use

You can use Book 2 as a tool for you to find scriptures related to what the Holy Spirit is teaching you and as a tool to help others understand what God's Spirit is teaching them.

Jesus, who is God, is the one personally training each disciple (his child) 24/7. He is the one for us to know, understand, and cooperate with.

The list on the page of Contents at the beginning of Book 2 shows sixteen things Jesus taught his disciples, which are things that the Spirit wants to teach all disciples today from the Bible. Those sixteen Basics can be learned in a systematic order, or they can be learned in any order according to the needs and desires of the people in the group. The order in which the Basics are learned and discussed does not really matter.

For example, for every event in your life (or for an event in the life of the person you want to help), you can ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand what he is teaching and then look through the list of sixteen basics listed on the contents page of Book 2. Decide which basic might relate to the event or circumstances and then turn to the page where that basic is described with Bible passages. Then read the content with the Bible passages and look for which Bible passage might relate to the present situation. Usually there are multiple passages that could relate.

Book 2 can also be used in a systematic way. To do this, you can begin with the first Basic and have discussions with a few others about the Bible passages listed under that subject. Each person can share their experience about a Bible passage or their experience with that general subject. Each one can discuss how they would like to make progress with that subject, and people can pray for each other. Each time the same people meet together, they can continue reading and discussing the Bible passages under Basic 1, maybe for two or three weeks. When they are ready, they can continue to Basic 2, and so on.

Maturity comes with consistent practice of the basics

Even when we know what the Bible says about an aspect of our lives, we need continual reminders and encouragement to continue practicing the basics of life with God. We even need reminders of his presence! (NOTE: You can ask God's Spirit to remind you of his presence, and any other truth and reality, and he will!)

Spiritual growth is similar to physical growth in many ways. For a person to grow and maintain physical health, he needs to be committed to regularly practice certain basics. For example, 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 spiritual 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 the purpose of these sixteen basics.

- 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." (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.")

Analogies 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. The most mature spiritual leaders also need to continually practice the basics of spiritual health. In fact, Jesus Christ, himself, is the best model of practicing all sixteen of the basic essentials, which will be explained at the beginning of each Basic.

Returning after failure

Failure will happen and it will often discourage you, but God, in his grace, always has his arms wide open for you to come to him. You can never do anything to cause him to love you less! He is always ready for you to come to him, 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 turn to him, you WILL grow in maturity.

Continual progress

For the rest of your life, God's Spirit will continually use everything in your life to help you become like Jesus Christ. (Romans 8:28-29) His training is customized for each person, but the basics are the same for all of us.

First Steps for a New Believer

When a person makes the decision to put their trust in God provision for salvation from sin through Jesus Christ (as described in “God’s Salvation” in Book 1), they become a child of the Creator of the universe! They are a new spiritual baby with eternal life. This first section is especially for that person. These are the **“First Steps for a New Believer.”**

A new Christian is a spiritual baby. Like a physical baby, they have immediate needs that are important to be met. Physical babies need warmth, milk, love, sleep, and other things. Spiritual babies need assurance, loving fellowship, spiritual food, communication with their Father, and baptism to identify with their family. These first five steps are simple, and later they will learn more about feeding themselves (Basic #3) and more about communicating with their Father and Lord (Basic #4).

Following each of the first steps, there is blank space where you can add more Bible references that help you understand the same subject.

Step 1. Gain assurance of salvation

The truths of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ are very different from our normal ways of thinking. That is why it’s 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. Following is also a summary of the basic truths that will give someone assurance of their relationship with God.

- **Understand that God has done everything to provide for your salvation!** There is nothing for you to do to gain your salvation except to believe and accept what God has done for you through Jesus Christ.
 - This is because the death penalty for your sin is something you could not pay yourself. Romans 3:23, James 2:10, Romans 6:23. Each of us deserves eternal death in hell because of our sin.
 - Even if you could become a totally righteous person, you still could not pay for your past sin. Jesus Christ is the only person in history who has lived a perfect life, and then he voluntarily allowed himself to be killed to become a sacrifice for the sin of every other person in the world. 1 Peter 3:18, 1 John 2:2. (But it’s up to each of us to decide to accept that sacrifice for our sin.)
 - After you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, there is no sin you can do that will cause you to be rejected by him! Jesus died one time for all your sin, past, present, and future! Romans 5:6-11, 1 Peter 2:24, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13, Hebrews 9:26-28
- **Understand that when you accept Jesus, your “legal” record before God is as clean as the record of Jesus Christ!**
 - 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.

- **Understand that when you accept Jesus, you are adopted into God's 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. Romans 5:8-10, 8:1.
 - When you have Jesus, you have eternal life with your Father, God. 1 John 5:11-13. Not because you deserve it, but because of how much he loves you!

Step 2. Identify as a believer in Jesus by getting baptized

New spiritual life begins in the heart, which 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 let's 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.

Step 3. Get to know your spiritual family (fellowship)

Everyone who has believed and accepted Jesus as their Savior is an eternal child of God. Similar to how a physical baby needs a family, so also a spiritual baby needs the family of other believers.

- 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.

Step 4. Get spiritual food from God's Word

God's truth is food for your spirit. You can listen to God's truth and you can read God's truth. The Bible is the source of God's truth.

- 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!
- 1 Peter 2:2 – God's word is like spiritual milk.

Step 5. Communicate with God (prayer)

When you are born into God's family, you begin a relationship with your new parent.

Communicating with your parent whom you can't see is different in some ways from the parent you can see, but in principle it is the same.

- 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.

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

Jesus was God, the creator, who came to live as a human like all of us. He had all the qualities of a human, yet at the same time he was still God. Jesus' love and unity with the Father did not decrease when he became human. Jesus had no sin, so the love between him and his Father was perfect. Jesus always knew and believed his Father's love.

Today, Jesus is working by his Spirit to restore that kind of love relationship with each person who is born-again into his eternal family. We can learn from his example. "We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19) The following sections explain these truths more completely.

Jesus knew his Father loved him

- John 5:19-20 – Jesus said, "Whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does."
- John 17:20-23 – Jesus prayed to his Father just before his arrest and crucifixion, saying, "My prayer is not for them alone [his followers at that time]. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ...May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." Jesus prayed that all future believers in him (including us, today) would know that the Father loves them (us) in the same way that the Father loves Jesus!
- John 3:16 – The Father's love is very strong. "For God so loved the world [loved the world so much] that he gave his one and only Son..." Jesus knew he would give his life as a sacrifice because the Father loved him and loved all people in the world. The Father knew the Son (Jesus) would be resurrected after his death, and the Father wanted to provide a way for all people in the world to be restored to his love.

Jesus understood who his Father was

Jesus was completely aware that God (the Father and Jesus and the Holy Spirit) had been using all power and all the resources of the universe to accomplish a special plan in the lives of all kinds of people, such as Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, Esther, Daniel, and many others described in the Bible.

- 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)
- God provides food for all living things. (Psalm 145:15-16)
- No spiritual being (including the devil) can do anything apart from the permission of the Father, to whom Jesus prayed. (Luke 22:31-32)

- God knows every thought that people think and every feeling they experience. (Psalm 139:2-3)
- To Noah, God demonstrated his judgment on the world and his love simultaneously. (Psalm 104:5-9)
- God moved his people among the nations and over many years to carry out his promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, 13:14-17, Psalm 105:8-11), Joseph (Psalm 105:16-22), and Moses. (Psalm 78:11-16)

Jesus knew his Father had a good purpose for everything

Even though the Father in heaven had great love for Jesus (his Son), Jesus experienced many difficulties while he lived on earth. When we experience difficulties, we often feel that God does not love us. What helped Jesus not doubt his Father's love while he experienced the following difficulties?

- Jesus had no home to live in. (Matthew 8:20)
- Jesus had no job for income.
- Jesus had no possessions and no bank account. He only had what people gave to him. (Luke 8:1-3)
- Jesus was never married.
- Religious leaders criticized him frequently and wanted to kill him. (Luke 4:29, John 10:31-39, Matthew 12:13-14)
- Jesus lived a short life of only 33 years.
- Jesus was tortured in horrible ways and then crucified, which was the most horrible kind of death. (Matthew 27:27-50)

The answer is that Jesus knew without a doubt that God had a special purpose for each difficulty. The Father's love had not changed, and he had a good purpose for each difficulty.

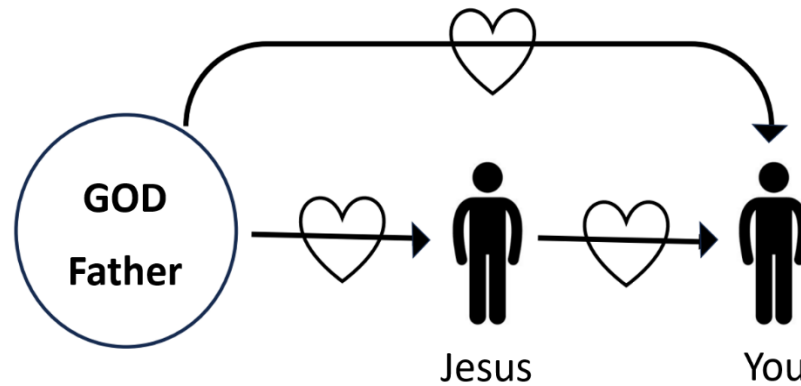
FOR DISCUSSION – What difficulties have you experienced? Do you think God might have a special reason for each difficulty you experience?

- What can happen if God's children compare themselves to others who don't have the same experience they have? The answer might be similar to the parable Jesus told in Matthew 20:1-16.
- God has special plans for each of his children that could mean different trials and different blessings. (What Jesus told Peter in John 21:20-23 is one example.)

Jesus loves his followers more than can be imagined

- Jesus told his disciples, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." (John 15:9) Another way this could be said is, "Just like the Father loves me, so I love you." That's a stronger love than we fully understand!
- Jesus said a similar thing in his prayer to the Father about future people who would believe in Jesus, "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:23) This could be reworded to say that the Father loves those who believe in Jesus in a similar way as he loves Jesus. That's also a stronger love than we can fully understand!

The following diagram illustrates how much the Father and Jesus love those who believe in him.



FOR DISCUSSION

Could you call yourself God's favorite daughter/son?

- Would you say that Jesus could be called the favorite son of the Father?
- Keep in mind that Jesus said he loves his disciples in the same way the Father loves him. (John 15:9)
- Keep in mind that Jesus said the Father loves his disciples in the same way he loves Jesus. (John 17:23)
- Keep in mind that God is unlimited in all his qualities, and is able to love all his children in the same way the Father loves the Son. Because of the limitations of humans, we can only have one true favorite. Since God is unlimited in all his qualities, he is able to love all his children in an unlimited way.
- Could we say that each of God's disciples (children) are his favorite, because he loves each one in an unlimited way – in the same way the Father loves the Son?

Jesus demonstrated his love in radical ways

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 all people living in the world. He fully believed the Father's love and wanted others to know that same love.

- Jesus washed the feet of Judas, even while knowing that Judas had already betrayed him. (John 13:2-5) Then Jesus told his followers to do the same! (John 13:34-35)
- Jesus loved the rejects of society. (Luke 15:1-2, Luke 19:1-10, John 4:7-42)
- Jesus viewed helping people as more important than traditions. That is why he healed people on the Sabbath. (Matthew 12:9-14, Mark 3:1-6, Luke 6:6-7, Luke 13:10-17, Luke 14:1-6)

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

For thought and discussion

What is an experience you have had that helped make you more aware of how much God loves you?

We love because God first loved us

God's Word says, "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 Lord's holy people, 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 God's most important instruction – to love! To love God and to love others. (Matthew 22:37-39)

Analogy of two wives

Believing God's love will motivate godly living and obedience. If someone uses a different motivation (such as fear) to try to inspire godly living, it will probably work against your understanding of God's love. Christians don't always have the same motive when they do a same action of obedience. Two Christians might do exactly the same thing, such as giving money to their church, but that action can come from different motivations. The following analogy of two wives illustrates this.

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 has 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. Years ago I had an affair, but he made it clear that he still 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.

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 can show 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 living to please him.
- 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."

Develop your understanding of God's love

What is your understanding of God's love? Following is an evaluation for you to pray and think about.

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 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.

___ God is eager to use all my weakness and all the evil around me to give me greater joy 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

___ 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, or 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 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. (Ephesians 1:4-10 together with Ephesians 4:21-31. Also Isaiah 45:7-10)

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

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!

Romans 1:16-17, Romans 8:1-17 – 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!

The righteousness of Jesus becomes ours!

- 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Corinthians 1:30 – 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!

- Jeremiah 33:16 – This was also predicted before Jesus came as a human person, when Jeremiah said the LORD would be the righteousness of his people.
- 1 Corinthians 1:30 – When we are placed into Christ, his righteousness becomes ours!
- Romans 5:8-10, Romans 8:1 – 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.

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 to teach and train you 24/7. The following passages describe this reality:

- 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

One thing that can hinder you from experiencing God’s love to the fullest are 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 in every 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 understand the appropriate way to respond, is an extremely important aspect of being his disciple!***

Real life stories to illustrate this truth

- God’s heart of love is shown by three parables in Luke 15. Each is a story of looking for something valuable that was lost.
- 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

ACTION POINTS

- 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 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 rather than being primarily focused on self-evaluation (continually focused on an evaluation of how you are living your life). Like the apostle John said, the more you understand God's love, the more you will love him! (1 John 4:19) The first book of these three training manuals, "Book 1 – Basics about God," is designed to help you discover more about who God is and what he has done for us. What other ways could help you focus on knowing and understanding your Creator, Savior, and Lord?

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.

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.

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me? I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be 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)
- “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” (Mark 1:35)
- “Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.” (Matthew 14:22-23)
- “So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.’” (John 11:41-42)
- Before his arrest, Jesus cried in prayer, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet 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—the One who has all power, who is full of love, perfect in justice, unlimited in knowledge, present everywhere, and who never changes. (John 17:1-3)
- 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?

Jesus trained his followers to stay close to him

Mark 3:14 – All of Jesus’ public ministry was based on a close relationship with his followers. Even when he chose his followers, his purpose was that they would be with him. Then they were with him all the time – day and night, every day, eating, sleeping, traveling, helping people until he was crucified. And Jesus welcomed more people than the twelve to follow him and be with him. (Luke 8:1-3, Matthew 19:21, Acts 1:21-22)

At the same time that Jesus was practicing a close relationship with his followers, he was living in a close relationship with his Father in heaven. He frequently talked with his Father (Luke 5:16), and he would spend extended times alone with Him. One example of this was after John the Baptist was murdered and after Jesus fed a crowd of more than 5,000. When it became dark, he sent the crowd away and sent his disciples on a boat so he could get time praying to his Father. (Mark 6:45-46) Evidently, he got time alone with his father until the fourth watch of the night, which would be 3:00 AM. His life was so busy that he had to sacrifice other things in order to get personal time with his Father. Jesus talked to his Father before meals (Mark 6:41), in difficult situations (John 11:41-42), and in times of trial (Luke 22:39-46).

As Jesus came close to the end of his earthly ministry with his followers, he explained more of his desire for a close relationship with them. During the final Passover meal with them, he gave the analogy of a branch of grapes closely connected with the vine. (John 15:1-17) He explained

that his plan for his children is that they be as completely united with him and dependent on him as a branch of grapes is united and dependent on the vine. He explained that a healthy close relationship with him was equally important as for a branch of grapes to have a close healthy connection to the vine.

The analogy of a grape vine for a close relationship summarized much of what he had taught his followers previously.

- He had taught that meditation on God's word was a source of continual sustenance. (Matthew 4:4)
- Jesus lived closely with his followers day and night. They were in constant fellowship with him day and night. Then, after his death and resurrection, he sent his Spirit to live with them in an even closer way. (John 14:16-20, and 16:5-15)

God's purpose

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. Even though God is so different from us, he created us in his own image so that we can experience the kind of closeness that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit experience together. In Genesis 1:26 God said, "Let **us** make mankind in **our** image, in **our** likeness...." God was talking; the Father, Son, and Spirit said, "Let **us** make mankind in **our** image...." They have always had loving closeness with each other, and then they designed people to be in their image so people can also enjoy the same kind of loving closeness with the Father, Son, and Spirit.

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 mortal, 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 that knowing Christ was his ultimate goal, and other pursuits were worthless in comparison to knowing Christ and experiencing fellowship with Him.

John 15:1-11

Jesus paints a word picture, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser (Gardener)."

- Verses 4-5 – "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so 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."

- Verses 7-8 – “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.”
- Verse 11 – “These things I have spoken to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.” Jesus wants every Christian to experience a joy-filled fruitful life!

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. In John 15, 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.” (John 15:5) 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—focused on who he is, what he is like, and what he has done—so his kind of fruit will come out of us.

(NOTE: Book 1 of the *Basic Training Manuals* can help you learn to focus on Jesus.)

The priority focus for abiding*

One aspect of our relationship with Jesus that is different from human relationships is that we can abide IN Jesus in a different way than we abide in human relationships. This means that we not only learn ABOUT Jesus, but we learn what it means to be IN him.

Jesus said, “Abide IN me.” Understanding and focusing on what he means for us to abide IN him makes all the difference for understanding the rest of our life with him. How well we understand who we are IN Jesus determines how we walk with Jesus. These realities are the truths that Paul focused on at the beginning of many of his letters, such as 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, and also throughout his other letters. It’s important that this also be the priority of our focus.

Following are some of the amazing truths of who we are IN Christ, as found in Ephesians 1—

- **Chosen.** “He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.” (Ephesians 1:4)
- **Loved.** “In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.” (Ephesians 1:5)
- **Holy and pure.** “He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.” (Ephesians 1:4)
- **Adopted.** “In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.” (Ephesians 1:5)
- **Completely forgiven.** “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace. (Eph 1:7)
- **Sealed with the Holy Spirit.** “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:13-14)

These important truths of who we are in Christ provide a filter for us to clearly understand the other truths of abiding in Christ. You can ask the Holy Spirit to help you focus on these truths and continually grow in your understanding of who you are IN Christ.

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How we stay close to God

John 15:7 – 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 24:15 – Joshua, when he was ready to die, said to the children of Israel, “Choose for yourselves this day 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.

Luke 10:42 – 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.”

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, “Book 1 – Basics about God,” will help you in this way.

The greatest problem

Rejection of God’s instruction is called sin, and sin results in separation from God. 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. 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:

- Joshua 7:1-26 – 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.
- Acts 5:1-11 – 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.

God used both of these examples to show the seriousness of sin. Ultimately, the consequence of sin is spiritual death. (Romans 6:23)

The only solution

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. (NOTE: For more help with victory over sin, see “Basic #15 – God Trains Us to Live in Victory.”)

Moral failures can bring you closer

Hatred for sin also applies to our wrongs even after we've been born-again into God's family. For example, Ephesians 4:29 points out that a selfish word needs to be dealt with. God's Spirit living in us will make us aware of these wrong words, thoughts, and actions that affect our closeness to God and our friendship with people. Then, each time he makes us 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)

When we become aware that we have wrong thinking such as lust, rage, hatred, etc., 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 to be 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.

