VICTORY SERIES
STUDY 3

NEIL T. ANDERSON

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *VICTORY OVER THE DARKNESS*

YOUR FOUNDATION IN CHRIST



LIVE BY THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP STUDY

"Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him."

COLOSSIANS 2:6–7



YOUR FOUNDATION IN CHRIST

LIVE BY THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

NEIL T. ANDERSON



BETHANYHOUSE
a division of Baker Publishing Group
www.BethanyHouse.com

© 2014 by Neil T. Anderson

Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan
www.bakerpublishinggroup.com

Ebook edition created 2014

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

ISBN 978-1-4412-6567-8

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations identified NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations identified NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations identified KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Cover design by Inside Out Design

Contents

Cover 1

Title Page 3

Copyright Page 4

Introduction 7

Session One: Liberating Truth 11

1. The Truth Shall Set You Free (John 8:31–36) 13
2. Absolute Truth (Proverbs 3:1–7) 17
3. Owning the Truth (Psalm 51:1–19) 21
4. Emotional Truth (Lamentations 3:1–24) 25
5. Destroyed From Lack of Knowledge (Hosea 4:1–6) 29

Session Two: The Nature of Faith 35

1. The Confidence of Faith (Hebrews 11:1–40) 37
2. The Object of Our Faith (Hebrews 13:7–10) 41
3. Growing in Faith (Romans 10:14–17) 45
4. Faith and Works (James 2:14–25) 49
5. Living by Faith (Galatians 3:10–14) 53

Session Three: Living Boldly 57

1. The Fear of God (Isaiah 8:12–14) 59
2. Overcoming the Fear of Death (1 Corinthians 15:50–55) 63
3. Overcoming the Fear of People (1 Peter 3:13–22) 67

4. Overcoming the Fear of Failure (1 Samuel 17:1–58) 71
5. Freedom From Fear (2 Timothy 1:1–18) 75

Session Four: Godly Relationships 81

1. Relating to One Another (Luke 6:20–42) 83
2. Discipline and Judgment (Zechariah 8:14–17) 87
3. A Proper Defense (Isaiah 53:1–12) 91
4. Acceptance and Affirmation (Romans 15:1–7) 95
5. Overcoming Rejection (Acts 15:36–40) 99

Session Five: Freedom of Forgiveness 103

1. The Ministry of Reconciliation (Leviticus 3:1–17) 105
2. Be at Peace With Each Other (Mark 9:42–50) 109
3. Seeking the Forgiveness of Others (Luke 7:36–50) 113
4. Forgiving Others (Ephesians 4:29–32) 117
5. Forgiving From the Heart (Matthew 18:21–35) 121

Session Six: Living by the Spirit 127

1. Living in God's Strength (Galatians 5:13–26) 129
2. Overcoming Legalism (2 Corinthians 3:5–18) 133
3. Overcoming Licentiousness (1 Corinthians 8:1–13) 137
4. Filled With the Spirit (Ephesians 5:15–22) 141
5. Releasing the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:16–22) 145

Leader's Tips 151
Victory Series Scope and Sequence Overview 155
Books and Resources 159
Index 163
About the Author 173

Back Ad 174
Back Cover 175

Introduction

The Victory Series

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught" (Colossians 2:6–7). Paul's New Covenant theology is based on who we are "in Christ." As a believer in Christ, you must first be rooted "in Him" so you can be built up "in Him." Just as you encounter challenges as you grow physically, you will encounter hurdles as you grow spiritually. The following chart illustrates what obstacles you need to overcome and lessons you need to learn at various stages of growth spiritually, rationally, emotionally, volitionally, and relationally.

Levels of Conflict

	Level One **Rooted in Christ**	**Level Two** **Built up in Christ**	**Level Three** **Living in Christ**
Spiritual	Lack of salvation or assurance (Eph. 2:1–3)	Living according to the flesh (Gal. 5:19–21)	Insensitive to the Spirit's leading (Heb. 5:11–14)
Rational	Pride and ignorance (1 Cor. 8:1)	Wrong belief or philosophy (Col. 2:8)	Lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6)
Emotional	Fearful, guilty, and shameful (Matt. 10:26–33; Rom. 3:23)	Angry, anxious, and depressed (Eph. 4:31; 1 Pet. 5:7; 2 Cor. 4:1–18)	Discouraged and sorrowful (Gal. 6:9)
Volitional	Rebellious (1 Tim. 1:9)	Lack of self-control (1 Cor. 3:1–3)	Undisciplined (2 Thess. 3:7, 11)
Relational	Rejected and unloved (1 Pet. 2:4)	Bitter and unforgiving (Col. 3:13)	Selfish (1 Cor. 10:24; Phil. 2:1–5)

This VICTORY SERIES will address these obstacles and hurdles and help you understand what it means to be firmly rooted in Christ, grow in Christ, live free in Christ, and overcome in Christ. The goal of the course is to help you attain greater levels of spiritual growth, as the following diagram illustrates:

Levels of Growth

	Level One Rooted in Christ	Level Two Built up in Christ	Level Three Living in Christ
Spiritual	Child of God (Rom. 8:16)	Lives according to the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23)	Led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14)
Rational	Knows the truth (John 8:32)	Correctly uses the Bible (2 Tim. 2:15)	Adequate and equipped (2 Tim. 3:16–17)
Emotional	Free (Gal. 5:1)	Joyful, peaceful, and patient (Gal. 5:22)	Contented (Phil. 4:11)
Volitional	Submissive (Rom. 13:1–5)	Self-controlled (Gal. 5:23)	Disciplined (1 Tim. 4:7–8)
Relational	Accepted and forgiven (Rom. 5:8; 15:7)	Forgiving (Eph. 4:32)	Loving and unselfish (Phil. 2:1–5)

God's Story for You and *Your New Identity*, the first two studies in the VICTORY SERIES, focused on the issues that help the believer become firmly rooted in Christ (level one in above chart). If you have completed those studies, then you know the whole gospel, who you are in Christ, and who is your heavenly Father. *Your Foundation in Christ*, the third study in the VICTORY SERIES, transitions to issues that are related to your growth in Christ (level two in the above chart).

As you work through the six sessions in this Bible study, you will learn how God's truth sets you free, how God is the object of your faith, how you can grow in that faith, how you can overcome fear and live boldly for God, how you can rest in God's acceptance and affirmation, how you can gain freedom through forgiveness, and how you can live by the Spirit. Growth requires the right foundation, which is your personal identity and security in Christ. The Steps to Freedom in Christ will be mentioned during this study. This booklet can be purchased at any Christian bookstore or from Freedom in Christ Ministries. The Steps to Freedom in Christ is a repentance process that can help you resolve your personal and spiritual conflicts. The theology and application of the Steps is explained in the book *Discipleship Counseling*.

Before starting each daily reading, review the portion of Scripture listed for that day, then complete the questions at the end of each day's reading. These questions have been written to allow you to reflect on the material and apply to your life the ideas presented in the reading. At the end of each study, I have included a quote from a Church father illustrating the continuity of the Christian

faith. Featured articles will appear in the text throughout the series, which are for the edification of the reader and not necessarily meant for discussion.

If you are part of a small group, be prepared to share your thoughts and insights with your group. You may also want to set up an accountability partnership with someone in your group to encourage you as you apply what you have learned in each session. For those of you who are leading a small group, there are leader tips at the end of this book that will help you guide your participants through the material.

As with any spiritual discipline, you will be tempted at times not to finish this study. There is a "sure reward" for those who make a "sure commitment." The VICTORY SERIES is far more than an intellectual exercise. The truth will not set you free if you only acknowledge it and discuss it on an intellectual level. For the truth to transform your life, you must believe it personally and allow it to sink deep into your heart. Trust the Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth, and enable you to be the person God has created you to be. Decide to live what you have chosen to believe.

Dr. Neil T. Anderson

SESSION ONE

Liberating Truth

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

"What is truth?" retorted Pilate (John 18:37–38).

Pilate asked a good question! However, there is a better one: "*Who* is the truth?" We know who isn't the truth. Jesus said to those who were not able to hear Him because they were not on the side of truth, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). If you want to know "what is truth," you have to know the One who is the Truth. Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31–32). The side of the one you are on, and to whom you are listening, will determine whether you have life or death and freedom or bondage.

Daily Readings

1. The Truth Shall Set You Free	John 8:31–36
2. Absolute Truth	Proverbs 3:1–7
3. Owning the Truth	Psalm 51:1–19

4. Emotional Truth	Lamentations 3:1–24
5. Destroyed From Lack of Knowledge	Hosea 4:1–6

1
The Truth Shall Set You Free

John 8:31–36

Key Point

Jesus is the Truth that sets us free from the law of sin and death.

Key Verse

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

John 8:36

We'll get lost if we set out on a journey with no known destination and no clear direction. Additionally, what we seek to build will eventually collapse if it doesn't have the right foundation. "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). Jesus is the cornerstone of "God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31–32). This statement puzzled the Jews, as they perceived themselves to be free already, having "never been slaves of anyone" (verse 33). But Jesus wasn't talking about being subject to another person. He was talking about the freedom that comes from being His disciple. Jesus is "the *way* and the *truth* and the life" (14:6, emphasis added). Knowing Jesus and His Word liberates us from the law of sin and death and sets us free from our past so we can be the people God created us to be.

Cognitive truth is something we can intellectually know to be true by reason and observation. Biblical truth is moral truth, because it reflects the nature of

God. Moral truth is far more than intellectual awareness or the ability to reason logically, because truth is inextricably bound up with the One who is the Truth. A book doesn't set you free; Jesus sets you free. When believed, God's eternal truth transforms the heart and affects the whole inner character of a true disciple. Paul refers to this as "knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness" (Titus 1:1). Contrast this with the devil, who did not hold "to the truth, for there is no truth in him" (John 8:44). Wicked men suppress the truth by means of their wickedness (see Romans 1:18), and those who don't believe in God have exchanged the truth of God for a lie (see 1:25).

Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). However, there is a way to be free of sin. In Luke 4:16–21, Jesus makes it clear that He came in fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1–2, which refers to the Messiah coming to deliver us from sin. "Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set [us] free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). As liberated children of God, we are no longer subject to the law of sin and death. We are free in Christ to live righteous lives.

The only thing we as Christians ever have to admit to is the truth. Truth is not something we fear. It is the liberating agent by which we are set free from the law of sin and death. We are instructed to speak the truth in love (see Ephesians 4:15, 25) and to walk in the light (see 1 John 1:7) in order to experience the freedom that Christ purchased for us on the cross. The Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17). He will lead us into "all truth" (John 16:13), and that truth will set us free.

Why is truth an attribute of God?

When Jesus spoke about truth in John 8:31–32, to what was He referring?

What is the difference between cognitive truth and moral truth?

What direction do you have for your life if you don't know the truth?

How sure is your foundation if you don’t have an intimate knowledge of God?



The foundation is already in place, and no one can change it. Let us therefore build on it and cling to it in the way that branches cling to the vine so that there is no gap between us and Christ. For the minute a gap opens up between the vine and its branches, the branches wither and perish. Similarily, if a building is not cemented to its foundation, it will collapse. Therefore, let us not merely cling to Christ, but let us be cemented to him, for if we stand apart we shall perish.

John Chrysostom (AD 347–407)

2
Absolute Truth

Proverbs 3:1–7

Key Point

Truth is absolute because it is rooted in the omniscient and immutable nature of God.

Key Verse

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5

God is the ultimate reality, and that which He creates cannot exist apart from Him. Truth is how things really are as seen from God's perspective. Christianity has always affirmed the concept of absolute truth because truth is rooted in the absolute nature of God. In other words, truth is absolute in that it has always been true and always will be true, regardless of whether we accept or reject it. Absolute truth is true whether or not we believe it. Truth is not conditional—it does not derive its validity from our perception. We cannot create truth, nor can we destroy it. We can only *choose* to believe it—and we *must* believe it if we want to remain mentally healthy people in touch with reality (God).

Various philosophies have tests to determine whether something is true or false. According to the coherence theory, something is true if it is logically self-consistent with its own philosophical base. A natural person with a scientific worldview will not likely believe the Bible to be true, because it does not fit his or her theory of evolution. Under this theory, a string of lies could be logically consistent with each other, but they would not be truthful. They would lack an eternal standard that is consistent with God's nature. According to the pragmatic

theory, something is true if it works. Demonic activities work, but they are rooted in the father of lies.

Many popular philosophies argue against the idea of absolute truth. Postmodernism is a movement that claims truth is relative; therefore, it can be whatever you choose it to be. What is true for you may not be true for another. At the heart of postmodernism is the rejection of absolute *moral* truth as revealed by the nature of God and divine revelation. It is a philosophical rebellion against God. Postmodernists have depersonalized God because an impersonal God doesn't have to be served. They prefer to decide for themselves what is true and what is false, thereby becoming their own moral standard.

The New Age movement twists reality in a different direction. The heart of New Age teaching is that we are gods. We don't need a Savior to die for our sins; we just need to realize that we are divinity. Because each of us is our own god, we can create reality with our minds. Truth then becomes what we believe it to be, and if we believe hard enough, it will become true. Recall that Satan deceived Adam and Eve with the same lie in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3:4–5).

Christians have chosen to follow the wisdom of Solomon, who wrote, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). We reject the notion that we are gods and instead humbly choose to submit to the One who is the Truth. We accept the fact that we have a personal relationship with the "author and perfecter of faith" (Hebrews 12:2 NASB), and we choose to acknowledge Him in all our ways (see Proverbs 3:6). "For the word of the LORD is right, and all His work is done in truth. . . . For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations" (Psalms 33:4; 100:5 NKJV).

Why is Truth eternal and absolute?

According to the coherence theory, how is something considered to be true or false? How is something true under the pragmatic view?

In what ways do postmodernists reject absolute truth? How does the New Age movement twist absolute truth?

How have you understood truth in the past?

Do you personally believe that truth is rooted in the nature of God? Why or why not?



This saying of Jesus persuades those who believe to leave behind worship that is according to the law. It teaches us that the shadow [the law] is our guide to the knowledge of Him and that, leaving the types and figures behind, we should go resolutely forward to the truth itself, which is Christ the giver of true freedom, who is also our redeemer. . . . For it is only through this truth, that is, Christ, that they shall be entirely free.

Cyril of Alexandria (AD 376–444)

3
Owning the Truth
Psalm 51:1–19

Key Point

God desires truth in the inner person and teaches wisdom in the inmost places.