Hosea 2:14-16 – “Therefore I am now going to allure her [Israel]; I will lead her into the wilderness [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 respond 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.’”

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.

Closeness with God

Even though God is so different from us, he designed us for closeness with him, as described at the beginning of this Basic #2. This closeness is much more than just talking with each other. As one source said, “Communion is the deep sense of bonding that gives rise to the emotional side of love.” (“Personal Development for Smart People,” Principle #2, by Steve Pavlina) A marriage

is the closest kind of relationship, and this is how God describes his desire for relationship with people –

Isaiah 54:5-8 – “For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit—a wife who married young, only to be rejected,” says your God. “For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back.”

Example of closeness

In marriage, the husband and wife enjoy each other’s presence. They enjoy being together in all kinds of situations and when they do all kinds of things together. A married couple doesn’t always talk, but they enjoy being close with each other. This is God’s desire for us, as Jesus said, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” (John 14:3)

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 had been 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 it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.’ (Matthew 7:7) My convictions about 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 another for the rest of my life. Usually, it’s for several hours once a week, and on some occasions I have taken 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?

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.

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 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.**

NOTE: As previously stated in Book 2's guidelines, these Basics can be studied in any order. For example, at this point in your Bible studies, you might want to skip to Basic #13 to learn more on how "God's Trains Us to Believe and Have Faith in God" before you start Basic #3.

Learn from Jesus' example – How he fed on God's word and trained his disciples by example

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.

During the temptations of Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus clearly explained the importance of God's written Scripture. Satan, the great enemy of God, tempted Jesus three times. Jesus responded to all three temptations by quoting written Scripture, each time beginning the quote by saying, "It is written...." After the first temptation, Jesus said, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4) Jesus was explaining that we need God's words for living, and not just physical food!

Jesus primarily trained his followers to feed on God's Word by the example he set. Jesus knew scripture well enough to quote it in many situations and to explain how it applied to life. In Luke 2:52 we learn that Jesus, as a child, experienced the normal growth process of all children, including growing in wisdom. Evidently Jesus studied and meditated on God's word to learn what it says, what it means, and how it applies to life. Following are some examples of Jesus demonstrating his knowledge and wisdom about God's Word:

- Even before Jesus began his public ministry, at the age of 12, the religious leaders were amazed at how well Jesus understood truth. (Luke 2:41-51)
- The temptation that Jesus experienced before his public ministry is something he must have told his disciples about at a later time. Jesus explained that he had confronted every temptation with a truth quoted from Scripture. (Matthew 4:1-11)
- At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus stood up to read in the synagogue, and when they handed him the scroll of Isaiah, he knew exactly what he wanted to read, and he already knew the meaning and application. (Luke 4:16-21) After reading it, he then said that it was being fulfilled right then at that time.
- At that same time in Nazareth, Jesus explained more about himself by using three examples of Elijah and Elisha, as recorded in Scripture. (Luke 4:22-30) Jesus obviously knew those stories in the Bible well and he knew how they applied to his situation.

- When Jesus explained who John the Baptist was, his explanation was based on Malachi 3:1, which he quoted. (Luke 7:24-27)
- When the religious leaders criticized Jesus, he responded by quoting a string of Scripture passages from Isaiah 29:13, Exodus 20:12, and Exodus 21:17, explaining how the Scripture applied to them. (Mark 7:5-16)
- When he chased the money changers out of the temple, he explained his actions according to Isaiah 56:7. (Matthew 21:12-13)
- When events led to his crucifixion, he knew the events were fulfilling what was written in Scripture. (Mark 14:21, Luke 18:31-34)
- After Jesus' resurrection, Jesus 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, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (Luke 24:25-27)

Jesus had learned Scripture so well that he referred to it and explained it as the basis for things he did throughout his life. By his example, Jesus set the model for his disciples to learn God's word, understand God's word, and base all their life on what God's Word says. The example of Jesus was equally as powerful as the teachings and instructions he gave to his disciples.

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 foundational for all of Jesus' life on earth. 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?

The meaning of feeding

Matthew 4:4 – Jesus said, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Every person and animal needs food to grow. Spiritually we are the same. When we are born again, as Jesus described in John 3, we are new spiritual beings. (2 Corinthians. 5:17) This is our new reality – that we are God's child forever! New babies need food to grow. As spiritual babies, we need spiritual food to grow.

The diagram in Appendix 2 can help you visualize what happens when you are born again spiritually. You are a new spiritual being who has the Spirit of God living in you. Before you were born again, you were under Satan's influence, and that's the kind of life you were familiar with. Now that you are God's child, you now have a choice of how you want to live. You can now make choices to learn and apply God's truth, which will result in spiritual growth. Or you can continue to choose your selfish way of thinking, which continues to promote your old sin nature, which is not really your true self anymore.

As you learn God's truth and apply it to your life, your new spiritual being will grow. The results will be increasingly amazing! This is why feeding on God's Word is so important.

God's promise for meditating on the Word

When you hear God's truth or read it, that's the first step of feeding. Thinking about the truth, praying about it, and thinking about how you can apply it to your life is called meditation. God's promise for this kind of meditation makes it one of the most important things we can do.

- 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?

Choosing what is most important

Luke 10:38-42 – Here we read a story of Jesus visiting in the home of Mary and Martha. Martha was busy getting things ready for Jesus, which was not wrong, but she was thinking that her activities were more important than what Mary was doing. In Luke 10:41, we read what Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

- What did Jesus mean by saying this?
- Was "serving" not important to God?
- The issue was, "what is first in importance?"
- Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to his words.

Listening to God speaking to our hearts through his Word DAILY is more important THAN ANYTHING ELSE. This is how we feed on God's truth. Then as we think and meditate on God's truth, we will grow spiritually, which means we will grow in our relationship with Jesus and our Father in heaven.

Pastor Herschel, who helped develop this manual, often said, "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 eight 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 God's written word being 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

ACTION POINTS

- Commitment – Tell God you will meditate on His word daily, asking him to help you.
- 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.

NOTE: It's good to notice that the first few Basics in Book 2 are the most important aspects of a friendship with God. This friendship starts with knowing God's love, and then we respond to his love by pursuing friendship with him through faith. The early sections of the Basics are the essentials for any friendship—listening and talking (feeding on God's Word and prayer). These primary principles open the door for every other aspect of our relationship with God.

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):

- Luke 6:12-13 – Jesus spent the night in prayer with his Father before choosing the twelve close disciples.
- Mark 1:35 – “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”
- Matthew 14:22-23 – “Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.” Later that night, after 3:00 AM (the fourth watch), he went to see the disciples on the lake. (Matthew 14:25)
- John 11:40-41 – “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.’”
- Mark 14:32-42 – Before his arrest, Jesus spent hours in prayer. 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)
- Luke 23:34 – On the cross Jesus cried out, “‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ And again he called in a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’” (Luke 23:46)

John 14:26 – Jesus lived his life on earth in complete unity and communication with his Father. Even though his Spirit gives us this desire also, we are not able to remember to constantly communicate with God. 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! We can ask his help to teach us and remind us how to be in communication with God through each day.

Matthew 14:22-25, Mark 1:35, Mark 14:32-42 Luke 6:12-13 – Jesus often spent extended in prayer at night. 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!

Jesus trained his followers to pray

Jesus both exemplified prayer to his followers and gave specific instructions about prayer to them. He was such a strong example of talking to his Father that one of his disciples asked him, "Lord, teach us to pray." (Luke 11:1a) Jesus then gave what we now call the Lord's Prayer. (Luke 11:2-4) After that model, he went on to explain more things about prayer. (Luke 11:5-13) One of his main points was that the love of our Father in heaven is much stronger than the love of any friend or parent we have. Jesus said, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." (Luke 11:13)

The implication from this explanation is that the love of our Father in heaven is much stronger than the love of any other person. Jesus implied that the more we understand the Father's love for us, the more we will be motivated to ask, seek, and knock in prayer to our Father. (Luke 11:9) This is a strong motivation to continually ask the Holy Spirit to help us understand more of how much God loves us. The more we understand the extent of his love for us, the more we will be motivated to go to him in prayer. All this is a reminder of the importance of Basic #1 – God is training us to believe his love.

Jesus gave exhortations throughout his ministry, and during his final meal with his disciples (the Passover), he gave six promises related to prayer. Prayer was obviously very important for the Lord Jesus! Following are some of the things Jesus taught about prayer:

- Matthew 6:5-8 – Motives are important in prayer. Praying to impress others will accomplish nothing, and neither will a motive to gain merit with God. But a motive set on seeking God as our Father is what touches his heart. (Matthew 6:6)
- Matthew 7:7-12 – Jesus exhorted his followers to ask, seek, and knock, since our Father in heaven is eager to act.
- Matthew 18:19-20 – Unite together with others to pray.
- Matthew 7:7-11, Mark 11:24, John 14:12-14, 15:7, 16, 16:23-27 – Promises for answered prayer.
- Luke 10:2 – Things to pray for—workers in the harvest.
- Luke 18:1-8 – Continue praying until we see God answer.

Besides the Lord's model prayer, some of the prayers Jesus prayed are recorded by his followers. These were obviously for their benefit and ours also. Following are some of the places where Christ's prayers were recorded:

- At Lazarus' grave – John 11:40-41
- At the last Passover – John 17:1-26
- In the garden, before his crucifixion – Mark 14:32-42
- On the cross – Luke 23:46

Jesus taught and trained his disciples about prayer throughout his ministry. At the time of his greatest trial, he asked some of his disciples to pray with him, but they did not understand enough to pray with him at that crucial time. (Mark 14:32-42)

The Holy Spirit continues to teach about prayer

John 14:26 – After Jesus' resurrection he sent the Holy Spirit to continue teaching the disciples about prayer. Today, the Holy Spirit continues to train us in this essential aspect of our relationship with God.

God desires communication in friendship

- With Adam – Genesis 3:8-9
- With Abraham – Genesis 18:1-33
- With Moses – Exodus 33:11
- With David – Psalms 21,22,26,28,30, 31,32,51,56,57,59,60,61,63,65,69,70,71, are examples of David writing to express his heart in different ways.

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

God promises to answer prayers

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, as we read here:

- John 14:13 – "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son."
- John 14:14 – "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."
- John 15:7 – "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."
- John 15:16 – "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you."
- John 16:23 – "In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."
- John 16:24 – "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."

FOR DISCUSSION

- 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 the similarities with the promises in the Gospel of John.

God commands us to pray

- Philippians 4:6-7 – “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
- Colossians 4:2 – “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.”
- Ephesians 6:18 – “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 – “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”
- 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 God.”
- James 5:16 – “The prayer of a righteous person 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 immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.”

Prayer is expressing your heart to God

The book of 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 to pray with others:

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 people 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.

Effective way to see a life transformed

1 Timothy 4:1-4 – Because God knows best what is needed for transformation to happen in any person's life, it is logical to pray and ask God to bring about any change needed. Paul is a good example of doing this.

Paul's example

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 – Of all the things Paul said he did for people, prayer seems to be at the top of the list. By looking at these examples, you can learn how and what to pray for others.

What was Paul's primary focus of prayer? When you study what he 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

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 gender) 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 Points)?

God Trains Us to Be Humble Servants

Basic #5

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

Learn from Jesus' example – How he was a servant

John 13:1-15 – 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 even knew anything was wrong.

When the apostle John begins to describe this unusual event, he describes the thinking of Jesus. Jesus knew who he was in light of his relationship with his Father. He would soon be leaving this world and returning to his Father, who loved him fully and completely, both then and always. 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.” (ESV)

John explained that Jesus was able to practice such humble love toward an enemy because he had a clear understanding of his relationship with his Father, which would include how much he was loved and accepted by the Highest Authority in the universe – his Father in heaven. 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.

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

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

YOU CAN BE A SERVANT THE SAME WAY JESUS WAS, 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.

Jesus trained his followers to be humble servants

The concept of being a humble servant was a difficult subject for Jesus to teach his disciples. It was very different from their normal thinking. And their wrong concept of greatness came up frequently in discussion among the disciples and with Jesus.

- Matthew 18:1-6 – The disciples were concerned about who would be the greatest in the new kingdom. Jesus' response was very different from what they expected!
- Matthew 20:20-28 – The mother of James and John came with her sons to request that they have highest honors in Jesus' kingdom. But all the disciples were also interested in receiving that honor, and they became upset about the request that James' and John's mother had made. Jesus' response was that they needed to have the mindset of being servants and even slaves in the same way that Jesus himself thought. (See also Mark 10:35-45 and Luke 9:46-48.)
- Matthew 23:1-12 – Jesus taught that greatness should be measured by becoming a humble servant.
- Mark 9:33-37 – The disciples were arguing about who was the greatest, and Jesus reminded them that his concept of greatness was to think of ourselves as the servant of everyone else.
- Luke 14:7-14 – When Jesus was eating in the home of a leading Pharisee, he noticed the tendency of people to exalt themselves, so he explained a different way of thinking and a different motivation.
- Luke 22:24-30 – Even at the last Passover with Jesus, the disciples had another argument about who was the greatest. Jesus again reminded them that his idea of greatness was very different from theirs!

Jesus also set an example of being a humble servant in a variety of ways by meeting the needs of all kinds of people in all kinds of situations.

- Not owning anything, not having an income, and not having a home, but giving his life to serve all kinds of people. (Matthew 8:20, Luke 8:2-3)
- Touching and healing the untouchable leper. (Matthew 8:1-4)
- Meeting the needs of a woman, even when it was socially unacceptable. (John 4:4-30)
- Washing the feet of his disciples. (John 13:1-16)
- Looking out for the needs of others, even when he was suffering. (John 19:26-27)
- Taking the place of the worst kind of criminal and receiving the lowest kind of treatment, all for the purpose of rescuing us from what we deserve. (Luke 22:54 - 23:49)

Jesus served by leading

Jesus also set the example of being a humble servant in another way. Servants often do what others ask them to do, but that's not the only way of serving. Taking initiative to think of needs that others have and to think and pray about how to fulfill those needs is also a strong way of serving. Jesus was continually thinking ahead and making plans. Following are a few examples of Jesus doing this:

- Mark 1:35-39 – Jesus took initiative to go to other places to meet people's needs.
- Mark 4:35-36 – Jesus took initiative to leave the crowds and go to the other side of the lake with his disciples.
- John 11:1-16 – Jesus made a plan for how to help Martha and Mary.

Jesus demonstrated this strong characteristic of a servant leader, which is taking initiative with God and with people to learn what the needs are and then to find and pursue ways to meet those needs.

Jesus served by asking questions

Jesus set an example of asking what someone wanted before serving them. He didn't impose his help upon people unless they were willing for it. For example:

- Mark 10:51 – A blind man was sitting by a road and called out to Jesus. Jesus then asked him, "What do you want?" The man wanted to receive sight, so Jesus healed him.
- John 5:6 – When Jesus saw a paralyzed man lying by a pool and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, Jesus asked him, "Do you want to get well?" The man did, so Jesus healed him, and immediately the man could walk.

Motivation for humility

John 15:9 and 17:23 – The more that you and I understand how much we are already greatly loved by Jesus and the Father, the more we will be motivated to meet the needs of others. We don't have to prove ourselves to God or 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 will 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 the passage gives us motivation by reminding us of what Jesus did for each one of us.

"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

The world's idea of greatness contrasted

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's system. That isn't the way it is in God's value system.

- Matthew 20:26-27 – Jesus said, “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.” Whoever wants to become great must be a servant, and whoever wants to be first, must become a slave, or simply serve the most.

If we want to be great in God’s eyes, we humble ourselves and serve others. God sees things differently than we or 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.

1 Peter 5:5-6

- Peter addresses “all of you”. He mentions younger and elder, but also challenges everyone 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, it’s just the opposite. A leader should be an example of humility and of putting others first instead of self.

FOR DISCUSSION

- Considering the example of Jesus in John 13:1-17, in what ways can you follow his example?
- 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

Two expressions of humility

The next two Basics of God’s training us (Basics #6 and #7) focus on two important expressions of humility: humility before God, and humility before people. Both of these require us to recognize others as more important than our own self-seeking tendencies.

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

Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:29-31 – Love others as you love yourself. Humility and serving others do 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 actually 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 effectively as we serve others. This is one application of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving others as ourselves.

Real life stories to illustrate this truth

- Joseph continued to live before God, even when he was 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

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, your parents, 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?

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 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.

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

John 17:1-26 – 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. This prayer that Jesus prayed when he was with his close followers contains many details about the understanding Jesus had, especially about his relationship with his Father, who is the same Father we have because of Jesus.

Luke 22:42 – 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."

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) His Father was 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)

This understanding enabled Jesus to go through all his sufferings. This is why he could say, "Not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42)

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?

Jesus trained his followers to humble themselves before God

John 5:19 – Jesus was a model of humility when he lived here. Even though he had all power and authority, he lived in dependence on his Father. Jesus told his followers, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does,”

Matthew 26:38-39 – When Jesus faced the most difficult trials of his life, he told some of his disciples, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death”, and then he prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will,”. He was a strong example of humbling himself before his Father.

Matthew 18:4 – Jesus explained that this kind of trust is similar to that of a child with his parents. With a child standing next to him, Jesus said, “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus taught Peter about humility

Jesus was a model of trusting his Father, and at the same time, Jesus taught his followers to trust him (Jesus) in all situations. A good example of how he did this was the sequence of events that Jesus used in Peter’s life to help him understand that Jesus not only had all power, but that he was also full of love, which meant that Peter could trust him at all times and in every situation.

- Luke 5:4-10 – When Peter first met Jesus, he had respect for him as a good teacher, but then Jesus demonstrated how he could do the impossible by filling Peter’s net with fish in the middle of the day. This changed Peter’s perspective of Jesus, and for the next three years Jesus taught Peter about trusting God in every kind of situation.
- John 18:15-18, 18:25-27 – Later Peter thought he was strong enough to handle the difficulties of life. But Jesus led him through the unexpected experience of his arrest and Peter’s denial, in which Peter demonstrated his weakness.
- John 21:1-19 – After Jesus’ resurrection, Jesus met Peter again on the same lake where they originally had met, and Jesus gave him the same experience of filling his net with fish. That repetition of the first experience gave Peter yet another perspective of who Jesus is. The first experience showed the power of Jesus, and then three years later Jesus did the same miracle to show Peter and the others that he not only had all power, but was also full of love.
- After both times, Jesus asked Peter to follow him, but the first time Jesus said the purpose was to “catch people” (Matthew 4:18-19), and then the next time was to “feed my sheep.” (John 21:15-18) Jesus had helped Peter learn how weak he was and how

much he needed God's help. Jesus had prepared Peter to trust God for the difficulties of life, which he couldn't handle on his own. This equipped him to be a better shepherd to care for God's children.

- 1 Peter (letter written by Peter) – It's interesting that Peter later wrote about this basic life lesson of trusting our heavenly Father to care for us in all situations when he wrote his letter to all believers. In chapters 2 and 3 of 1 Peter, he explained how important it is to follow the example of Jesus who "entrusted himself to him who judges justly." (1 Peter 2:23) Peter had learned how important it is to trust God in the most difficult situations. Later in the same letter he wrote, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's almighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time." (1 Peter 5:5-6)

As Jesus did with Peter, he taught his disciples to humble themselves before God by helping them understand that they could trust him at all times, in every situation. He did this in many ways, including the following examples:

- Matthew 6:25-34 – Jesus emphasized his care for people by comparing their value to the flowers and birds. God takes good care of them, and how much more valuable are people than the other parts of his creation.
- John 11:1-44 – Jesus helped his followers understand that his ways are sometimes different than what we understand, and his ways are always good and helpful. This was very clear in how he handled the situation with Lazarus. People didn't understand why Jesus waited, but he had a plan for the welfare of everyone. He was training them to trust God even when things are difficult to understand.

God has revealed himself throughout history

The more clearly people see who God is, the greater their desire is to trust and obey him. This is humility. He has done this in many ways, beginning with Adam and Eve and continuing through today.

Isaiah 66:1-2 – "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. 'These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.'"

The more we see the greatness of God in all he created, the more eagerly we'll trust him in all situations.

All through history, God has done things that are impossible for people.

- Genesis 18:10-14 – God said to Abraham, "Sarah your wife will have a son." (Genesis 18:10) Sarah laughed. God said, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14)
- Jeremiah 32 – God told Jeremiah to buy a field, even though an enemy was about ready to destroy his country. This did not appear to be a good business plan, but then we read, "Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: 'I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?'" (Jeremiah 32:26-27)

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, "These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word." (Isaiah 66:2) 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.

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 during unjust suffering
- 2:23 – Jesus' example of putting his hope in his Father
- 3:5 – Wives to hope in God ("In the same way" as Jesus in chapter 2)
- 3:7 – Husbands to hope in God ("In the same way" as Jesus in chapter 2)
- 3:15 – Hope in God during unjust suffering
- 4:19 – Hope in God during suffering
- 5:5-7 – Putting your hope in God means you are being humble before God
- 5:6 – "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, so that in due time He may exalt you."
- 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

In 1 Peter 3:5-6 Peter commends Sarah 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 give them even 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. According to David’s words in 1 Samuel 23:26-29, he felt as if God had deserted him.

Psalms 22 – David also expressed his feelings of pain and confusion when he wrote this Psalm. But at the same time that 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.

The invitation of Jesus

Matthew 11:28-30 – “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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 will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

- All of us get tired at times and almost feel 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 weakness and 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.
- When we feel like giving up, it’s either because we’re trying to do more than God wants us to do, or else we’re trying to do things in our 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 with God

Hebrews 12:1-13 – 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 overwhelming problems, but in the midst of those problems they looked to God, humbled themselves before him (trusting him), and then were taught special lessons and watched God do special things.

Problems are a good means for helping us grow in a close friendship with God through circumstances in life.

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 the Lord of your life in every way.

- Romans 12:1-2 – In light of God’s mercies “...offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.”
- Matthew 16:24-25, Mark 8:34-36, Luke 9:23-25

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?
- Have you told Jesus that he is Lord over every possession he has entrusted to you?

Assertive humility

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

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

1 Peter 5:5-6. There are 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.

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

1 Samuel 2:35 – 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." 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 allows fear to 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.)

Confession is an expression of humility before God

To confess sin means to acknowledge the wrong that we have done and also to agree with God that he is right. Full confession means that we express to God how we were wrong, and, when appropriate, we also express this to any people who were affected by our wrong.

1 John 1:8-10 – “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”

1 Peter 5:5 – “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Our pride pushes us to do our own preferences rather than to agree with what God says is best for us. As time goes by, we learn that our preferences are destructive when they are not the same as God’s desires for us.

Good examples of confessing sin to God are in Psalms.

- Psalm 32:1-6
- Psalm 51:1-17

Thankfulness is an expression of humility before God

Psalm 50:1-23 – God, our Creator desires our giving of thanks to him more than any sacrifices we could make (vs. 7-14).

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 – “Giving **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

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 dedicated 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.

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 of 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 because of her lifestyle and 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.

Jesus trained his followers to humble themselves before others

As Jesus lived his life, he adjusted to the evil people around him. He knew that he and his Father would use every action of all kinds of people to accomplish God's ultimate purposes. In that sense he could humbly cooperate with all kinds of people and not have a concern that they would destroy God's plan. Jesus taught his followers to think this way both by his example and by his instruction.

- Jesus taught by example: When Jesus went to the region of the Gerasenes and healed a demon-possessed man, the people asked him to leave their region. (Luke 5:1-20) Jesus cooperated with them and left, and later we find out that God apparently used the testimony of the man freed from spirits to prepare the hearts of the people to receive Jesus' message more eagerly during his next visit. (Mark 7:31– 8:13)
- Jesus taught with explanation: Months before Jesus was arrested, he told his disciples about his future suffering, rejection and death at the hands of the religious leaders. (Mark 8:31) He was helping them understand that God always has a purpose, so even when people do evil things against us, we can be humble and kind.

Jesus taught his followers to love those who caused them trouble and to even love their enemies. In Luke 6:27-38, Jesus gave a good explanation of what this means, including the following points:

- Pray for those who mistreat you.
- Don't retaliate when someone mistreats you.
- Give to others in a sacrificial way, without trying to protect yourself.
- Help people who cannot do anything for you.

In the final statements (Luke 6:35-38), Jesus explained that the only way we can show this kind of love is to understand how much our all-powerful Father in heaven is caring for everyone, providing for us, protecting us, and teaching us in every situation.

Jesus repeatedly taught forgiveness to his disciples, as written in the following passages:

- Matthew 6:14-15
- Matthew 18:21-22
- Mark 11:25
- Luke 6:37
- Luke 17:3-4

Jesus had such a clear understanding of his relationship with his Father that he was able to humble himself before others in the most extreme situations. During the final Passover meal with his disciples, he demonstrated this attitude clearly when he washed the feet of his disciples, including Judas, because Jesus knew his relationship with his Father. (John 13:1) Then, after serving them by washing their feet, Jesus said, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (John 13:34)

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 struggles, weaknesses, and sin in the lives of others
2. Humility about struggles, weaknesses, and sin in our own lives as we relate to others

The foundational principle

1 Peter 5:5-7 – “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” God is either building you up by his grace or doing something, such as opposing you, so that you might become willing for him to build you up.

God uses all in your life to build you up. He does this in many ways, even using the wrong things that people do toward you. Because all people are imperfect, it’s often challenging to cooperate with them. But when we learn to focus on what God wants to do through imperfect people in our lives, we are able to experience his help in many kinds of ways. That’s why 1 Peter 5:7 says, “Cast all your anxiety on him (God) because he cares for you.” In our relationships with people, it’s natural to become anxious, fearful, angry, and worried, but God wants us to understand more clearly who he is and how he is working to build us up in a world that is very broken.

Roles of people in our lives

God has designed people in different roles in our lives to build us, even though they have many imperfections. Following are four kinds of roles God has designed for building us up:

- **Parents.** “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.” (Colossians 3:20) “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ – which is the first commandment with a promise [Exodus 20:12] – ‘so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.’” (Ephesians 6:1-3) “My son, keep your father’s command and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. Bind them always on your heart; fasten them around your neck.

When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you.” (Proverbs 6:20-22)

- **Government.** “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.” (1 Peter 2:13-14) “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” (Romans 13:1. Also Romans 13:2-7.)
- **Work.** “Slaves [employees], obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.” (Colossians 3:22. Also, 1 Peter 2:18, and 1 Timothy 6:1-2.)
- **Church.** “Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13) “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.” (Hebrews 13:17)

Guard our minds and attitudes toward one another

Philippians 2:2-5 – “Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as 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. It is important for us 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 thoughts that you allow to remain are there by your choice. (Philippians 4:6-8)

Work past every tension or problem

Ephesians 4:2-3 – One aspect of humility is “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

- Matthew 5:23-24 – Jesus explained one way to “make every effort”. He encouraged people to take immediate action to resolve problems. “Leave your gift there in front of the altar” and restore the relationship.
- Matthew 18:15-17 – “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

- Ephesians 4:26-27 – A humble person will attempt to work past every tension and problem, and not give a foothold for anger and bitterness. If you need help, ask a church leader or a Christian counselor to help you.

When is reproof appropriate?

- Proverbs 19:11 – Sometimes it is good to overlook the wrong that someone else has done.
- Matthew 18:15 – Sometimes it's good to talk to the one who has sinned against you.
- How do we know when to be quiet and when to speak up? We need the Holy Spirit's help.

1 Corinthians 16:14 – “Do everything in love.” Often, we are eager to tell others what we think is wrong, but it's important for us to pray and consider what would be most helpful for the other person. When we talk to someone about an issue, *how* we talk to them usually makes a big difference. God wants everything we do to be done in love.

Romans 14:1-23 and 15:1-7 – “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.” Another challenge is that not all Christians agree on what is sin and what isn't. All of Romans 14 and some of Romans 15 deals with the subject of Christians having different ideas of what is sin. There is much debate among Christians on this subject! God's Word should be the basis of knowing if something is sin and not our opinion or preference, but not all of us agree on how to interpret many parts of the Bible. If you can clearly show someone that God's Word says *in more than one place* that something is wrong, it might be good to talk with them. A general guideline is that if you cannot show a person at least two places in God's Word, where it says something is wrong, you probably should not bring up the subject 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 (some verses in 1 Cor. 13:1-7 remind 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 their perspective. When people feel that you understand them, it will be easier for them to listen to what you have to say.
5. Be ready to understand your own needs or problems that come to light in the process.

Forgiveness

- 1 John 4:19 – 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)
- Genesis 50:19-20 – Joseph’s example in these statements 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. This resulted in complete forgiveness.
- Hebrews 12:15 – 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. Bitterness grows in our heart when we do not completely forgive someone and also if we cannot trust that 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.
- 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

Romans 5:6-10 – 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.

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 because we remember that God is their ultimate Judge, and he can give them consequences. Plus, he can use authorities to bring consequences or require repayment when needed. (1 Peter 2:23, Romans 13:4)

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 – “Sending a message by the hands of a fool is like cutting off one's feet or drinking poison.”
- 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 suffering and abuse to help us mature

Hebrews 12:1-13 – The Lord disciplines (trains) his children as a perfect parent. Many times, discipline and training is difficult and even painful. In sports, players know that pain and suffering are usually necessary when 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.

Deuteronomy 8 – This is an example of 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.

- Hebrews 12:10-11 – “They [our fathers] disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order 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.”
- 1 Peter 2:19-21 – “For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are 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 Corinthians 6:7-8 – “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.”

God uses evil but never approves evil

- 2 Chronicles 36:15-18 – God used the evil destruction of Babylon to discipline the people of Israel.
- 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 described the awful judgment he would bring against Babylon for all the evil they did against his people.

God uses evil actions of people for our benefit. At the same times, 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. 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 judgment.

With humility, problems build relationship with people

1 Peter 5:-6 – “Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”

- 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 can 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 if we do everything in God’s way, with the help of his Spirit, some people will still turn against us, as they did when Jesus lived here and communicated love to people.)

Example of humble openness deepening 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. It took humility for Sam to be open with the others, but when he did, he was surprised by their acceptance and understanding. The result was that he developed closer, deeper friendships with these men than he had ever experienced previously—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

1 Peter 5:5 – “God opposes the proud but shows favor [grace] to the humble.”

Genesis 4:1-16 – Cain focused on his own understanding and did not try to learn the thinking of God, his creator. The result was the murder of his own brother.

- Pride thinks my welfare is more important than the welfare of others.
- 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 makes judgments about the motives of others before hearing their explanation.

Judging others

Joshua 22 – This story in Joshua gives an example of how much destruction can happen as a result of judging motives. This is a common form of pride when we look at the actions of another person and then make a judgment about their motives. This often brings harm in relationships.

1 Corinthians 4:5 – We should not judge others. Soon after that statement Paul said, “I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this.” (1 Corinthians 5:3) On the surface Paul seems to be contradicting himself. But when we closely study the whole passage, we see that Paul is writing 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 until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the **motives** of the heart.” ***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 has been doing this.” Then he explains that he was judging the sexual immorality being practiced by a church member. He also goes on to say there are some actions that should be judged. These 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.

We can see wrong actions, but only God can see wrong motives.

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

WRONG MOTIVES

Pride
Selfishness
Jealousy
Bias
Hate
Lust

WRONG ACTIONS

Lying
Stealing
Sex outside marriage
Idolatry
Murder
Drunkenness

For both categories, God's Word provides the basis for judgment. For motives, God's Spirit uses his Word to judge our *own* 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.

Matthew 7:1, James 4:11 and Romans 14:13 – God's Word says we are not to judge another person's motives in any way at any time.

Matthew 20:1-15 – Jesus gave this interesting example of the problem of judging someone's heart motive. An employer hired people at different times of the day and then paid 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. Jesus pointed out that the true motive of the employer was that of wanting to be generous with people!

God's Word is the judge

Romans 3:4 – "Let God be true, and every man a liar." God's Word is always the basis for truth and evaluation. 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.

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)

Romans 14:4 – "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand." This whole chapter emphasizes the importance of helping others live to please God and not to be influenced by our opinion of them. God's written Word should be our focus and not our opinions.

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. Never make a negative evaluation of their motives.***

Does this mean we cannot let someone know if their actions felt hurtful to us? If someone's action causes 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!

Romans 15:1-2 – “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.” The opposite of passing judgment on another person is looking for ways to build them up.

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 talking 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 disbelief about 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 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 – Jesus praised a leper who expressed gratitude for being healed.
- 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.

God showed us this most amazing kind of love, as 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?

ACTION POINTS

- 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 help you know that you are an essential member of his body, the church.

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 thought and discussion

It is amazing that Jesus wants to use weak people with many 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 God's eternal work?

Jesus trained his followers as members of his church

Jesus was the best teacher and trainer who has ever lived on this planet. At the beginning of his ministry, he chose some people to be with him to grow in their relationship with him and to be equipped to serve others. (Mark 3:13-19) He purposely trained these followers in the context of

relationships because he knew it was the best place for them to learn and the best context for them to serve and help others. Jesus invested all three years of his ministry in training disciples in the context of a group of like-minded people who were focused on him.

What Jesus did with those first followers is the example for his followers today. Now, when a group of his followers unites together to help each other follow Jesus and grow with him, we call it a church. This is the exact same purpose that Paul described for a church in Ephesians 4:11-16.

A church is a group of people who believe in Jesus and who are following him together with the help of each other. Jesus taught that we need each other, and he also exemplified the importance of working together with others.

As Jesus spent time with his disciples, he made it clear that whatever each person does in Christ's name is equally important. (Matthew 10:40-42) Giving a cup of water to someone or showing hospitality to someone is equally important to doing the work of a prophet. This is how Jesus designed his followers to work together. Each one has a different role, and each is equally important for accomplishing God's purposes.

Even Jesus, himself, who had all power in the universe, depended on others to accomplish his purposes. Examples of this include the following:

- Feeding large groups of people (Mark 6:30-44)
- Proclaiming the message of the kingdom to more people (Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-17)
- Provision for his physical needs (Luke 8:3)
- Praying with him when he was in need (Matthew 26:36-46)

Jesus taught and demonstrated that every person is important for helping each other, loving each other, and for accomplishing God's purposes. This is what a church is all about.

What is the church?

Ephesians 1:22-23 – “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

- 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. Imagine that I get up tomorrow morning. I wake up and remember that I need to go to work today. What do I do? Well, my head says that I need to get out of bed. My head signals 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.” I now have a problem. My 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 I could accomplish my purpose and mission. My body simply obeys and fulfills whatever my head wants it to do. When Jesus Christ is our personal Savior and Lord, he is our Head. 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. Instead, he left us here on earth to be his body (servants), to do his will and carry out his plans and purposes, including his desire for finding and saving the lost. (Luke 19:10, Matthew 28:18-20) A local church, the people you meet with each week, is simply an example of his whole body, which is a spiritual unit. (1 Corinthians 12:27-28) The whole body of Christ never meets in one place on this earth. But in the future, after Jesus returns to earth, every member of his body will someday all meet together 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.

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 all the way through Bible college, meeting with church members 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. 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, one of the leaders, gave me an answer that 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. A 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 what a church is all about!”

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 tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

- What is Jesus talking about when he says to Peter, “on this Rock I will build my church”? Did Jesus mean that Peter was the Rock, or did he mean 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 (Matthew 16:13), “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” Some said one thing and others said another. Peter said, “You are the Messiah [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 [this name means “a little rock” in Greek], and on THIS rock [this word means “big rock” in Greek] I will build my church.” In the context, it seems that Jesus was saying that the truth of Jesus being the Son of God is the Rock (foundation) that he would build his church on. How can we know what Jesus meant? Some church traditions say that Peter was the foundation of the church, which made him the first Pope. Is this true or not?
- How can we know for sure? One way would be to ask Peter. That, of course seems impossible, but not really. Read what Peter said to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. (Acts 4:10-12) “Then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” The foundational truth that Jesus wanted 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, Peter, am the Rock, the way of salvation and eternal life.” The foundation is Jesus alone.
- Peter also explained this issue more in his personal letter to all Christians. Peter wrote that Jesus is the primary living stone and that all believers in Jesus (including himself) are like living stones being built into a spiritual house. (1 Peter 2:5-8) Peter viewed himself to be like all other believers in Jesus.
- “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.” (Matthew 16:18) Jesus clearly says that He will build HIS church. The church is NOT Catholic, or Baptist, or Methodist, or Pentecostal. A local congregation can 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 never used the word “church” but he was the best model for the way his followers should live their lives. And as they did this after he left, groups of his followers were called churches.

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 often, and he taught them about

sharing life together in every way. Then, just before he ascended to heaven, he told all his followers to teach others to do everything that he had taught them. (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, but they had his Spirit. This is what church is all about – growing in a relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit.

God's plan for you and his church

The church and your family are the most crucial places for you to apply the principle of humbling yourself before others. The church is the environment God plans to use to help you grow and for you to help others grow. (NOTE: For more about God's plan for the church, see "Book 3 – Basics of God's Plan for Relationships.")

The church is THE BASIS OF TRUTH in the world

1 Timothy 3:15 – "...the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth."

The only organization that will last

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome 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 us and cause us to love this world more than God. He will try to stop whatever God wants to do. BUT 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 in the church

We see a principle taught in the Bible that provides a practical guide for the financial support of leaders in churches today. 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.

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 giving one tenth (tithing) is not a command in the New Testament, the principal of honoring God with a tithe still applies for all time.

- Matthew 23:23 – Jesus recognized that tithing is a Godly practice.
- 1 Corinthians 9:13-14 – Paul referred to the Old Testament principle of tithing and recommended that it be applied to the leaders of the church.
- 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.

Analogy – Who is the real owner?

We are often like the son in the story of a father who 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?

ACTION POINTS

- 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?

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 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.