Key Verse

Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

Psalm 51:6

We can be sorry that we have sinned, but that doesn't constitute confession. We can ask God or others to forgive us, but our request accomplishes little if we aren't specific about what we need to be pardoned from. We will not enjoy our relationship with God and others unless we own up to the truth and live accordingly. We will never come to Christ unless we admit that we have sinned and are sinful by nature. Without such an admission, we fail to acknowledge that we need a Savior. Therefore, the first step in establishing a righteous relationship is to embrace the truth.

We can learn a lot from King David when it comes to facing our own sinfulness. David had a whole heart for God, but he committed a hideous sin. He lusted after Bathsheba while her husband, Uriah, was away at war. When she became pregnant, David tried to cover his sin by calling Uriah home so he could have relations with his wife, but he refused to have special privileges while the other men were away at war. So David arranged for Uriah to be on the frontline, where he would surely be killed (see 2 Samuel 11). David came under heavy conviction (see Psalm 32), but he still didn't acknowledge his sin. So God sent

Nathan to confront him (see 2 Samuel 12). David finally threw himself on the mercy of God and confessed his sins (see Psalm 51:1–5).

The first step in any recovery program is for the person to stop living in denial and face the truth—to admit he or she has a problem. Many of us are like David. If we think we can get away with it, we will likely try. However, the heavy hand of God will be on His children when they sin, as it was for David (see Psalm 32:3–4).

Some will not acknowledge their sins even under heavy conviction. In such cases, divinely sent human intervention may be necessary, as it was for David. That was the role of a prophet in the Old Testament—to bring sinners to repentance. The purpose of the gift of prophecy in the New Testament is to lay bare the secrets of the heart so the unrepentant turn to God (see 1 Corinthians 14:25). Many recovery ministries practice a process called "intervention" for those who are living in denial of their sinful behavior. A special meeting is arranged at which family and friends speak the truth in love to the one living in denial. The purpose is to get the loved one to acknowledge the truth and offer the person the kind of help that will set him or her free from his or her sinful ways.

Interventions fail if the person will not admit he or she has a problem and needs help. They also fail if the confronted person only gives mental assent to what others are saying and goes along with their suggestions in order to appease them. Intervention by others or by God's conviction will only be effective if we acknowledge the truth in the inner person (the heart). Troubled individuals have to own the truth as David did and desire the only remedy for their sin: repentance and faith in God (see Psalm 51:7–13).

Why doesn't sorrow for sin constitute confession? What is required for us to truly confess our sins to God?

What is the first step for any person who desires to resolve his or her personal and spiritual conflicts?

What role did prophets play in the Old Testament? What role does the gift of prophecy play in the New Testament?

How has God used people in your life to bring about necessary change?

How is intellectual knowledge of the truth different for you than knowing truth in the inner person?



> *We do not teach concerning the unrighteous man that it is sufficient for him to humble himself on account of his wickedness. Rather, God will accept him only if—after passing condemnation upon himself for his past conduct—he walks humbly on account of it and in a righteous manner for his remaining days.*
>
> Origen (AD 184–253)

4
Emotional Truth
Lamentations 3:1–24

Key Point

If what we believe does not reflect truth, then what we feel does not match reality.

Key Verse

For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.

Proverbs 23:7 NKJV

When truth enters our heart, it immediately stimulates an emotional response. Only in the heart do our mind, emotion, and will come together in holistic unity. We have little or no direct control over our emotions. We cannot willfully change how we feel, but we do have control over what we think and what we choose to believe. Our emotions are primarily a product of our thoughts. How we think and what we choose to believe affect how we feel.

Suppose your company is laying off personnel. You have been a faithful employee for years and believe the current downsizing won't affect you. On Monday, your boss says he wants to see you Friday morning at 10:30. At first you may assume that you will be laid off and become angry. Then your mind goes back and forth about other possibilities. You feel anxious because you don't know the truth, and now you are speculating. By Thursday you have become convinced in your own mind that you will be laid off tomorrow, and now you are depressed because you feel hopeless and helpless. In four days you have felt angry, anxious, and helpless, and none of those feelings have any basis in reality. They are all a product of your own thoughts.

Friday finally arrives. As you enter the office, you are greeted with applause by the management team, who inform you that you have been promoted to vice president. How would you feel now after hearing the truth? If what you believe or think does not reflect truth, then what you feel does not match reality.

Notice how the writer of Lamentations feels as he mentally recalls negative circumstances: "I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me" (3:19–20). He believes that God has driven him from light to darkness (see verses 1–6). He feels trapped and doesn't believe God hears his cry for help (see verses 7–8). Not only that, God has led him astray, pounced on him like a wild beast, and pierced his heart with an arrow (see verses 9–13). He has become a laughingstock among his peers (see verse 14). All these negative circumstances and perceptions have left him bitter and without peace (see verses 15–18). His soul has become downcast because he mentally entertains all these dismal thoughts.