Learn from Jesus' example – How he practiced leadership

Jesus was the greatest, most effective leader who has ever lived in this world. One evidence of this is the positive effect he has had on this world for the past 2,000 years after his ministry on earth. With this in mind, it is good for us to look at his definition of a leader, to look at his example of being a leader, and to look at the way he trained his disciples as future leaders.

The foundation of Jesus' leadership was that of cooperating completely with his Father in heaven, as he said in the following statements:

- "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." (John 5:19)
- "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 5:19-30)
- "... but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me." (John 14:31)

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. As we saw in Basic #7, 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.

Jesus trained his followers to be leaders

In many ways, Jesus was the most special person and special leader who has ever lived on this earth. At the same time, he also 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, and 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. 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 from 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)

Jesus taught his followers to have a close relationship with him, just as he had a close relationship with his Father. (John 15:1-8)

Jesus defined his purpose as a leader in Mark 10:45 when he said, "...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." This was a new concept of leadership, much different than the typical thinking of people in the world, whose value system is much different than God's values. Jesus' followers were often thinking of exalting themselves instead of thinking how they could promote the welfare of others.

Following are some examples of this:

- Matthew 18:1-6 – Jesus said that the greatest in his kingdom was to be like a child.
- Matthew 20:20-28 – When the mother of James and John asked Jesus for her sons to receive the highest honors in his kingdom, Jesus emphasized the importance of having a mindset of becoming servants, and even slaves, in the same way that Jesus himself exemplified.
- Matthew 23:1-12 – Jesus taught that greatness was to be measured by humbly serving others.
- Mark 9:33-37 – The disciples quarreled about who among them was the greatest, but Jesus reminded them that greatness was to be shown through serving others.

Jesus also taught this concept of servant leadership to his followers on the last night he was with them, before his crucifixion. After washing their feet, he said, "Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (John 13:12-15)

Leadership lessons begin early

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.

Leadership training in different ways

God trains us in many different ways to become leaders.

- He helps us understand leadership by working under leaders.
- God trains us to help others, which is the work of a leader.
- God trains us to lead by working with other leaders.

Working under leaders

Whether you work for an employer, are a member of a church, or live in a city or on a farm, God uses many kinds of leaders to help you grow in your relationship with him. The thinking God wants you to have toward the many different leaders in your life was addressed in Basics #5, #6, and #7 in this manual (Book 2).

Children are prepared to lead

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. 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. These are also the same qualities that will help you be a good leader.

Helping others is leadership

When you help another person, you become 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. 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 exactly 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 become 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, even when not in a recognized leadership position of a group. 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 the group 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 pray, to ask God for his help and leadership for 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, "For 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, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."

The more we learn to effectively meet the needs that we see in the lives of others, the more we learn to be effective servant leaders. 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 the more mature brothers and sisters are to teach and care for their younger brothers and sisters (Matthew 28:18-20).

Similarities to parents

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 your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today and forever."
- Hebrews 13:17 – "Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you."
- 1 Peter 5:1-5 – Mature Christians carry out a role with many similarities to parents. Christians who have matured in their life with Jesus, and who are helping a group of others grow in their life with Jesus, are designated as elders (also called overseers, pastors, and shepherds, which are interchangeable terms for the same persons called elders).

At the same time, there are also some major differences between physical parents and spiritual parents. We need to remember that all of their responsibilities are not the same. Physical parents provide the necessities of life for their children (1 Timothy 5:8), but spiritual parents normally do not. Physical parents train their children by giving consequences (Proverbs 13:24, 19:18, 29:17), but spiritual parents normally do not.

Jesus' example as a spiritual parent

The Lord Jesus himself is the best example for being a spiritual parent. 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.

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 hundreds of 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.

Two kinds of leadership roles in the church

In the New Testament church, two kinds of leadership roles are described: pastors and servants.

The first kind of church leader: Pastors

For pastors, there are three names given to describe the same person.

- Elder: Describes their spiritual maturity. They are “older” spiritually.
- Overseer: Describes their responsibility. They “watch over” the church.
- Pastor: Describes their work. “Pastor” means shepherd. They serve Christ and the church. They Shepherd, teach, guide, correct, counsel, encourage, help and serve all.

Two Bible passages reveal these as descriptive names for the same leadership role; Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5.

- Acts 20: 17, 28 – Each leader in this group of leaders from Ephesus (a plurality) was referenced by all three names: elders, overseers, and shepherds (pastors). “From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church.” “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” Each leader of a church needs to function in all three ways. He should be spiritually more mature (elder), take responsibility (oversee), and do the work of shepherding the church (pastor, which comes from the Latin word for shepherd).
- 1 Peter 5:1-4 – In this passage, all three names are mentioned for the same church leaders: elders, shepherds, and overseers.

Plurality of pastors

In the New Testament, pastors always occur in plurality (more than one pastor in the church). 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 about commitment to teamwork). The fruit of such humility and love is what God desires, and it is how he works to build his church.

However, teamwork does not automatically happen within a plurality of pastors. If two or more pastors are united together in plurality because of a close friendship (similar to how 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. Mature character and experience are the primary qualifications for a church leader. (NOTE: For more about God's plan for leadership in the church, see "Book 3 – Basics of God's Plan for Relationships.")

The second kind of church leader: Servants

The second kind of leadership role in the New Testament is that of a servant. Many translations have used the word "deacon" in a few places, such as Philippians 1:1, and 1 Timothy 3:8,12, but in the original Greek manuscripts, there is not a different Greek word for servants and deacons. Jesus used this same word in places like Matthew 20:26 and 23:11 where he said the greatest will be the servant (deacon) of all. A "deacon" leadership role is simply a servant who has been designated to have responsibility for a specific task in the church.

Acts 6:3-4 – "...choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

- Pastors are responsible for the church, while servants are responsible for a task.
- Servants serve the church, and are under the direction of the elders, pastors.
- A servant, or team of servants can be placed 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 should do something that the Word has not told that person to do. For example, 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 a pastor should not command 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 practicing sin with an unrepentant spirit, but this 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. However, submission is to be the person's

own choice. Pastors are not authorized to demand people to submit to them. They should teach God's word about humility but should not insist on submission. Submission is to be voluntary. Verses about submission are always addressed to the follower, not to the leader. (The same is true for wives and husbands.)

Obedience to the Word of God is the ultimate evidence of humility and love of God. This attitude 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 (Basic #10 – 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 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 was preparing Peter for leadership and talked to him about what it means to love Jesus. After his resurrection, Jesus told Peter the importance of feeding the Lord's sheep. John 21:1-20
- God called Moses to leadership. Exodus 3:1 - 4:31

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 spouse?
- 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.

Learn from Jesus' example – How he practiced teamwork

When the Lord Jesus lived here in person, he put together a group of disciples who traveled together as a team. Even though his disciples had many problems (stealing, doubting, arguing about who is most important, betrayal, and denial of Jesus), he built a team for ministry. To do that, Jesus practiced teamwork with his Father in heaven.

We see this clearly described in John 5:19-30. Here are some of the highlights of that section:

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

Christ's teamwork is an example for us to follow in our marriages, workplaces, families, churches, and every place where we have relationships with people who will benefit from working together.

As we seek to practice teamwork with 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 possible for him to practice teamwork with them? The most important thing that made it possible was his teamwork with his Father.

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 his Father and 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 (who represents Jesus and your Father) is working in your life and in your teammates' lives to help you make progress as a team?

Jesus trained his followers in teamwork

Jesus taught his followers that teamwork is not only a team cooperating with a leader, but, even more importantly, leaders pursuing teamwork with their co-leaders. Jesus showed this aspect in his relationship with his Father. Jesus did not make decisions on his own, but only in agreement with the Father. If anyone would have been qualified to make decisions on his own, it would have been Jesus. But Jesus told his followers, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." (John 5:19) And later he said, "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) Likewise, the Father showed teamwork with his Son. "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man." (John 5:26-27)

The kind of close teamwork that Jesus had with his Father required close communication. Even though he knew his Father well (from all eternity!), Jesus spent much time in close communication with him. Jesus would frequently get personal time in prayer with the Father, as described in Luke 5:16 and other places.

Jesus exemplified and taught that close communication with his Father was important and also that close communication with the rest of his co-workers (teammates) is important. Much of Jesus' instruction on how to help, serve, and meet the needs of others required communication. Even though Jesus wasn't married, he exemplified and taught the importance of deep communication with the people we are most closely in relationship with.

Jesus not only taught and exemplified that a leader needs to work with a co-leader, but he also made it clear that each person on the team is equally important. (Matthew 10:40-42) Giving a cup of water to someone, or showing hospitality to someone is equally important as doing the work of a prophet. This is how Jesus designed his followers to work together. Each one has a different role, and each is equally important for accomplishing God's purposes.

Even Jesus, himself, who had all power in the universe, depended on teamwork to accomplish his purposes. As stated in Basic #8, examples of this included the following:

- Feeding large groups of people. (Mark 6:30-44)
- Proclaiming the message of the kingdom to more people. (Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-17)
- Provision for the ministry he was doing. (Luke 8:3)
- Praying with him when he was in need. (Matthew 26:36-46)

Jesus taught that teamwork is more important than a one-person show. Jesus could have been the sole, effective communicator to tell people throughout the world of his love and salvation, but instead he chose to use weak, limited, and fallible people to cooperate with his Spirit to accomplish his purposes. This was also demonstrated when Jesus limited his ministry to only three years before he left his work in the hands of his followers. Jesus taught and demonstrated that every person is important for helping each other, for loving each other, and for accomplishing God's purposes. This is teamwork.

Jesus also taught that love is more important than accomplishing a goal. In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus said that love for God and love for people are the two most important instructions for life. God's design was for love to be the foundation of teamwork and for teamwork to be the soil in which love grows. Jesus, as our Creator and leader, expressed how much his Father loved him. (John 5:20, 15:9, 17:23) Love was the foundation of his relationship with the Father, and he designed people to have the same kind of loving relationship with him and with each other.

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

Teamwork produces so many benefits, but it is impossible to practice teamwork 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: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

- 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.

Paul's example

In Romans 16, we see how well the apostle Paul practiced teamwork. He commends Phoebe for being a helper of many. He calls Aquila and Priscilla "my co-workers" in Christ Jesus. "Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ," and then Paul lists many more who served the Lord with him. He closes the letter saying, "Timothy, my co-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 the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.” Many think that “one mind” means that we have to agree on everything. That’s not true. But what is necessary is agreeing about the goal (being of one mind about the goal). Having a common goal is the beginning of teamwork. Then teamwork is accomplished as we discuss our different ideas of how to reach the goal and either defer to each other or work out compromises when we don’t arrive at mutual agreement.

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 a great example of teamwork. After reading this passage, write down the similarities between the functions of our body and the functions of a church.

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

- Encourage one another. Hebrews 3:13
- Serve one another. Galatians 5:13
- Carry one another’s burdens. Galatians 6:2
- Forgive one another. Ephesians 5:32
- Be concerned for one another. 1 Corinthians 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 Thessalonians 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. John 13:34-35 (and 20 other places in the New Testament)

Churches working together are a team

Churches need each other similar to the way that individuals need each other. The principle in 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 can be applied to many situations. One application can be the concept of churches working together. A church can greatly benefit from uniting together with other churches for the purposes of encouragement, counsel, help, and outreach. 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 (especially to know of his love and salvation) and to grow in maturity to be like Christ.

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?
- Psalm 133 is all about the value 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? (1 Peter 5:8-9)
- 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

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. To work closely with another person, it is essential to understand them. And the better you understand another person, the easier it will be to work with them. But it takes work to understand them.

James 1:19 – “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak...” Good communication requires careful listening and asking questions to more clearly understand. 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
- Nehemiah led the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem. Nehemiah 3 describes impressive team work to accomplish the task.

ACTION POINTS

- Commitment - Tell God you are committed to grow in unity with each of the close relationships he has given you.
- Evaluate who your “fellow workers” are in your church.
- Ask: Are there 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 this 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/him.

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.

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) The greatest need for every person is to be rescued from Satan and from the consequences of sin. It is a matter of life and death, including final judgment and spiritual death—the finality of separation from God. Because Jesus was fully aware of this need in every person's life, he was committed to providing a rescue and 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 that record the life of Jesus Christ are full of examples of how he related to people who are separated from God. John 3 records a conversation with Nicodemus, who was looking for answers, and John 4 records a long conversation with a woman at a well. Luke 19 tells of Jesus visiting Zacchaeus. Jesus answered people's questions, helped hurting people, met all kinds of needs, cried over the people in the city of Jerusalem, 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 it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." Paul said that everything he did was toward the goal of rescuing people from spiritual death and helping them have a relationship with Jesus Christ, and he said that he had 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

What are the names of people whom you would like to pray for and ask God to show you what you might be able to do to help them know him?

Jesus trained his followers to influence people

Jesus told people, “I am the light of the world.” (John 8:12) He also told his followers that they were lights in the world. (Matthew 5:14-16) He said the purpose of their light was for others to see their good actions and praise the Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16) This is important because a world without God is a world without deep love, joy, peace, and hope (the fruit of God’s Spirit, as in Galatians 5:22). When Jesus and his followers demonstrate love, joy, and the peace of God to this broken world (a world that has destroyed the good that God had created people for), they bring helpful influence into the darkness of the world.

Jesus knew that when he and his followers influenced the world with the light of God, the evil forces of darkness would oppose them. Jesus explained that this happens because all people are either God’s children or children of Satan. (John 8:42-46) From Adam and Eve in the original garden to the return of Jesus as King of Kings, there is a continual battle raging between Satan (and those belonging to him) and those belonging to God. Jesus also explained that the forces of Satan will never be able to stop the purposes of God. (Matthew 16:17-18) In fact, God, in his sovereignty, can use the work of Satan to accomplish God’s purposes. Jesus demonstrated this most clearly when Satan influenced Judas to betray Jesus and then led the religious leaders to promote the crucifixion of Jesus. (Luke 22:1-6) From the perspective of people at that time, Jesus was defeated when he was killed, but in actuality, his death was victory—a sacrifice that paid the death penalty that people deserve because of their sin. (Romans 6:23) What the world and Satan thought to be their greatest victory was actually the greatest victory for God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.

Another positive influence from Jesus was to give an answer to one of the greatest dilemmas in this world, which is the question, “How can a loving, powerful God allow so much evil and suffering?” Jesus answered this question by helping his followers understand that God is ultimately in control over the evil that happens in this world. Even though it sometimes appears that evil is the greatest power, Jesus made it clear that God always has a plan for how to use evil to accomplish his purposes. Jesus demonstrated this to his followers by predicting the awful things that would happen to him, long before any of it actually happened. After he fed the crowd of more than 5,000, Jesus told his followers that he would suffer in many ways, be rejected and killed by the religious leaders, and then come back to life after three days. (Luke 9:21-22) Later, after doing another miracle that amazed people, he again told his followers that he would be betrayed into the hands of people. (Luke 9:43-45) Then, another time, as they were heading toward Jerusalem for Passover, Jesus gave more details of how he would be mocked, scourged, crucified, and then rise again. (Luke 18:31-34) He even explained that the horrible things that would happen to him had been predicted by the prophets many years before that. (Luke 18:31) Finally, after Jesus’ resurrection, Jesus told two of his followers on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), and many others who were gathered together (Luke 24:36-49), that all the horrible events that had happened to him were all planned by God and had been communicated to Moses and the prophets many centuries before they actually happened. (Luke 24:36-49) In this way, the disciples were able to understand that God has a sovereign plan beyond the evil that happens in this world. His love, power, and knowledge supersede even the most horrible evil.

After his resurrection, Jesus explained to his followers that the message of complete forgiveness provided by his death and resurrection is the message of freedom and hope for all people. (Luke 24:45-49) It's the message that will be the greatest influence for good in the world until Jesus returns to establish his new kingdom. (Revelation 19-22)

During his three years of ministry, Jesus trained his followers to be effective communicators of his life-giving message of love and hope. Jesus showed that his love could be demonstrated and communicated in unlimited ways. Whether by saying a kind word, giving some food, giving a drink of water (Matthew 10:42), or healing from sickness, God will use anything done in his name to have a positive influence on others.

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

Salt and Light

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 through whom he would work 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 us to be thirsty for him. He wants to change our actions and attitudes so people can 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 are so much better than the devil's plan. God's 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 live their lives with him.

The first thing Jesus said to future followers

Matthew 4:19 – “‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’”
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?

- 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 some church leaders had a meal and a meeting in Steve and Sue's home. While we were eating the meal, Sue came and told her husband that their two-year-old son, Peter, was nowhere in the house and that the house door to the street was open. Steve excused himself, saying, "I've got to help Sue find Peter." A lost son had priority over all other plans. The meal and the meeting stopped. 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. We all rejoiced that the lost child had been found!

Like this story, the world is full of lost people that Jesus came to save. We see the urgency and join his priority of rescuing lost people.

Becoming all things to all men

1 Corinthians 9:19-22 – “Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people 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 out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the 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 rescuing 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.” People who live in different cultures will be attracted to different things about Jesus. Everyone needs Jesus, but the things we emphasize about Jesus when we first meet people will be different. In the Bible, Paul introduced Jesus in different ways, according to their way of thinking.

- Acts 13:16-41 – Paul introduced Jesus to some Jews by reminding them of history in the Bible that prepared the way for Jesus, as he summarized in Acts 13:32.
- Acts 17:22-31 – Paul introduced Jesus to people in Athens who knew nothing about the Bible. He began with the truth that our Creator is God who will judge all people by his chosen man who was raised from death.

Following are two examples of how this message can be communicated. It is wise to memorize one example and be prepared to share it in any situation at any time. Obviously, the situations will be different, but once you clearly know the main points, you can make adjustments according to the need at the time. This is an important tool for every follower of Jesus!

NOTE: If you are presenting the gospel to someone, you can also refer to “Book 1 – Basics About God” for a list of verses that relate to salvation.

Gospel Message – Example #1

This example is based on the statement that Paul wrote in Romans 6:23. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Memorize this verse 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, and there are many other 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.***

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, halfway down the paper. Write “God” on the right side, halfway down.
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, where do we find eternal life?” – The answer is, “In 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 was 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.

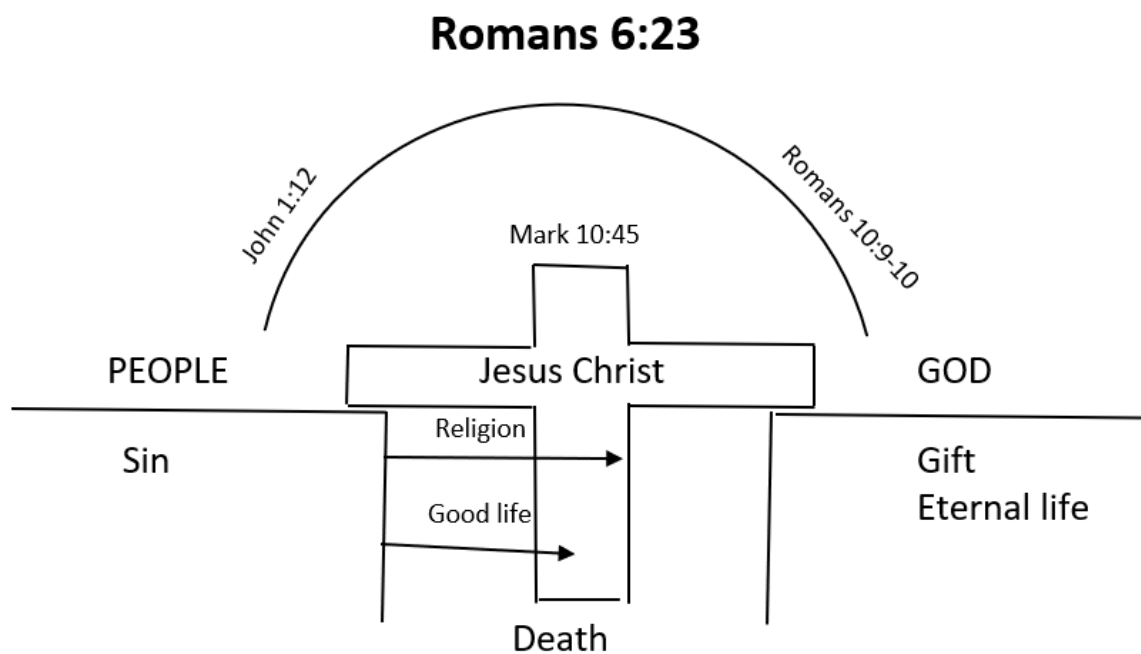
14. After they pray to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior, ask them, “According to the Bible, do you have eternal life now?” You can ask them to read 1 John 5:11-13. Ask them, “According to these verses, who has eternal life?” – The answer is the one who has Jesus has eternal life.

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: Even if you remember very little about the diagram, do not be afraid of telling someone about Romans 6:23. Just ask God to help you, and tell them 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 the following diagram, step by step, as you explain the Gospel outline.



Gospel Message – Example #2

The following example of the gospel message is especially helpful for people who have a desire for freedom. It could be freedom from spiritual oppression, social oppression, or political oppression.

This example is based on the explanation that the apostle John gave about Jesus. John began with the reminder that God is the Creator of the world, and then he explained what the Creator did when the world became full of darkness.

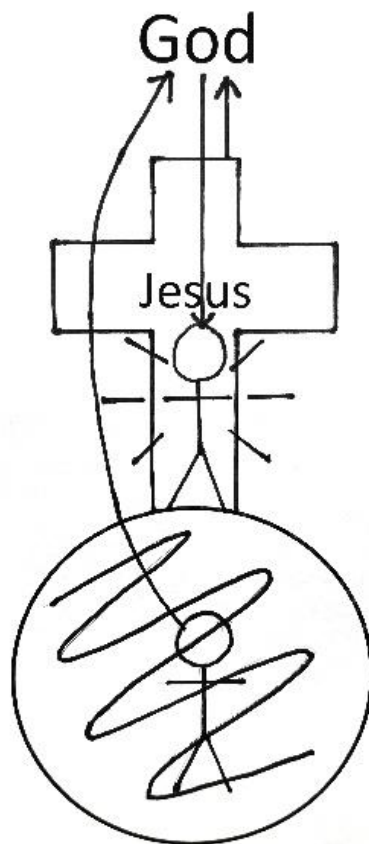
1. Remind the person that God is the Creator of the world and the universe. This is how the Bible begins in Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”
 - With paper, you can write “God” at the top and draw a circle at the bottom with a stick figure inside, representing the world and them. (See the finished diagram at the end of this example.)
2. Agree with the person that this world has become full of darkness in many different ways, which has resulted in suffering of many kinds.
 - Make marks inside the circle to darken it.
3. Read John 1:1-14. John explains that Jesus is the creator of the world, God the Son, the light of God who came into the world.
 - Draw a second stick figure (representing Jesus) on top of the dark circle. Write “Jesus” over the stick figure, and draw an arrow from God toward the stick figure.
 - Make small lines coming out of the stick figure, representing light.
4. John 3:16 summarizes this same truth by saying, “God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him will not die but have eternal life.”
5. The verses after John 3:16 help us understand the meaning of this more clearly. Read John 3:16-21.
 - Focus on 3:17, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” God’s deep desire is to rescue people from darkness and to save them from judgment for sin.
 - Then focus on 3:18, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” Explain that every person needs to decide if they want God’s light or if they would prefer to remain in darkness.
 - John 3:36 adds, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.”
6. The apostle John explained that the reason Jesus can rescue us from darkness is that he voluntarily gave up his life for people, allowing himself to be killed, and then he came back to life three days later, demonstrating he has the power over death and darkness.

- John 10:14-18 quotes Jesus, “I am the good shepherd ... and I lay down my life for the sheep. ... No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”
 - Draw a cross around the stick figure of Jesus, representing the death that Jesus died. Jesus demonstrated the truth of his statement when he predicted that after his death he would come back to life on the third day after dying, which he did, and then he showed himself for many to see. (Luke 18:31-34, John 14:29, 1 Corinthians 15:1-8)
 - John 11:25 quotes Jesus, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.”
 - Draw an arrow from the cross to God, demonstrating his resurrection.
7. Ask, “Do you believe that God sent Jesus to be the light in this dark world?” Let them answer.
8. Ask, “Would you like to have the light of God in you and become God’s child?”
9. John 1:12-13 explains how you can have Jesus as the light of God. “To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” Everyone who believes who Jesus is and receives him becomes a child of God.
- Draw an arrow from the dark circle through the cross and continue it up to “God”.
10. Romans 10:9-11 is another place that explains how you can take this step to be saved out of darkness, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”
11. Say, “If you would like to talk to God right now, you can. You can tell him that you believe that Jesus is God’s light to rescue you from darkness, and that you want him to live in you.”
- Ask if they would like to do that.
 - If their answer is yes, you can offer to say a prayer out loud and let them repeat it after you. Or do whatever seems appropriate for that person at that time.
12. You can tell them that John makes a clear explanation about what happens when we receive Jesus as our Savior from darkness.
- 1 John 5:11-13 – “This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”
 - John gives another strong promise of assurance in John 10:28-30, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”
13. If desired, you can show them more promises about the power of Jesus Christ over darkness:
- John 8:12 – “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

- Col 2:13-15 – “When you were dead in your sins, ... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

14. You can now give them advice on how to grow in their new life with God. At the beginning of this manual are “First Steps for a New Believer.”

Here is an example of the simple diagram you can draw while explaining the gospel message according to John:



God – the One who brings people to Himself

God's Spirit is definitely the most powerful influencer 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

1 John 5:14-15 is an amazing promise. It says that God will take action whenever we ask anything according to his will! In regard to people's salvation, we know that God's will (desire) is that every person would become his child (but he can't force them to make that decision). 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9 make this clear. (NOTE: The Greek word used in 1 Timothy 2:4 for "God wants [desires]" is exactly the same Greek word used in Matthew 26:39, Acts 18:21, and James 4:15.)

With God's promise in mind, you know that God will take action in every person as you ask him to do the following things: (Suggestion: Ask God to do this for one person and then include the names of others who fit the same request.)

1. **Convict** people of their need for God and help them understand more about what Jesus has done for them. John 16:8-11
2. **Help** people see who God is more clearly. John 16:13-15
3. **Help** us find people whose hearts are prepared by God. Acts 17:26-27

God can do many things to convict people of their need for him and to help them know him better. We are very limited in what we can do. But God has promised to take action every time we ask something according to his will! This is a strong motivation to ask God frequently to work in the lives of non-Christians we know and also those we briefly see as we go through each day. This promise is also a strong motivation to ask God frequently to help Christians know him better. In reality, this 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!

NOTE: Regarding the question of how often to ask God to do something according to his will, Jesus gave the model prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread..." (Matthew 6:9-13), which teaches us to go to him at least daily for the things we need and want. This can include the salvation of other people.

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 confronted with their sin, or exposed their sin, were 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 it was not his normal practice to 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 whom 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 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 ways other than confrontation, and it's good for us to learn from his example.

How to influence when leaders oppose you

Daniel in the Bible is a good example of how to be an influence when leaders oppose you. He was a captive from Israel, living under the Babylonian authorities who had no respect for God. In Daniel 1:1-21, we read the requirement of the authority, and we also read about the proposal Daniel made to the authority. Daniel did not limit himself to a "yes" or "no" answer to the requirement given by the leaders. Instead, Daniel made an alternative proposal. When Daniel made this alternative proposal, he accomplished the following things:

- Daniel showed respect to the leaders
- Daniel gave the leaders a choice and did not demand that they change or do something different.
- Daniel continued to trust God for the result, no matter which way the authority decided to choose.

Real life stories to illustrate this truth

- God used a kidnapped girl to reach Naaman. 2 Kings 5:1-19
- Jesus talked with a woman at a well, and then she went and told people in her town about Jesus. John 4:1-42

ACTION POINTS

- Commitment – Tell God you are committed to following 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.

Learn from Jesus' example – How he fulfilled his commission

Jesus wanted every person in the world to know of God's love, but he did not talk to every person. Why not? Because he had a special plan for how to be the most effective. Jesus knew that his Father loved every person in the world and that his desire is that no one will die apart from him. (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9) Jesus also understood that God's Spirit is always working 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), 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. 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." (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 and many things from God's Word. He also taught them how to live with God continually every day and how to reach out to lost people. For three years he spent much time with them, giving a lot of personal attention, 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 teach others the same things, we know that 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 gives us hope and courage

Jesus knew that the work of communicating his love and truth to people would have many challenges. 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 spiritual battle, so he knew his followers would need to remember why they are in a war and how they could get help in the war. That was why Jesus said at the beginning of his commission, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Matthew 28:18) And at the end Jesus also said, "...surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

- 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. He also knew how his Father wanted to use him as a weak human to carry out God's purpose in the world.

Jesus' understanding about his relationship with his Father was the foundation for him to give the commission. Really, this is also the foundation for us to obey his commission.

- The more we understand the One who gave the commission and the more we understand our Father, who gave Jesus the commission, the more motivated we will be to carry out the commission.
- At the end of Jesus' commission, he said, "...surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Similarly, Jesus had always known that his Father was continually with him and that he was carrying out his Father's desire. This motivated Jesus and gave him courage. (John 17:22-26) Jesus knew that all of us would need that same motivation.

Jesus' commission relates to his promise, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it." (Matthew 16:18) 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?

Jesus trained his followers to fulfill the Great Commission

Jesus came to this broken world to seek and save the lost, bringing the possibility of life with God now and forever to all those who want it. It's the message of hope that every person needs to hear. Jesus knew that he was "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), and from the beginning of his ministry to the end, he prepared his followers to communicate this message to the rest of the world. (Mark 3:13-15)

We know Jesus' example of helping people was the most important way he trained his followers. From the beginning, when Jesus first chose the twelve, he wanted them to be with him for a period of time before he would send them out. (Mark 3:14) Then, just before Jesus returned to heaven, he told his followers to do everything he had taught them. (Matthew 28:20) Later, Paul wrote that he lived his life by following the example of Jesus. (1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1)

Jesus knew that the future assignment he would give his disciples, to make disciples in all nations (people groups), would be difficult and sometimes humanly impossible. To prepare his disciples for such a difficult assignment, he gave them challenging assignments. At two different times Jesus sent his followers to preach and to heal. He sent out the twelve to do this (Luke 9:1-6), and another time he sent out 72 with a similar assignment. (Luke 10:1-17) Jesus also put his followers into difficult situations that only he could solve. When a crowd of thousands of people had been with him for a while, Jesus told his followers to feed them. (Matthew 14:15-17) When Jesus was in a boat with his disciples in an awful storm, Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith. (Luke 8:22-25)

One of the most common things Jesus emphasized with his followers was their need to believe and have faith. Their trust in him, which meant their belief and faith in him, would need to be the foundation for their future lives and effectiveness in communicating his message of love and truth. How Jesus taught this to his followers is explained more in Basic #13, "God Trains Us to Believe and Have Faith in God."

After his resurrection, Jesus gave strong emphasis to the importance of communicating his message of love and truth to all people. Whenever he was with a group of his followers, Jesus frequently gave instructions to reach all people in the world with the gospel, which is the good news of who he is, what he has done, and what he will do. Christians often call this instruction the "Great Commission." Following are examples of when Jesus gave this instruction:

- Mark 16:14-15 – The first day of Jesus' resurrection. "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'."
- John 20:19-21 – "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again, Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.'"
- Luke 24:46-48 – Luke also wrote about Jesus appearing on the evening of the first day of his resurrection. Luke wrote, "He (Jesus) 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.”

- Matthew 28:16-20 – This was a meeting appointed by Jesus. “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.’” This meeting in Galilee was probably the large crowd described in 1 Corinthians 15:6.
- Acts 1:8 – Forty days after his resurrection, on the day Jesus 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.”

The challenge of fulfilling Jesus’ instruction

The instruction that Jesus gave to go and make disciples throughout the world might have seemed impossible to carry out, especially for those first disciples. How could those eleven go into other countries all over the world and preach the gospel to every human being? How could they speak the languages? How could they get the money to go? They owned no ships, had no money, and knew no important people. How could his instruction be carried out? But Jesus had given them one promise. **“Surely I am with you!”**

This promise might have 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.”** (Exodus 3:12) 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. Jesus said the same thing to the eleven, and also to us.

Many have also asked the question, “Did Jesus mean this for all Christians at all times, or only for those eleven disciples at that time? The answer can be found in what he said in Matthew 28:20, “Teach them [those who will become disciples of Jesus] to obey ALL that I have commanded.” That would also include what he had just commanded, along with the promise he had just given. **This means that each one of us is commanded to obey his instruction and be part of bringing the gospel to every person on the earth, in every nation – and Jesus will be with us until the work is finished!**

Should all Christians do the same thing that Jesus and first disciples did to communicate the gospel message to all people? The answer becomes clear when we read what his followers wrote and what Paul wrote. Paul’s description of how the body of Christ works together in 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 makes it clear that God’s plan is for his people to have many different roles to fulfill his desires. Even Paul sometimes took on another job besides preaching. (Acts 18:1-5)

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 people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”
- 2 Peter 3:9 – “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead 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 10:14 – “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And 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 anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

- For those of us who know Jesus Christ as our Savior, God has left each of us on earth to do his will and to 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. But he left us here because he has a purpose. He wants us to tell as many as possible how to have eternal life and live our lives with 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? In this basic, Book 2, we have already seen how our Creator modeled the answer to this question when he lived here physically with us and trained a few disciples. Paul also 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. This kind of personal discipleship can be done in many ways. Fathers and mothers have good opportunities with children God has given them. Whenever we are able to build a friendship with someone, it will likely be an opportunity to help them take steps in their life with Jesus in whatever stage of growth they might be at.

The greatest help for this world of suffering

Practicing these basic principles will result in great change for 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 went 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. In Appendix 1 you can read some guidelines for beginning to help at least one other person grow in their life with Jesus. The title is, "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).

As members of Christ's body, our roles of communicating God's love and truth will vary a lot. There is a lot of difference between my fingernail and my tongue, but both are important. In a similar way, our roles of carrying out God's purposes in the world will vary a lot. We easily get in trouble when we compare ourselves with each other, but most importantly, each of us needs to ask God to help us understand and learn what role he has for us. For example, if I stay at home to help one child but I compare myself to a travelling missionary who is helping hundreds of people, I might feel that my ministry is inferior. But that's not how God thinks! The principle of what Jesus said about the widow's small coins (Luke 21:1-4) applies to many aspects of our lives, including the number of people we help.

With this in mind, God might want a parent to learn how to help my one child effectively and learn how to help that child to know God more completely. But again, we don't want to compare our abilities with other parents. A parent who only has one child might have a greater influence than the parent who teaches five children at home and trains them to accomplish many things!

FOR DISCUSSION

- 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 for you to receive training from others (if at all possible).

God's plan brings joy

As we share in the work of Jesus to help people know him, we will often experience his joy. 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 – “Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends.”
- 1 Thessalonians 2:20 – (Written to the Christians at Thessalonica) “Indeed, 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. Let disciples see and know your joy!

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)?

ACTION POINTS:

- Commitment – Tell God that, because he loves all people, you are committed to work together with him and with others toward helping 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 his promises and his truth
in every aspect of your life.**

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, "Very truly I tell you, 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) We see that Jesus had complete trust in his Father. Jesus knew that his Father has all power, has all knowledge of everything, and is perfect in all he does. And, most of all, 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. In Hebrews 12:2 we are told that Jesus is the author and perfecter of faith. 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 that 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. 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, united with God?

Jesus trained his followers to have faith in God

Jesus frequently talked about belief and faith. Sometimes he made statements to his disciples about how small their faith was, or how slow they were to believe. In John 3:16-18 Jesus said that belief is the determining factor between life and death for each person! Faith was obviously an important subject for Jesus.

Jesus used circumstances to help his disciples grow in faith. During his three years with them, he allowed them to be in many kinds of situations so they could learn to trust him at all times and in every kind of circumstance. Following are some examples:

- **Life threatening circumstance.** The disciples thought they were going to drown in a storm while Jesus slept. They woke him, and he immediately stopped the storm and brought calm. They were amazed that Jesus could even control the weather! (Matthew 8:23-27, Luke 8:22-25)
- **Demonic influence.** The disciples of Jesus were not able to help a person with an evil spirit, but Jesus did. (Mark 9:14-32)
- **Impossible situation.** It seemed impossible to feed a crowd of more than 5,000 people who had come to see and hear about Jesus. (Luke 9:10-17) The only food that the disciples could find in the crowd was five loaves of bread and two fish, but Jesus showed that he could multiply that small offering to feed the whole crowd.
- **Sickness.** Jesus healed all kinds of people with various kinds of sickness such as ten people with leprosy (Luke 7:11-19), a paralytic (Luke 5:18-25), a person deaf and mute (Mark 7:31-37), blind people (Matthew 9:27-31), and every kind of sick person brought to Jesus. (Matthew 4:23)
- **Death and confusing circumstances.** The disciples of Jesus could not understand why Jesus had not helped a sick friend who had died. But then Jesus came and raised him to life. (John 11:1-44)

In each situation, Jesus demonstrated that he had all power to do everything, and with his love he had all wisdom to know what would be helpful in each situation. He demonstrated that they could trust him in all situations and for all reasons.

One example of these teaching situations is the sequence of events that included the feeding of 5,000, Peter walking on the water, the feeding of 4,000, and then a discussion Jesus had with his followers. In this discussion, the disciples misunderstood something Jesus had said, so Jesus asked them, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread?” (Matthew 16:8-11) These miracles showed the disciples, and all people, that they can have faith in Jesus to provide for needs in every kind of situation.

Following are some other situations where Jesus commented about his disciples having little faith. What was happening in each situation?

- Matthew 6:30
- Matthew 8:26
- Matthew 14:31

In contrast to having little faith, Jesus sometimes commended people for having great faith. Two of these people were not even Jewish people, but Jesus described them as people with great faith. Somehow, they had come to understand who Jesus is, which led to strong confidence in him. What was it that each of these people trusted Jesus to do?