Suddenly, his whole countenance changes: "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (verses 21–23). There has been no change in his external circumstances; what has changed is his mental process. He has recalled the truth about God. It would have done no good for someone to say he shouldn't feel that way about God, because he couldn't really have changed how he felt. He could, however, change how he has been thinking—and he did. When he chose to believe the truth about God, his emotions conformed to reality.

It isn't others or the environment that determines how we feel. We are emotionally impacted by how we mentally evaluate the circumstances of life and by what we have chosen to think and believe.

What is the connection between faith and feelings?

In Lamentations 3:1–14, how does the writer express his feelings to God? How do his perceptions leave him bitter and without peace?

What does the writer realize in verses 21–23? How does this change his emotional state and his outlook on life?

What are some times that your feelings toward others didn't match reality because what you believed about them wasn't true?

How should the truth impact you emotionally as you meditate on God's Word?



Anyone who is searching for consolation outwardly in the things of the world is not capable of being reformed inwardly by the favor of divine consolation. Whoever yearns after lowly delight cannot receive the Spirit of truth. The Spirit of truth flees from a heart it discerns is subject to vanity and restores by the light of His coming only those it beholds carrying out the commandments of truth out of love.

Bede (AD 673–735)

5
Destroyed From Lack of Knowledge

Hosea 4:1–6

Key Point

People are not in bondage to past traumas—they are in bondage to the lies they believed as a result of the trauma.

Key Verse

My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.

Hosea 4:6

The nation of Israel was apostate. Even the land suffered from the immorality of the people (see Hosea 4:3). God warned the priests not to blame the people, as they too were guilty of sinning and also guilty of not teaching the truth. “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God” (verse 6). Ignorance of the law is not an acceptable excuse, and people will remain in bondage to their sins if they don’t know the truth.

Paul raises a similar issue concerning salvation in Romans 10:14–15: “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?” This is why the Church has been commissioned—to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth (see Matthew 28:19). We are saved by faith, but if we don’t know what it is that we are to believe, then how can we be saved? If we don’t know the truth, how can the truth set us free?

If a department store had a 50-percent-off sale on all its merchandise, you couldn't take advantage of it if you never heard about it. Merchants have to get the word out if they are going to stay in business, and so does the Church. The Church is "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Being members of the Body of Christ, we are called to speak the truth in love (see Ephesians 4:15, 25) and to share our faith with those who have never heard the good news. Ignorance is not bliss; it is defeat.

Even if we have heard the good news so as to believe unto salvation, we must still have an increasing knowledge of the truth to live liberated lives. People are in bondage to lies or to falsehoods they have chosen to believe in the past. If truth sets people free, then lies will keep them in bondage. Many Christians are not experiencing their freedom in Christ because of past traumatic experiences. It is not the trauma experiences themselves that are keeping believers in bondage; rather, they are in bondage to the lies they have believed as a result of the trauma.

Consider children who have been abused by their father. They could choose to believe that they are no good, or that God doesn't love them, or that they deserved the abuse. Such children develop a negative perception of themselves and a negative concept of God the Father. Unless such beliefs are replaced with truth, they will remain in bondage to false beliefs.

There are also spiritual forces in this world that seek to deceive us into believing lies. Satan, the father of lies, "leads the whole world astray" (Revelation 12:9). We have been warned "that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (1 Timothy 4:1). A lie is a lie no matter where it comes from, and it is our responsibility to choose the truth that will set us free.

In Hosea 4:1–6, why did God hold the priests accountable for the people's sin? What had the priests failed to do that kept the people in bondage?

Why is it so important for believers to speak the truth in love?

Why are many believers not experiencing the freedom they have received in Christ?

What past experiences have distorted your beliefs about yourself and God?

How can you choose to embrace God's truth so that you will not be "destroyed from lack of knowledge"?

> *Since we have been "created in truth and righteousness" and have been reborn in baptism, in order to remain in it we are instructed to put away lying altogether. Hold fast to truth. Do not cheat your brother in any way. Being members of one body, support one another's causes in turn.*
>
> Ambrosiaster (written c. AD 366–384)

Living Under Authority

Under the Old Covenant, God intended to establish His people in the Promised Land. The Mosaic Law was both civil and ceremonial. The prophet, priest, and king roughly represented the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of government. Each branch had certain restrictions to ensure proper check and balance. The king could not use his executive powers for personal gain (see Deuteronomy 17:14–20). The priests avoided any conflict of interest by having no portion of the land (see 18:1–8). The prophets could not speak presumptuously (see 18:20–22). The system broke down when Solomon violated every one of his restrictions (compare 1 Kings 10:14–11:8 with Deuteronomy 17:14–20).

Under the New Covenant, Christians have dual citizenship. First, "our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20) because of our new birth in Christ. Second, we have a citizenship in our respective countries because of our natural birth or naturalization processes. The Word of God governs the Church, but the state has its own constitution. How, then, do we relate to these two governing authorities? Paul said, "Let everyone be subject to the governing [higher]

authorities, for there is no authority except that which God established" (Romans 13:1). The primary reason we are to submit to higher authorities is because "there is no authority except that which God has established." If we rebel against any higher authority, we are rebelling against God (see verse 3), and we bring civil and/or divine judgment on ourselves.