- The Roman centurion in Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10

- The Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21-28

What did Jesus say about faith for these people?

- The blind beggar in Mark 10:46-52
- The woman with a blood disease in Luke 8:43-48
- Jairus and his daughter in Luke 8:40-56

The result of Jesus training his disciples for three years was that their faith in Jesus grew. Their faith grew when they saw and understood more clearly who Jesus is. They became more convinced that he really does have all power, he really does know everything, he really is full of love, and he really does want to help all kinds of people. The more they knew who Jesus really is, the more they wanted to trust him in every way, and this is what faith in Jesus is all about!

Hebrews 11:1-40

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is often called the “Hall of Faith.” Two verses in this chapter, Hebrews 11:1 and 11:6, combine together to give a definition of faith: “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” “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.”

This chapter in Hebrews also includes a variety of examples of people who were known for their faith in some way.

- Some made decisions based on their faith.
- Some took action because of their faith.
- Some experienced miracles because of their faith.
- Some experienced victory because of their faith.
- Some suffered because of their faith.
- Some faced opposition because of their faith.
- Some lost their lives because of their faith.

FOR DISCUSSION – 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.”

- What things do we see about faith in Hebrews 11?
- Ask yourself, “Am I believing? If so, I will earnestly seek him. I must believe that he is really there, but I must also 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. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.” This is an amazing promise. The Creator of the universe is committed to take action whenever we ask for something according to his will! Even if we misunderstand his will, he is our loving Father who will teach us his will.

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 in Jesus, and then he wants you to live by faith in Jesus 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. "For 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. (Ephesians 1:13-14, Romans 10:9-11, 1 John 5:13)

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 – "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives 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 1:17 – "... as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

- It is impossible to please God when we are not willing to believe and trust God. (See Hebrews 11:6-29) People throughout history have made decisions according to the truth of who God is and what he has promised to do. Moses faced many very difficult situations, even impossibilities. Each time Moses made decisions, he acted according to what God had shown and told him. As a result, God consistently led Moses to victory. 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.
- Living by faith 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)
- Ephesians 6:16 – "In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."

Last week, last month, last year, when you faced needs and difficulties, did you pray? Did you cast yourself upon God? Did you trust God? God still acts upon our faith. Do you make decisions to trust God in your daily experience? Paul was talking about "any" and "every" circumstance. Are you willing to really believe and trust God in any and every circumstance? Then you can also say, "I have learned the secret."

We don't see God at work when we are not believing and trusting him

Matthew 17:19-20 – A father had brought his son to the disciples because he was possessed with a demon. The disciples prayed for him, but nothing happened. "Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not drive it out?' And He said to them, 'Because of the

littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.”

When the disciples asked Jesus why they could not cast out the demon, Jesus said that it was because of their little faith. **God has chosen to respond to our faith.** At the same time, remember that sometimes God has other purposes beyond what we understand within our faith. God can, and often does, act upon our request, yet God won’t always do exactly what we thought he should do. (See “Misconceptions” below.)

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 falsely think that living by faith is only when you make risky decisions without knowing what will happen in the future and without having a plan. (For example, a person setting out on a mission without any source of income is said to be “stepping out in faith,” and a Christian who has a job with a reliable income is said not to be living by faith.)
- Some falsely 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 ideas of faith

Following is a summary of two different ideas (ways of thinking) that Christians have about faith in God.

- The first way of thinking says “Faith *always* results in a miracle.” This way of thinking can lead to discouragement or feelings of guilt if a miracle doesn’t happen.
- The other way of thinking says “Faith will trust God’s will to be done.” This way results in inner peace, even during pain and suffering.

Evaluation of the first idea: Faith should EXPECT A MIRACLE

This is the thinking that our prayers of strong faith (belief) will bring about God’s powerful actions. It implies that God won’t do much if our faith is weak. People with this way of thinking often say that miraculous events *always* accompany true faith, such as the following:

- Current, new prophetic declarations will come true.
- Miracles will happen (supernatural events).
- Miraculous healing will happen.

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

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

In addition, there are other factors in the Bible which are often ignored by people with the above way of thinking.

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

Evaluation of the second idea: Faith can 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 will ultimately deliver us—either now, or in the months and years ahead, or in heaven.
- God is able to do miracles. He often intervenes in providential ways to help us (supernatural events).
- God also often allows suffering and death for purposes we might not understand.

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, yet will I hope in him." (Job 13:15) Faith can be shown by believing God's promises even while suffering.

Base your faith on God's Word

Just because someone does miracles and demonstrates 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 about faith being based on God's word and leading to maturity:

- Romans 10:17 – "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about 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 servant 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 a godly life 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, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."
- Hebrews 4:12 – "For the word of God is alive 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 – "But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do."

It is 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 14:12-14 – (Jesus speaking) "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they 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 Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."
- 2 Corinthians 12:9 – "But 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 deal with 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. He says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on 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 only 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 by reminding us of truth. (John 14:15-21, 25-27, 16:5-16)

When Jesus was here, his followers asked him questions about what they should do, such as in Luke 9:54. He answered them, and then they knew 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 who can explain God's written Word (1 Corinthians 12:12-30). 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 also 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 who can give counsel to 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 you 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 decision 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) Take extra time to apply these principles before making a decision. This is a very important practice.

If you are a committed follower of Jesus Christ, and you apply these three principles in 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 – “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about 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 of seeing God work when you were trusting him?
- What would be good for you to think about when you are trusting God to work but you don’t see him do what you are hoping or expecting?

ACTION POINTS:

- 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.

Learn from Jesus' example – How he loved

Jesus loved all kinds of people. When a rich young man came to him with questions, 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.

John 13:1-4 – "It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist."

It was possible for Jesus to love in this way because he "knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning 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?

Jesus trained his followers to love

Jesus taught that God made people for love. This means a loving relationship with God and also loving relationships with people. His statements in Matthew 22:37-40 make this clear when he said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,"

and “Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets [all God’s instruction] hang on these two commandments.”

Jesus also explained to his followers that the reason he came to live in this world is because of God’s love for people, as he said in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...”

Jesus demonstrated God’s love and taught God’s love in radical ways

- Jesus taught to love our enemies. (Matthew 5:43-48)
- Jesus washed the feet of Judas after Judas had betrayed him (John 13:2-5), and then Jesus told his followers to do the same! (John 13:34-35)
- Jesus loved the rejects of society. (Luke 15:1-2, Luke 19:1-10, John 4:7-42)
- Jesus emphasized that helping people is more important than traditions, such as when he healed on the Sabbath. (Matthew 12:9-14, Mark 3:1-6, Luke 6:6-7, Luke 13:10-17, Luke 14:1-6)

Jesus gave some very personal lessons about love to Peter. These lessons came to a climax in the context of one of the most stressful situations Peter had ever experienced. Peter’s close friend, John, describes these lessons in his writing of the Gospel of John. Following is a summary in sequential order of how these lessons took place:

1. A few minutes after washing the feet of his disciples Jesus said to all his disciples, including Peter, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35)
2. Peter then made a strong commitment of love to Jesus by saying, “I will lay down my life for you.” (John 13:37) Later in the evening Jesus stated, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) Peter was trying to express strong love to Jesus, but he soon learned that he needed God’s help to do so.
3. That same night Peter found himself in a pressure situation, and three times he denied that he knew Jesus. (John 18:13-18) He was learning how much he needed the help of the Holy Spirit to love someone.
4. A few hours after Peter had denied Jesus, Jesus literally laid down his life for Peter, even though Peter didn’t understand what was happening at the time.
5. Days after the resurrection of Jesus, when Peter was still learning the meaning of all that had happened, Peter went fishing on the Sea of Galilee with some of the other disciples. They caught nothing that night, but then Jesus appeared on the shore and filled Peter’s net with fish. Afterward, Jesus invited Peter and the others to join him for breakfast around the same kind of fire that Peter had stood around when he had denied Jesus. (The Greek word, *anthrakia*, used to describe this kind of fire of burning coals, is only used in these two places in the whole Bible – John 18:18 and John 21:9.) Beside that fire, Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him, probably correlating with the three times Peter had denied Jesus just days before. Each time Peter said he did love Jesus, and each time Jesus instructed him to feed his sheep. (John 21:9-17) Then Jesus told Peter the same thing he had told him approximately three years before that, “Follow me.” (John 21:19 compared with Matthew 4:19.) By this statement, Jesus made it clear to Peter

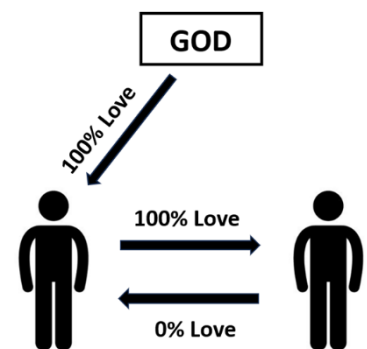
that he still wanted him to be his close follower, just as much as when he had first met Peter. His love for Peter had not changed.

6. As John wrote about Jesus' love for Peter and the other disciples, John gave a profound insight about how it was possible for Jesus to love so deeply. John described how Jesus clearly understood that his Father loved him deeply. The Father's love for him was the foundation of Jesus' ability to love others, including Judas, who betrayed him, and Peter who denied him.
 - "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does." (John 5:19-20)
 - "As [in the same way] the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." (John 15:9)
 - "May they [future disciples] be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." (John 17:23-26)
7. For many years afterward, Peter passed these lessons of love on to others. When he wrote his epistle of Peter, he exhorted the readers to "love each other deeply, from the heart." (1 Peter 1:22) And, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins." (1 Peter 4:8)

The difficulty of loving someone who doesn't love you

God has made us as people to be loved and to love others. When someone doesn't love us, it can feel impossible to love them. Is it even possible? Jesus was a good example of how it can be possible. This diagram illustrates the principle.

In all of history, no one has taught and practiced love as deeply and completely as Jesus Christ. Because Jesus knew that his Father loved him 100%, Jesus had the ability to love others in the same way, 100%, even when they didn't respond with any love for him. The same can be true for us. The more we understand God's love for us, and the more we are secure in that love, the more we will have the energy and the ability to love others, even those whom we feel are impossible to love.



FOR DISCUSSION – According to 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, how important is love?

Love one another, as I have loved you

John 13:34-35 – "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love 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 is to love as he loved us, a love that included loving enemies (such as his love for Judas).

- Jesus could have emphasized that his disciples should love the lost, or to love their enemies, but notice that he emphasized that they should **love each other**. Those who are closest to us are often the ones who hurt us most deeply. At those times, our close friends can feel like our enemies.
- John later said, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." (1 John 3:16)

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 will be 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)

Love from God is practical

1 John 3:17-18 – "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in 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.

Love from God is sacrificial

- John 15:13 – "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."
- Romans 5:5-10 – "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit... when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly... while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (vs 8)... while 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 that we give and expect nothing in return. (Philippians 2:3-11) Because God made us to both 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. Following are examples of sacrificial love (being a giver, rather than a taker):

- Letting someone else have the best choice of food, rather than taking it for myself.
- Doing what the other person wants to do for an evening, instead of what I would prefer to do.

- Keeping quiet about all the work I did on a project and letting my co-worker get most of the recognition for working on a project.
- Doing what gives pleasure to the other person, rather than doing what gives me pleasure.

At the same time, remember that to love others well, you need to be healthy. Sacrificial love does *not* mean that you must neglect your own physical and emotional health. (See the “Care for yourself” section in “Basic #5 – God Trains Us to Be Humble Servants.”)

FOR DISCUSSION – Can you remember a time when someone showed love to you in a sacrificial way?

God’s love was great to us, so ours should be great 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 – “Dear friends, since 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

- Colossians 3:12-14, 1Peter 2:23-24 – 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.
- Ephesians 4:31-32 – “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave 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 that 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 and 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.

Love is understanding differences in others

“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For 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, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. Love

must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.” Romans 12:3-10

In the above Bible passage, Paul listed seven different gifts; prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy. These summarize the different ways that people show love to others. For example, consider a scenario where many members of a church in a small town worked for the same company. The company had problems and was suddenly closed, which meant that many church members suddenly had no job. One lady (Person A) immediately began collecting money from others to help those who had no job and needed financial help. She had the gift of giving. Another person (Person B) began thinking about passages from the Bible that would be helpful for people to think about in their difficulty, and he looked for opportunities to teach these Bible passages to them. He had the gift of prophesying and teaching. Two people (Persons C and D) spent time visiting those who had lost their jobs, listening and talking with them to share in their pain. These people had the gift of mercy. Another person (Person E) began making plans to start a new business where some of these people could work and have a new source of income. This person had the gift of leading.

Each of these people was important. No one was more important than the others. But imagine if the people who had the gift of mercy (Persons C and D) began criticizing Person B, who was spending his time studying the Bible to find passages to teach the others. Persons C and D could easily think that Person B did not really love people because he was not helping those who needed help but was only studying the Bible. Person A could easily think that Person E did not really love people because he was focused on starting a new business to make more money. And there are many more ways that some of these people could criticize one another because the others weren't showing love in the way they thought was most important.

This happens when people think about and process circumstances through the lens of their own gift. When people have the gift of mercy and they see someone with a problem, they think that showing mercy to that person in some way is the most important way to show love. But the person who has the gift of teaching sees the same person and thinks that the most important way to show love is to help that person understand what the Bible says about their problem. So that person can easily criticize the ones with the gift of mercy, and say that they do not really have God's love because they are not teaching people what the Bible says when they have difficulties. And there are many more ways that people criticize and judge each other for not showing love to someone else.

We show God's love by NOT taking his place as the Judge

Romans 14:1-15:7 say a lot about the problem of judging (criticizing) others who have a different way of thinking. We tend to think we are the judges of who is right and who is wrong. Paul addresses this problem in Romans 14:

- Romans 14:1 – “Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.”
- Romans 14:4 – “Who are you to **judge** someone else's servant?”
- Romans 14:10 – “You, then, why do you **judge** your brother or sister?”
- 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. (Romans 14:4-8). Paul gave this instruction in the context of giving other instructions about loving each other (Romans 13:8-13) and spiritual gifts (Romans 12:3-8). So, the loving thing for each of us to do is to help other people seek the Lord—pray, study God’s Word, and seek God about what he wants them to do in each issue of life. When we only say 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!

Paul was convinced this was very difficult instruction to follow. In the book of Romans, he used 29 verses to explain this instruction. (Especially in Romans 14:1 to 15:7) His explanation about this point is far lengthier than any of the other instructions he gives about love in Romans. Evidently Paul was convinced that this instruction was more difficult or more easily misunderstood than other aspects of loving people.

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! Everyone is still learning.

Summary statement

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 once.

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, love each other deeply, because love covers over 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, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and 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.

ACTION POINTS

- 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 that you love 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.

Learn from Jesus' example – How Jesus lived in victory

Jesus experienced intense attacks from his greatest enemy, Satan, 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 that 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!

WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP, YOU CAN LIVE IN VICTORY THE SAME WAY JESUS DID!

Jesus trained his followers to live in victory

One strong example of Jesus training his followers to live in victory is described in John 11. Here we read that Jesus allowed his followers to come face to face with the death of a friend. Death has always been the most dreaded enemy and the ultimate defeat. Death defines the end of every aspect of life. So, when Jesus allowed his followers to face the death of Lazarus, Jesus did not show them how they could overcome death, but rather he pointed them to himself, saying, "I AM the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;

and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” (John 11:25-26) Jesus, the Creator of the world and of all life on earth, told his followers, “I am the life!” He, himself, is the victor over death. He’s the source of life, the sustainer of life, and the controller of life. He helped his followers understand that to be united with him meant that they would never be defeated by death.

At first, the followers of Jesus were uncertain of what this meant, and their confusion even increased when they watched Jesus be crucified and buried. But after Jesus’ resurrection, they began to understand the meaning of the statement that Jesus had made when he had said that he is the life and that all who believe in him will never die. They realized that death could never defeat him!

Jesus taught his followers that ultimate victory was not according to their understanding of victory, but according to God’s. A dramatic example of this was when Peter thought that Jesus, as a victorious leader, would not be murdered by his enemies. Death of the Messiah seemed to equal defeat according to Peter’s understanding. But Jesus quickly explained that was a wrong way to think because God had a much larger plan for a much greater victory. (Matthew 16:21-23)

Jesus explained that everyone who believes in him and lives according to his statements of truth is a child of God and will experience the realities of who Jesus is. (John 8:31-51, 11:25-26) His followers not only imitated him, but they also learned that they can be united as one with him in the spiritual realm. This means living in his victory at all times and in every aspect of life. Many things that are true of Jesus are also true of his followers. Following are some examples of this.

- Light. (John 8:12, Matthew 5:14-16)
- Spiritual authority. (Luke 10:17-20)
- The source and sustenance of life. (John 6:47-59, and 7:37-39)

The followers of Jesus also learned that Jesus not only has victory over death but also victory in every other aspect of life.

- The spiritual realm. Because Jesus is the supreme power in the spiritual realm, he is always victorious in the spiritual realm. (Luke 8:26-39, Mark 3:22-30, Luke 11:14-23, John 12:31)
- The material realm. Because Jesus is the creator of the physical world and universe, he is over all events and functions in the material realm, including the weather and function of human bodies. (Luke 8:22-25, 9:12-17, Matthew 4:23)
- All Jesus does. Because of who Jesus is, he will always have victory in everything he does, both in the spiritual realm and material realm. (Matthew 16:18, Luke 10:17-19)
- People’s minds and emotions. Because Jesus is the creator of people’s minds, emotions, and all aspects of their being, he wants to bring his victory into every aspect of our being and existence. (Matthew 22:18, Mark 2:8, Luke 5:20-26, John 6:60-66)

Jesus taught his first followers how to live victoriously by believing him in all situations. Near the end of his life, Jesus also prayed that all future followers could live victoriously in the same way. (John 17:20-26)

We all have struggles in life. We all face circumstances beyond our control. We struggle with sin. We have challenges in relationships, grapple with confusion, and can feel defeated. But Jesus helped his followers learn to anchor into his victory and not be overcome by life's problems. He demonstrated this reality, first of all in his own life, and then he taught his followers how to participate in his life of victory in every way.

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?

Recognize Satan's primary strategy is deceit

When we face struggles and battles in life, our minds strive to understand what is happening. As we try to make sense of a challenge, we develop beliefs about that situation. Unfortunately, some of those beliefs are not based on God's perspective about the circumstances. Satan can influence us by tempting us to believe lies. This is deceit. Deceit makes one thing look like something else, when it's not actually the real thing.

- Genesis 3:13 – Satan deceived Eve.
- Matthew 4:1-11 – Satan suggested ideas to Jesus that were contrary to God's truth, similar to what he does with us.
- John 8:44 – Jesus called Satan the father of lies (deceit).
- 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 – Satan sets up arguments and pretensions against the truth.
- Revelation 12:9, 13:14, 20:10 – Satan is the deceiver of the world.

God has created his people to enjoy his creation (food, sex, and many other things), and most of all, to enjoy himself. But throughout history Satan has been presenting alternative suggestions with small, deceitful twists that take us away from the good design that God planned for all these things. For example, God's design is for a man and woman to enjoy the life-long commitment of marriage in order to enjoy sex without destructive consequences, but Satan tempts people to have short-term sexual encounters. Initially, Satan's deceit is very attractive and enjoyable, but the eventual result is pain, heartbreak, and destruction. A second example is when we face any disaster, such as a house fire. Satan wants to tempt us to doubt God's goodness, but God intends the crisis for our soul's good, not for harm, to teach us and to build our faith more deeply. Every circumstance is an opportunity for progress and growth, to bring us blessing. (Refer to the one-page diagram of God and Satan in Appendix 2 of this manual.)

Recognize the work of your enemy

Recognize that Satan and his demonic beings can try to affect your thinking. There is no evidence that Satan *knows* your thoughts, as God does, but Scripture shows that somehow, he can attempt to influence your beliefs.

- Ephesians 6:10-18 – Christian believers can be affected by the devil's schemes.
- Mark 8:31-33 – Jesus said that Peter was 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 impact Peter's mind, without Peter knowing who was doing it!

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 deceived thinking

You don't need to decide whether misguided thoughts have come from your own selfish nature or from Satan. Either way, they need to be dealt with in the same way—by discovering truth.

- 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 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. Bring the thought to Jesus and ask him to give his perspective on the thought, which will likely be a truth from Scripture that relates to the thought you have. This can be done by talking directly to Jesus Christ about the thought (out loud or in your mind).
- Ephesians 6:10-18 – All of the spiritual armor is made 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 salvation (rescue from our enemy, the power of sin, the penalty of sin, and ultimately the presence of sin) for 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.

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 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.
- Focusing on the shed blood of Jesus helps us remember the reason for his shed blood, which was our deceived and sinful hearts. Whether those deceptions had led to pride, lust, or hatred, this was the root problem for which Jesus died.
- Focusing on the shed blood of Jesus reminds us that our sins have been totally forgiven at the cross, and now God sees us, not as sinners, but as pure and righteous in Christ! (2 Corinthians 5:21)

The solution to all struggles with sin is focusing on Jesus Christ! Like the clothing in Romans 13:12-14, whenever we're aware of a selfish thought, we can "put on" 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!

When we make a choice to focus on Jesus—his attributes, and what he has done for us, and what he has promised—that choice is called faith. Faith is believing the truths about God as revealed to us through his Word. Faith is based on historical evidence about God: his creation and his work in the world. To have faith, you make a choice about what to believe and what to think about. Focusing on the sufficiency of Jesus Christ is faith. Thanking him is a great way to express your faith.

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 Matthew 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 of 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.

Warfare when your enemy already has a foothold

The sad reality is that all of us have already experienced the enemy’s deceptions and let him inside the door of our lives. For some of us, these deceptions and sins have been going on for long periods of time. Long-lasting change 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. Actions
3. Habits
4. Relationships to promote actions
5. Lifestyle

In many ways, the battle in our mind is the most intense because that's where deception begins. Once this battle in the mind 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 of the 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. Get help for your struggles from other mature believers or from mature Christian counselors who have had experience in helping people overcome problems and addictions.

God has provided daily spiritual victory for every believer

1 Corinthians 15:57-58 gives a statement to hang on to: "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.

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."

The Holy Spirit will remind you

You will forget to go to Jesus and thank him during temptations 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.

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), either with yourself or with someone else?

Your conscience is your flag for victory (success)

God wants you to be a winner (successful) in every part of your life, and especially your relationships with people. To help you be a winner in your friendships and in your life, God has designed a signal inside you to help you know when there is a problem. In sports, referees use flags to tell the players if there is a problem. A yellow flag means that something wrong happened and that it needs to be taken care of before the play can continue. God has designed your body with a flag—your conscience. He has designed your conscience as the inner part that becomes uncomfortable when you do or think something different from what you know is good. When your conscience is based on God's truth in the Bible, it is a helpful signal, like a flag, to help you know that you have had a selfish thought or that you have done something wrong.

God knows that even small things affect friendships. Sometimes just one of your words or a small action can cause pain for another person you know. Your conscience is like a flag to help you know when this has happened.

God knows the importance of making things right with every person. He loves every person and he has pain when someone he loves has pain. God also knows that when we hurt one person, it becomes easier to hurt another person. This is why Jesus told his followers, "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5:23-24) By saying this, Jesus taught us that making things right with another person even takes priority over worshipping him at a church service.

Paul, who wrote some of the Bible, knew the importance of having a clean conscience in all his relationships. He wrote in Acts 24:16, "I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man." He knew the importance of dealing with problems in relationships as much as you are able to.

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."
- 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 first of all admitting your problem and thanking Jesus for shedding His blood for your sin.

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 in Appendix 2 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.

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 might remember 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 today, as we learn to trust God in each difficulty and trial we experience.

Giving thanks for the victory

God has already defeated our greatest enemy by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:11) and God has already given all the promises we need for living a victorious life of godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4). When we understand these realities, we honor God by thanking him for what he has already done to give us victory. An analogy of this would be a person in deep water who can't swim. A floating life ring has already been thrown to him. If he calls out, "Please help me!" the people watching might think he doesn't know what a life ring is, or maybe he doesn't see the life ring. People watching know that the logical thing for the drowning person is to grab hold of the life ring and say, 'Thank you!'. In a similar way, each and every time we are affected by a negative thought or feeling for any kind of reason, we can say, "Thank you, Jesus, for your shed blood for my sin," or "Thank you, Jesus, for your promise that

says, “_____.” Of course, if we don’t know what promise might apply to our need, we can ask him to show us that promise.

Each time we give thanks to Jesus for what he has already done, we are choosing to believe the reality expressed in 2 Corinthians 2:14, “Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ.”

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

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 truths (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)?

God Trains Us to Work

Basic #16

God's desire is to help you use your abilities and resources in fellowship with him for his glory and for others' benefit.

Learn from Jesus' example – How he worked

Although very few details of Jesus' life are recorded from his boyhood until the beginning of his public ministry (Luke 2:41-52, Matthew 3:13-4:17), one of the main things we know about those years is that he worked as a builder or a craftsman, working with wood or stones. A few verses give some insight into the work Jesus did during that time. Luke 2:52 says, "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man," implying that Jesus worked well during that time. In Mark 6:3, the people in his hometown referred to him as a carpenter. Then, later in his life, right before his first miracle at the wedding in Cana where the wine ran out, his mother, Mary, told the servant in charge, "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:5) This shows Mary's complete confidence in Jesus' ability to help them and to meet the need of the moment. It is amazing to think that the Creator of the universe worked for many years without recognition, humbly doing daily labor to provide for himself and to bless others!

During his years of public ministry, Jesus did work of a different kind: preaching, teaching, working miracles, and ultimately doing the work of accomplishing our salvation. Unlike his earlier life, this work brought much attention. Jesus was at work in many ways:

- Solving problems
- Meeting practical needs
- Feeding people
- Showing kindness
- Asking questions and having discussions
- Helping people understand truth
- Healing
- Protecting
- Praying for people
- Traveling regularly to accomplish this work

Even though this work was different than his early years of manual labor, it was still hard, as we can see because Jesus got tired and needed rest. (Mark 6:31-32, John 4:6)

Throughout his life—whether working with stone and wood with no recognition or publicly proclaiming God's kingdom—Jesus' work was aligned with God's will. In John 6:38 he said, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me." At another time, Jesus said he did just what the Father is doing. (John 5:17-19) At the end of his life, Jesus said that everything God wanted him to do, he accomplished. (John 17:4) During his lifetime, Jesus used all of who he is and all of his abilities to do the will of the Father, which included his work during his first 30 years of life.

YOU CAN DO ALL KINDS OF WORK ALIGNED WITH GOD’S WILL AND IN FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, DOING MANY THINGS TO HONOR GOD AND BLESS OTHERS LIKE JESUS DID! (John 14:12)

For thought and discussion

- What kinds of work have you done in your life? Describe some feelings you have experienced while doing various jobs (including school, if applicable).
- Discuss some various types of work and how each type would honor God and bless others.

How Jesus trained his followers to work

Even though Jesus’ training of the twelve disciples was focused on the work of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and shepherding people, the principles about work and Jesus’ example of work apply to many aspects of living life and working. Furthermore, Jesus said that his disciples who know the law of God should use both what God taught in the Old Testament (the law) and the new things Jesus was teaching. (Matthew 13:52) The Bible has much to say about how we work—from Moses’ writings, to the wisdom of Solomon, to the examples of people in Israel’s history, to the letters of Paul and other apostles, to the end in John’s book of Revelation.

Perspectives about work

We often look at work from our own perspective because work is such a common and essential part of our everyday lives. Many people see work as a burden or a curse because of the pain and failure often experienced while working. Others take the perspective that a disciple’s life should mostly be focused on and filled with “spiritual” things like reading the Bible, praying, and talking about Jesus.

However, it is important for us to look at work from God’s perspective, looking at his desires for us as people and as disciples of Jesus. In the first verses of Genesis, we see that even before sin entered the world, work was a good part of God’s purpose and plan for people. Later we see that Jesus and Paul gave many instructions to disciples about the role that work has in our lives. God made us for work and created us in Christ Jesus for good works, and he cares very much about what we do and how we work in all aspects of life.

Work is good—a part of God’s design and purpose for people

Genesis 1:26-29, 2:15 – When God created the first man and woman, he immediately gave them work to do. Work is a foundational part of who we are and is foundational to our role of imaging and honoring God in this world. God worked when he created and organized the world, and he put Adam and Eve in the garden to be like him (in his image) by working and ruling. Their work was naming, multiplying, and cultivating good things (being fruitful). They worked because God worked.

Work is a foundational part of God's plan for people, who are made in his image and who model God and fulfill his purposes in the world by being fruitful, multiplying, filling, subduing, and ruling over creation in a good, godly way in fellowship with him. A significant part of God's purpose for people is to image him by doing work—creating, producing, managing, exploring, developing, improving, and bringing out the potential of what God has put into the world. All of this was part of God's plan and is a part of his purpose for humans, which God blessed and called good before the fall. (Genesis 1:31)

God has made us to glorify him by working and by enjoying the fruit that he brings from our labors as we do many kinds of good things that bless our families and many others.

Working in companionship

Genesis 2:18-20 – God created Adam first, gave him work, and then he said Adam needed a helper for his work. Work was an important purpose God created people for, but not the only purpose. Companionship with each other was also God's purpose.

Genesis 3:8-10 – These verses help us see that God enjoyed a relationship with the people he created. The work that Adam and Eve did in the garden was in fellowship with each other and with God. God made Eve so Adam would not be alone and so he could have a companion that could help in the work. We also read that God walked with them in the cool of the garden. Work and fellowship with God went hand in hand.

We work in a broken world

Genesis 3:1-24 – When Adam disobeyed God by eating the fruit that he had been commanded not to eat, one consequence was that the work became painful, challenging, and futile. (Genesis 3:17-19) We still know and experience that pain of challenge and failure in our work today. The consequences of sin and death affect all aspects of work to such a degree that many people have a negative view of work and feel trapped in working to live and then just working until they die. This can feel miserable and meaningless.

God saves us to work-worship

God's purpose for people from the beginning was to work. It's interesting to note that in Genesis 2:5 and 2:15, the Hebrew word used for work was "abad," and in Exodus 3:12 and 9:1 "abad" is often translated as worship. At that time, when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, God rescued them out of the pain, suffering, and futility of slavery to work-worship him. Work, as it is meant to be, is an act of worship to God, and worshipping God is an aspect of any work that is done unto God.

This Hebrew word "abad" is translated as "worship", "work", or "serve" throughout the Bible. This word "abad" combines both worship and work as one idea, which can be expressed as "work-worship."

Romans 6:15-23 – Paul says that we, as Christians today, have been saved from our slavery to sin (from the slavery of doing works which led to death). This is similar to what God did to call the Israelites out of slavery to work-worship God. Christians are also called to work-worship. We now belong to God and are able to do righteous works leading to life.

Romans 12:1-2 – Paul says, in light of God’s salvation, we should offer our bodies to him as a living sacrifice, an act of worship, learning to do His will as work-worship unto him.

Ephesians 2:10 – Paul says we are God’s work in Christ Jesus to do the good works God has planned for us. Now that we are delivered from sin by Jesus, we are new creations able to work in fellowship with him and his will, and that is pleasing worship to Him.

Paul’s example and instructions about work

Paul taught the early churches a lot about work, both by what he wrote and by his example.

- 1 Corinthians 9:1-18, Acts 18:3 – Even though he had the right to receive compensation for his work of preaching and teaching, Paul wanted to go above and beyond in willingly showing love to God and love to others by providing for himself through tent making.
- 1 Thessalonians 2:9 – Paul said, “Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.”
- 1 Corinthians 15:15 – “I worked harder, yet not I but the grace of God in me.” Paul was aware that the work he did was by God’s strength and grace.

In the letters he wrote to churches, Paul taught that we should:

- Work doing something useful so that we can give to others. (Ephesians 4:28)
- Work as a way of loving each other. (1 Thessalonians 4:10-12)
- Work in order to lead a quiet life and provide for ourselves. (1 Thessalonians 4:10-12)
- Work hard to provide for ourselves and not be a burden to others “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.” (2 Thessalonians 3:6-13)
- Provide and care for our families and relatives. (1 Timothy 5:3-16)
- Do work for others, even our masters or employers, as if working for the Lord. We are serving him, and he will reward us. (Colossians 3:22-24)
- Don’t be weary in doing good for we will reap a reward in the proper time. (Galatians 6:9)
- Hope in God, not riches. Enjoy what God gives and do good and generously share to save up for our future life with God. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

Various roles and seasons of work

God has given all of us various abilities, resources, opportunities, and roles. It is good for us to use whatever God has given us without becoming proud or without comparing ourselves to others in jealousy. Jesus told a parable in Matthew 25:14-30 about a master who gave varying amounts to each of the servants and commended them for putting to use what he had given. The issue was not how much they had but what they did with what was given to them.

Many disciples followed Jesus, but they had different roles.

- Mark 3:13-19 – Only twelve were selected for the role of apostle, and Jesus called these apostles away from their work as fishermen, tax collectors, etc.
- Luke 8:1-3 – Several of the women who followed Jesus supported him out of their own means.

- Matthew 27:57-60 – Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of Jesus who was rich and played an important role in Jesus’ burial by giving him his own tomb.

After Jesus ascended to heaven, believers in Jesus had various roles. In the early church, the disciples chose some to distribute the food so the apostles could focus on prayer and sharing God’s word, and as a result, both the sharing of food and the preaching of God’s word went better and the church grew. (Acts 6:1-7) In his analogy of the body of Christ, Paul recognizes the various gifts God has given to each of us and asks us to value each gift and humbly use it to its full potential. (Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 4:12-26)

At different times in our lives, or when the needs around us change, we may do some types of work more at one time than another. Following are some examples in the Bible:

- Jesus – He worked with his hands for much of his life as a carpenter or stonemason, then he traveled preaching and doing miracles for three years, and now he is in heaven interceding and advocating for us. One day he will return to earth to rule as king.
- The first disciples – The first time that Jesus sent his disciples out to proclaim the kingdom, he told them to not take money with them but to rely on others to provide for them (Luke 9:3), but then later he told them to take along money and things to take care of themselves. (Luke 22:36)
- Paul – He worked as a tent maker and traveled as a missionary, but later in his life was in jail and wrote letters to churches, which was work of a different kind yet unexpectedly valuable to so many believers.

Since people make plans but God directs our steps, it is good to be flexible and open to all types of “work” God has for us. Even in the course of a day’s events, interruptions can come or plans can change so we are not able to do the work we expected, but God may have different works, or ways of serving people, that he wants us to do. We can be content, trust God, love others, and do our best, whether in the short interruptions of our life or in long seasons of work that may not be glamorous or enjoyable.

God’s eternal plan of fellowship with him as we work

In all of the various types of work, we can enjoy fellowship with God as we work. At the beginning of creation, Adam and Eve had fellowship with God in the garden as they worked. After the fall, they were separated from God and cast out of the garden, but now, through Jesus’ death on the cross, we who have trusted in Jesus have peace with God. (Colossians 1:18-23) We are in Christ and Christ is in us through his Spirit. His life permeates us at all times, even when we’re not consciously aware of it at a given moment. Because of that reality, we can be in fellowship with him at any moment of the day, whether at work, at church, in our home, or at rest. Because the Spirit of Jesus Christ lives in us, we are able to do things in step with who he is and what he does. (1 John 1:3-2:6) As we learn to be aware of what God wants in the various situations of our lives, and we keep in step with his Holy Spirit, we are actually working with him! We experience fellowship and joy. That fellowship and joy can be experienced in any work situation, whether in the smallest tasks or in the greatest undertakings. As Paul says, “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.” (Colossians 3:17) And one day, we will serve (work-worship) the Lord in perfect fellowship with him in the new heavens and new earth. (Rev. 22:1-5)

Wisdom about work

The books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are full of practical advice about work:

- Proverbs 10:4 – “Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth.”
- Proverbs 13:11 – “Dishonest money dwindles away, but whoever gathers money little by little makes it grow.”
- Proverbs 14:23 – “All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.”
- Proverbs 21:5 “The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.”
- Proverbs 22:29 – “Do you see someone skilled in their work? They will serve before kings; they will not serve before officials of low rank.”
- Proverbs 28:19 – “Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies will have their fill of poverty.”
- Proverbs 31:10-31 – A wife of noble character and who works hard is praiseworthy.
- Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 – “I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.”

When work has no meaning

On the other hand, some parts of Ecclesiastes speak of work as meaningless—work done in this world without an eternal perspective.

- Ecclesiastes 2:18 – “I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me.”
- Ecclesiastes 12:8 – The writer’s conclusion at the end, “Meaningless! Meaningless! ...Everything is meaningless!”
- Ecclesiastes 12:13b – “Here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.”

From this wisdom we can see that work, from an earthly perspective apart from God, is meaningless in and of itself.

Rest from work

Rest is also part of God’s plan and is something that he wants for us. It is good for us to learn to have the proper balance of both work and rest in our lives.

- Genesis 2:2-3 – There is a time to work and there is also a time to rest. As we learn from God’s example in creation, he worked for six days and on the seventh day he rested.
- Exodus 20:8-11 – God commanded the Israelites to stop their work one day a week and rest.
- Mark 2:27 – Jesus said that the Sabbath is made for people’s benefit.
- Matthew 11:28 – Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Misconceptions about work

Here are some false beliefs about work:

- “Work is bad.”
Truth: God made work before Adam and Eve sinned, and although work is now painful and is not always successful, work is still a good part of God’s plan for us.