The Church as a whole is never charged with the responsibility of governing the state. The Church is the conscience of the state. Individual members of the Church are citizens of the state who may be called to civil service. Civil authorities are God's servants who are instruments of justice in the land (see verse 4). Government forces, when properly used, prevent tyranny, ensure social order, and execute justice. We should not fear the rulers of the state if we are submissive and living a righteous life (see verses 3–4).

The Church should never stand in opposition to another authority that God has established. We are urged to pray for "kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Timothy 2:2).

SESSION TWO

The Nature of Faith

Pistol Pete had enough water in his canteen to make it halfway across the desert. His trusty map said there was a pool of water at the halfway mark. He chose to trust the map and proceed by faith across the desert.

When Pete arrived at the pool it was dry, but there was a pump. He pumped the handle, but it only burped up dry sand. Then Pete noticed a sign on the pump with instructions. It said there was a bottle of water buried a foot below the surface just two feet south of the pump. He quickly dug up the bottle of water and was relieved to find it was full. The sign said he was to use the water to prime the pump. If he followed the instructions, he could have all the water he wanted.

The sign instructed that once he had his fill of water, he was to refill the bottle and bury it again two feet below the surface so the next traveler would have all the water he or she wanted. However, if Pete kept the bottle, there just might be enough water in it to get him across the desert without dying of thirst. If you were Pistol Pete, would you drink the water from the bottle or would you believe the sign and use the little bit of water in the bottle to prime the pump? If the sign was true, you would have your fill of water, and so would the next person who was faced with the decision to follow the map and believe the sign.

Daily Readings

1. The Confidence of Faith	Hebrews 11:1–40
2. The Object of Our Faith	Hebrews 13:7–10

3. Growing in Faith	Romans 10:14–17
4. Faith and Works	James 2:14–25
5. Living by Faith	Galatians 3:10–14

1
The Confidence of Faith

Hebrews 11:1–40

Key Point

Faith is the operating principle of life, because everyone lives by faith in something or someone.

Key Verse

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.

Hebrews 11:6

There is no more important issue to grasp than the nature of faith. Faith is the means by which we live and relate to God. We are saved by faith (see Ephesians 2:8–9) and we live by faith (see 2 Corinthians 5:7). “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” (Hebrews 11:6). In reality, everyone lives by faith; it is the operating principle of life. The only difference between Christian faith and non-Christian faith is the object of our faith.

The real issue is not *whether* one believes or does not believe. The real issue is *in what or in whom* one believes. Consider how you drive your car. When you come to an intersection and see a green light, you will likely drive through without stopping. Although you can’t see the color of the light facing the other direction, you believe it is red. You also believe that the drivers of the cars coming from the other direction have seen the red light and will stop. That is demonstrating a lot of faith in a mechanical device and people! How would you

approach the intersection if you didn't have such faith in traffic lights and other drivers?

Hope is the parent of faith. The biblical idea of hope is not wishful thinking. Rather, hope is the present assurance of some future good. People don't proceed by faith if they have no hope. Suppose you want to catch a bus. You walk to the bus stop in faith, hoping the bus will be on time and that the schedule is right. If the bus never comes and the schedule is wrong, your hope is dashed and you lose faith in the public transportation system. If you never had any hope of catching the bus, you would not have proceeded by faith. That would be foolish.

The writer of Hebrews said, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (11:1). You drive with confident assurance through the intersection with the hope that drivers coming from the other direction will see and stop for the red light. You drink soda out of a can even when you can't see the contents because you believe the manufacturer is delivering a safe product. In general the public demonstrates a lot of faith in government and private industry, even though neither is perfect.

The God of all hope is the object of our faith. The record of faithful people in Hebrews 11 is a testimony of God's faithfulness. They had great faith because they had a great God. They chose to believe God and live accordingly, even though it meant extreme hardship. By faith Noah built an ark, even though there was no body of water on which it could rest (see verse 7). By faith Abraham was willing to sacrifice his own son, because he believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead (see verses 17–19). These heroes of faith believed the promises of God—though they never received what was promised in their lifetime—because they looked forward to a greater eternal reward (see verses 13–16, 39–40).

In what ways do we all exhibit faith? What is the difference between Christian and non-Christian faith?

What is the biblical definition of hope? How is it related to faith?

How does the record of faithful people in Hebrews 11 demonstrate that we can have confidence that God will keep His promises?

What confidence do you have that God will keep His Word?

What faith objects have you had in the past that have let you down?



Oh, what an expression has he used in saying "an evidence of things not seen." For we say there is "evidence" in the case of things that are very plain. Faith then is seeing things not plain, he means, and brings what are not seen to the same full assurance with what are seen. So then neither is it possible to disbelieve in things which are seen, nor, on the other hand, can there be faith unless a person is more fully assured with respect to things invisible than he is with respect to things that are most clearly seen. For since the objects of hope seem to be substantial, faith gives them substantiality or, rather, does not give it, but is itself their substance.