- “All true disciples should do the same works the apostles did: leave their careers, travel preaching, even do miracles.”
Truth: Not all disciples were apostles. Many of Jesus’ followers and true disciples in the early church worked jobs and had gifts and roles that were different from the apostles.
- “The work we do only matters as a platform to share the gospel or support others sharing the gospel.”
Truth: Work *itself* is good. Tasks have value regardless of whether or not the gospel is being shared in that moment because tasks are both a vehicle for love and a necessary requirement for life in this world. Anything from giving a cup of water to a lifelong career that is done in faith and love in Jesus’ name is worthwhile. Work is a primary component of God’s design for life.
- “Church is the primary setting where I use my gifts and abilities.”
Truth: God gives spiritual gifts for the building up of the body of Christ for doing works of service, and God wants us to use our gifts and abilities for loving others and glorifying him in all aspects of life, not only church gatherings.
- “Full-time ministry as a paid church worker is the best way to maximize time for God.”
Truth: Every element of our lives in all moments of the day in all kinds of settings can be done as worship to God, and in fellowship with God, and for the benefit of others. (Colossians 3:23-24)
- “To really live by faith, I must trust God to provide for me without trying to provide for myself.”
Truth: Even when Jesus sent the disciples out two by two without money or provisions, he said that the work they were doing deserved the wages of people providing for them. (Luke 10:7) Later, Jesus told the disciples to take money and care for themselves. (Luke 22:36) The general rule that Paul gave for the churches is that God wants us to work and provide for ourselves (see previous section on Paul). Work is included in our life of faith.

Worthwhile work

Worthwhile work is summed up in loving God and loving others.

- Matthew 22:36-40 – Jesus said that all the commands are summed in loving God and loving others, and that includes our work. God is our first love, and doing the “work” of believing him and spending time with him and honoring him with adoration is worthwhile.
- John 6:29 – One of the foundational “works” Jesus wants for us is to simply believe him.
- Luke 10:38-42 – When Jesus was visiting Mary and Martha, Martha was very busy with work, but Mary chose to sit at Jesus’ feet listening to him. Jesus commended Mary for that.
- John 12:3-8, Matthew 26:6-13 – When Mary poured out expensive perfume on Jesus, some of the disciples complained that it was a waste of money that should have been used to help the poor, but Jesus said what she did was a beautiful thing that would be remembered.
- Revelation 2:1-4 – Later, after Jesus had ascended to heaven and appeared to John in a vision, he told the church in Ephesus that even though they did many good works, they had forgotten their first love of Jesus, and Jesus wanted them to go back to what they were doing when they were loving him first. Time spent with God, adoration poured out on God, and things done that honor God are not a waste of time or money.

An essential expression of our love for God is our love for people

- John 14:23-24, 1 John 4:7-21 – Jesus said that we love him by loving each other.
- 1 Corinthians 13:1-4 – Paul explains that anything we do is empty, meaningless, if it is not done in love.
- Galatians 5:13-14 – In all the variety of works that we can do, the essential component that makes something worth doing is if it is loving and beneficial to others.
- Matthew 10:42, Colossians 3:23-24 – *Whatever* we do is worthwhile when done out of love for others and love for our Lord, whether a small task for someone or a lifelong career.

Note of caution

It is possible to engage in some kinds of “work” that are destructive and hurtful (such as stealing or human trafficking). Any kind of work that knowingly hurts others is neither God’s will nor his design for work. (Proverbs 1:19, Proverbs 10:2) Beware of rationalizing selfish or greedy pursuits by thinking, “I need money, so this is okay.” The end does not justify the means. Self-seeking and destructive activities do not spring from God’s love and do not demonstrate your love for God and for people. Instead, resolve to do wholesome work that can meet your own needs and the needs of others. “Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.” (Ephesians 4:28)

Jesus promises rewards for work

Jesus helped his disciples see that work lasts past this world into our future life.

- Luke 12:32-34 – Jesus told his disciples in that giving to the poor lays up treasure in heaven.
- Luke 12:16-21 – In the parable about a rich man who built a bigger barn for himself and then died, Jesus showed that being rich toward God is a wise way to live.
- Luke 16:1-9 – Jesus told the parable of a shrewd manager in order to commend using things in this world to make friends that will last into the next world.
- Matthew 25:14-30 – In this famous parable of the talents, Jesus made clear that God wants us to use and multiply what he gives us, and he will give us even more. And we learn a few verses later that even the smallest thing like giving a cup of water to someone who is thirsty is worthwhile because it serves Jesus. (Matthew 25:31-46)

The eternal life that we have in Jesus means that the work we do has significance in this world and the next. There will be rewards in our future life with Jesus for how we are now loving others and honoring him.

Eternal reward

Paul also writes of rewards in heaven.

- Galatians 6:9-10 – Believers are encouraged not to lose heart in doing good but rather to keep remembering our future reward.
- 1 Corinthians 3:8-15 – “The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful

how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."

We are made for good works

Just as Adam and Eve were made for a purpose that included working in this world, we as new creations in Christ are made for doing work that God has planned for us. God wants us to work at doing what is good!

- Ephesians 2:10 – We are created in Christ Jesus to do good works that God has planned for us to do.
- John 15:1-11 – Jesus said that apart from him we can do nothing, so he wants us to abide in him and his words and obey his commands to love each other that we may have the joy of bearing fruit in fellowship with him.
- Ephesians 4:11-16 – Paul said that evangelism and preaching and teaching are for equipping God's people to do works of service so that we all grow in unity and maturity and grow in knowing Christ and being his body.
- James 1:22-27, 2:14-26 – James said that we are made to be doers of God's words and that living faith does works.

FOR DISCUSSION – What challenges have you experienced when doing work?

FOR DISCUSSION – If someone would ask for your advice about finding a job, what things would you suggest they consider?

ACTION POINTS

- What are some of the ways you have already been trusting God in your area(s) of work.
- Commitment – Tell God you desire to grow in fellowship with him in your workplace or school setting.
- Discuss with a mature Christian the struggles you experience as you seek to glorify God in your work.

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 16?

2. What are some ways that God has already helped you learn about work?

3. What Bible passages have been helpful for you to understand God's design for work?

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

5. What is something you would like to continue to do, or something new you would like to do in this area of work (consider the Action Steps)?

Appendix 1

Practical Steps for Becoming a Spiritual Parent

When God created people, his plan and design for them was to marry and have children. Although not everyone is able to have physical children, it is still God's normal plan for most people. Spiritually, God's plan is similar. When someone is born into his family, God's plan for them is to mature and to help others too. In this way, God's normal plan for his spiritual children is to become spiritual parents. Jesus made this clear when he gave a commission to his followers before he ascended to heaven. (Matthew 28:18-20) Following are some practical steps for anyone to become a spiritual parent by helping another person to grow spiritually.

First of all, understand what a spiritual parent is.

- A spiritual parent is someone who helps one or a few people to make progress in their personal life with Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 1:11-12
- This can be a father or mother helping one or more children. Ephesians 6:4
- This can be anyone who follows the example of Jesus to help one or more disciples. Matthew 20:18-20 (NOTE: In the Bible, the word for disciple comes from a word that means "to learn.")



Understand what a spiritual parent does.

- A spiritual parent encourages and helps others to learn from Jesus. Hebrews 3:13
- A spiritual parent prays for each disciple and also helps each one pray for others. We



learn this from the example of Paul and from the principle in Ephesians 6:18,

- A spiritual parent discusses together with each disciple how to live every aspect of personal life in relationship with God according to the Bible. We learn this from the example of Jesus and from the principle stated in Joshua 1:8-9.

Understand what a spiritual parent does not do.

- A spiritual parent is different from a physical parent in one major way. A spiritual parent does not try to control disciples. Disciples always have complete freedom to participate or not, just as Jesus gave his disciples complete freedom to follow him or not. For example, Jesus gave Judas complete freedom, even while aware of the fact that Judas would use that freedom to betray his spiritual parent. Do not view yourself as having the authority to control your disciples.

Understand and practice the steps to become a spiritual parent.

1. Pray for and look for someone with a desire to make progress in their life with God. John 7:37-38
2. Meet together regularly. Hebrews 3:13-15
3. Discuss together who God is, in his character and attributes, and also learn what he has done for us. Discuss how all aspects of personal life can be lived in a relationship with God according to the Bible, God's Word. This is what Jesus did with his disciples, helping them live according to God's truth in every way.
4. Use the *Basic Training Manuals* as guidelines for what to discuss in the Bible. The manuals are guides to help you find references in the Bible according to the subjects that Jesus taught his disciples. At the beginning of each of the three manuals (Books 1, 2, and 3) are instructions for how to use that specific manual. Each one is used in a different way, but always to help people go to the Bible as their source for living life with God.
5. If other friends have a similar desire to make progress in their personal life with God, include one, two, or three others to be part of the group that you meet with regularly, (Five or more in a group makes it difficult for each person to share and discuss what is happening in their personal life.) NOTE: For complete openness in these personal discipleship groups, it is best for men to meet with men and women with women.
6. Advise and encourage your spiritual children to pray for family and friends and to look for one or more people they can help become a child of God and to grow in their life with God. In this way they will also become spiritual parents! (This follows the example of Jesus, who taught his spiritual children to help others, as he stated in Matthew 28:18-20.)
7. Continue friendship, prayer, encouragement, and advice with your spiritual children as long as possible. (This follows the example of Paul with his spiritual children, as in 1 Thessalonians 2:6-20.)



Additional guidelines for FAMILIES and BIBLE DISCUSSION LEADERS

Here are some guidelines for parents who want to help their children learn from the Bible or for spiritual parents who want to help others learn from the Bible. These guidelines are helpful for anyone who wants to learn and live by God's Word.

First of all, write down the following five questions and keep them in your Bible. They will help you learn what the Bible says and how you can live according to its truth. You can use these questions even if you have not read much of the Bible and even without preparing ahead of time (although preparation can help).



Five questions for Bible study groups:

1. What does this passage say about **God**?
2. Is there an **example** to follow?
3. Is there a **command** to obey?
4. Is there a **promise** to claim?
5. Is there a **warning** to be careful about?

When you meet together with your family or your friends for Bible study, do the following:

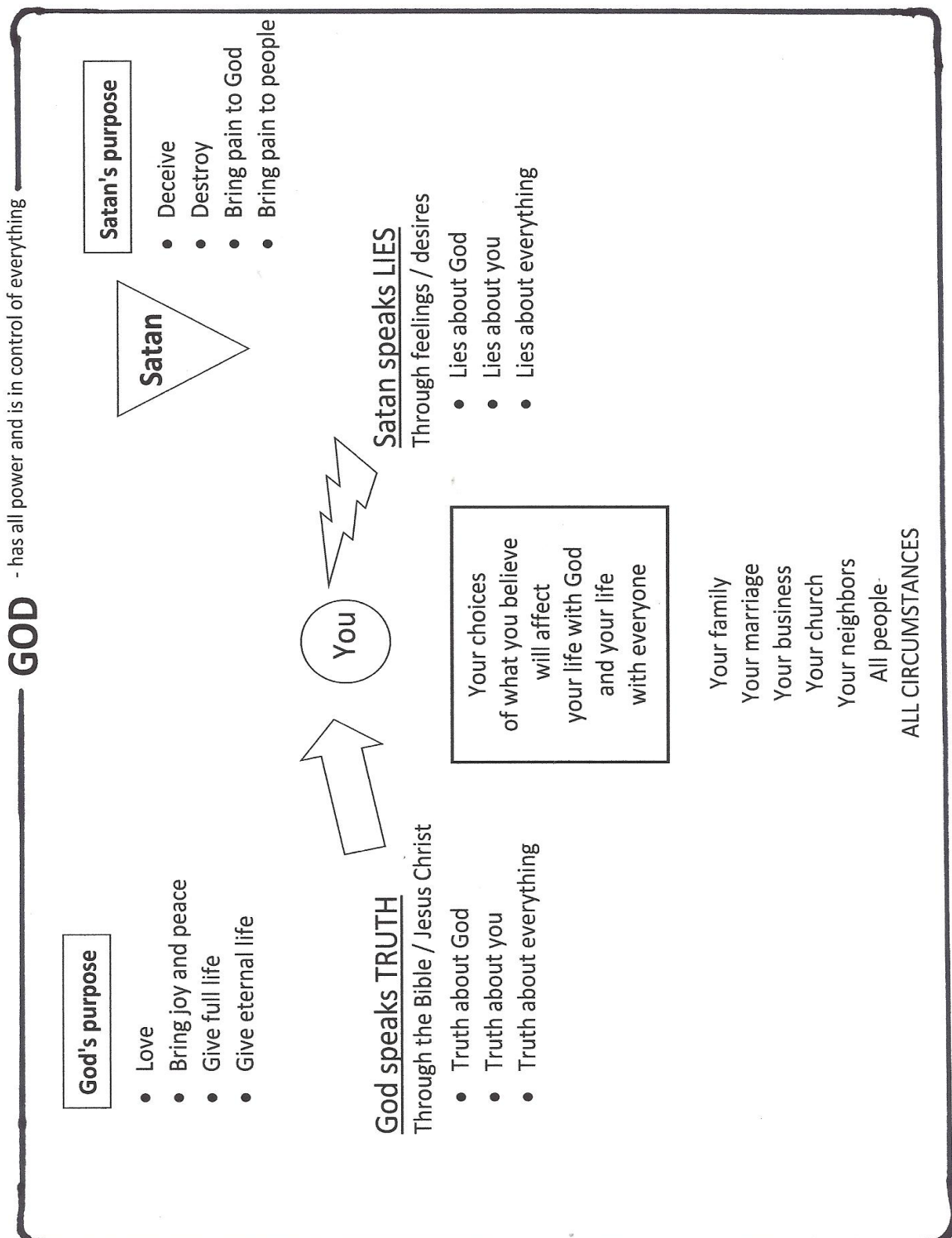
- Choose any part of the Bible to read. It could be half a chapter or a full chapter.
- Pray aloud to ask God to help you understand what you will read.
- Read the section out loud together.
- Look for answers to any of the five questions, beginning with the first one about God.
- Pray and ask God to help you remember what you learned (preferably take turns praying aloud).

Appendix 2

Diagram of Life

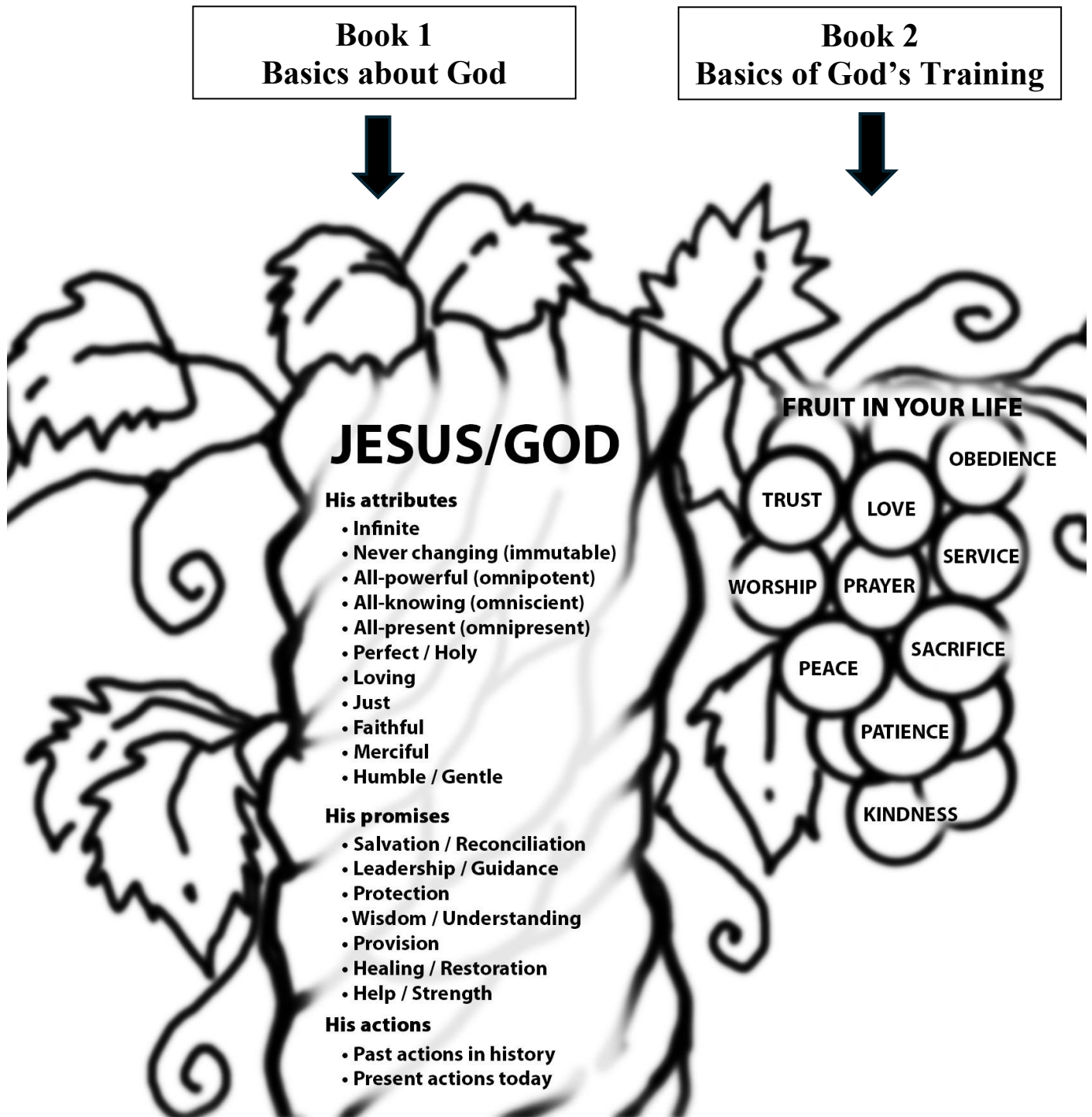
Diagram of Life

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 diagram on the following page 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.



Appendix 3

Illustration of How Book 1 (Basics about God) Is the Motivation for Practicing the Basics in Book 2



Appendix 4

Characteristics of a Christ-follower Who Is Practicing the Basics

Those who have studied and discussed all three of the *Basic Training Manuals*, and are practicing them, should be making progress in the following areas.

These are characteristics of those who are mature in their life with Jesus Christ:

- Baptized, assurance of salvation, and regular fellowship with the church.
- Feed on God's Word daily.
- Enjoy God's love and is 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 sixteen Basics and grow as Christ-followers.
- Serve their spouse in many ways, keeping him/her and the family as top priority relationships.
- Honor their parents.
- Choose to trust God in every kind of situation.
- Are responsible workers.
- Support their pastors whole-heartedly, which means they are an integral part of their church.
- Respect and cooperate with authorities at work and in government.
- Practice close and regular communication with another mature person, with whom they are totally open about everything in life, including thoughts and feelings.
- 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.

Appendix 5

Basics of God's Training

Categorized in the 5 C's

Below is an outline of how the sixteen 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
- # 16 God Trains Us to Work

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

Competency relates to developing the skills needed to fulfill the other four categories: Christ, Community, Character, and Calling.