John Chrysostom (AD 347–407)

2
The Object of Our Faith

Hebrews 13:7–10

Key Point

We can trust in Jesus because of the witness of other believers and the fact that Jesus' nature never changes.

Key Verse

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Hebrews 13:8

The psalmist wrote, "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night" (Psalm 1:1–2). Faith is dependent on its object. To say that you should walk by faith begs the question, "Faith in what?" You cannot have faith in faith.

Jesus Christ is the only legitimate object of our faith, for two reasons. First, we can trust in Jesus because of the witness of those who have chosen to believe in Him. Trusting in Christ results in our becoming new creations and believing that the truth sets us free. The writer of Hebrews says, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7). He doesn't say we should imitate what they do or say. If their lives demonstrate what they believe, then we should imitate what they believe, because what we do or say is just a product of what we have chosen to believe. People don't always live according to what they profess, but they always live according to what they believe.

The second and primary reason Jesus is the ultimate object of our faith is that He never changes. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). We learn to trust people who are true to their word and trust in things that have proven to be consistent. The most universally accepted faith object is the fixed order of the universe. We set our clocks and make plans according to the calendars. The world would be thrown into chaos if the rotation of the sun and moon suddenly changed. If we have that much confidence in the sun, why not in the Son who spoke the universe into existence and sustains all things by His powerful Word (see Hebrews 1:3)?

It takes time to establish trust in something or someone, because the process of building faith requires consistent and continuous behavior demonstrated over time. That is why human relationships are so fragile. It may take months or years to establish a great degree of trust in another person, but one act of unfaithfulness can destroy it. We can choose to forgive those who have betrayed us, but it often takes a long time to regain the trust that has been lost.

If God were to change or if His Word proved to be false, He would no longer be a legitimate object of our faith. Centuries of human history have proven that the nature of God is eternally consistent, as is His Word. Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18). In other words, heaven and earth will pass away before the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet will disappear from God’s Word or be altered in any way. Critics have hammered on this anvil for centuries. The hammers and those who wield them have fallen away, but the anvil of God’s Word remains the same.

How does the witness of those who have chosen to believe in Christ demonstrate that we can completely trust in Him?

How does the fact that Jesus never changes enable us to put our trust in Him?

How has the record of history proven God to be completely reliable?

In what ways are you imitating the faith of godly people in your life?

People always live according to what they believe. What are your actions saying about the object of your faith?



If they are not seen, how can you be convinced that they exist? Well, where do these things that you see come from, if not from one whom you cannot see? Yes, of course you see something in order to believe something, and from what you can see to believe what you cannot see. Please do not be ungrateful to the one who made you able to see; this is why you are able to believe what you are not yet able to see.

Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430)

3
Growing in Faith

Romans 10:14–17

Key Point

How much faith we have is dependent on how well we know the object of our faith.

Key Verse

Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:4

If faith is dependent on its object, then the amount of faith you have depends on how well you know the object of your faith. If you know seven promises from the Word of God, your faith will be limited to those seven promises. If you know 7,000 promises, your faith will be greatly enlarged. “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ” (Romans 10:17). You grow in your faith as you increase your knowledge and understanding of God and His Word.

Suppose a father stands his young son on a table, encourages the boy to jump into his arms, and then catches him. As the process is repeated, the father progressively steps farther from the table. His son continues to jump, because he trusts his father to catch him. Now suppose the father puts the boy on the limb of a tree and encourages him to jump into his arms. It is a little bigger leap of faith, but the boy jumps nevertheless because he believes his father will catch him. Would the boy jump from the tree into his little sister’s arms? Probably not. Even though the leap is the same, the object of his faith has changed. The ability of the best of fathers to be the perfect object of a child’s faith will diminish as he or she continues to climb the tree of life.

No matter how high we climb the tree of life, our heavenly Father will always be there for us, and we will feel safe and secure if our faith is rooted in Him. As little children, we bore our parents' name and depended on them for our daily existence, but salvation has brought a change in our identity. We are now children of God, and our heavenly Father has become the ultimate object of our faith. We hear about Him from godly parents and Christian teachers, who instruct us in the ways of God. We read and memorize God's Word and learn to live by faith according to what He says is true. In order to live a victorious Christian life by faith, we have to know the Word of God. It is presumptuous for us to step out in faith beyond that which we know to be truth. If we don't know the truth, we can't live the Christian life by faith.

Perhaps worse than not knowing the truth is deciding for ourselves what we want to believe—which makes us the objects of our own faith. Some self-initiated arbiters of truth try to manipulate God by cleverly worded prayers and claiming false promises by "faith." That only brings disillusionment and despair. Some are disappointed in God because He doesn't respond the way they thought He should. It is critically important to understand that God is under no obligation to us. He is only under obligation to Himself and His Word. He is a faithful Father who keeps all His promises, and He will never deviate from His Word.

Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). Little children trust their parents. They believe what their parents tell them, and well-trained children instantly obey without question. To mature in our faith, we need that same childlike faith.

How can believers increase their faith?

Why must the object of our faith change from when we were children? What is there about faith that shouldn't change?

What is the result of people choosing for themselves what or whom they believe?

Do you believe that you have sufficient knowledge of God and His ways in order to step out in faith? Why or why not?

In what areas of your life do you feel God “stretching” you to trust in Him more?



Faith comes by hearing, because when we hear the holy Scriptures we believe in the teaching of the Holy Spirit. This faith is made perfect by all the things which Christ has ordained; it believes it truly, it is devout and it keeps the commandments of Him who has renewed us.

John of Damascus (AD 675–749)

4
Faith and Works

James 2:14–25

Key Point

People don't always live according to what they profess to believe, but they do live according to what they truly believe.

Key Verse

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.

James 2:18

In most English translations of the New Testament, the words "faith," "trust," and "believe" are translated from the same root word in the original Greek. However, the common usage of each of these words in the English language can have different connotations. Saying "I believe in that" doesn't carry the same weight as saying "I trust in that." Giving mental assent to something is not the same as a demonstrated reliance on it. To "believe in Jesus" and to "trust in Jesus" have the same meaning in Scripture. Many people say they "believe" in the historical Jesus but have never trusted in Him as the only means of salvation. That is the point James is making when he writes, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder" (2:19). Although demons acknowledge God, they have demonstrated no trust in Him.

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?" (verse 14). James is not challenging the apostle Paul's teaching that we are justified by faith and by faith alone; he is correcting the faulty notion that people can profess to believe in something when there is no evidence in their lives to verify it. To those whose lives bear no

resemblance to their professed beliefs, James says, “Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds” (verse 18). Remember, people don’t always live according to what they profess, but they do live according to what they believe in their hearts.

Everything you do is an expression of what you have chosen to believe. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled [or satisfied]” (Matthew 5:6). Do you believe what Jesus said? If you believed it, what would you be doing? You would be hungering and thirsting after righteousness!

James illustrates the truth that faith in God results in good works by calling our attention to Abraham, who is often referred to as the father of our faith (see James 2:23–24). Paul uses Abraham as the prime example of justification by faith (see Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6). James asks, “Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?” (2:21). It seems like Paul and James contradict each other until you continue with James’s argument: “You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did” (verse 22). In other words, Abraham trusted God because of his willingness to sacrifice his only son, which never happened because God provided a scapegoat. So Abraham’s justification came through faith, and his “work” revealed what he believed.

James does not say good works are essential for faith or for salvation. He teaches that our works are the evidence of our faith (see 2:17). According to James, faith can only be demonstrated by what we do—actions speak louder than words. Suppose you were jailed and put on trial for having professed to be a Christian. Other than your words, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Your life is a testimony to what you believe. Jesus said, “By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:16).

What is the difference between believing in something and trusting in it? How does that relate to James’s statement that even the demons believe in God?

In James 2:20, we read, “Faith without deeds is useless.” According to James, what is the connection between faith and works?

How does James say Abraham demonstrated his faith in God? How was his faith "made complete"?

In what ways is your profession of faith different from what you truly believe?

How important is it to you that your life is a mirror of what you believe about God and yourself? Explain.



Faith without works is dead, and works without faith are dead also. For if we have sound doctrine but fail in living, the doctrine is of no use to us. Likewise, if we take pains with life but are careless about doctrine, that will not be any good to us either. It is therefore necessary to shore up the spiritual edifice in both directions.

John Chrysostom (AD 347–407)

5
Living by Faith
Galatians 3:10–14

Key Point

By the grace of God we live by faith according to what He says is true in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Key Verse

Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith."

Galatians 3:11

Legalists are those who attempt to satisfy the just demands of God by their own works. They have either refused God's offer of grace or have never heard it, so they have never had the opportunity to understand and believe the gospel. As a result they feel condemned, because nobody has perfectly kept the law (see James 2:10; Galatians 3:11).

Paul says, "The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, 'The person who does these things will live by them'" (Galatians 3:12). Our understanding of law and grace affects how we live. If we choose to live under the law, we will seek to know the commandments of God as the Pharisees did and try our best to live accordingly. This results in a community enforcing a lot of rules and regulations. History has shown that traditions are added to the list of dos and don'ts in order to keep us from breaking the law. Trying to keep the law in our own strength only results in defeat, frustration, and burnout. The whole community feels condemned by their inability to keep the law.

The good news is that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (verse 13). The means by which we live would radically change if we chose to receive this free gift of God. Living under the

grace of God is a life concept rather than a law concept. “He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit” (verse 14). Under the grace of God, we receive new life that enables us to live in a whole different way. Under the New Covenant, we live by faith according to what God says is true in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Under the law, we try to change people’s behavior. Under the grace of God, we are new creations in Christ and are transformed by the renewing of our minds (see Romans 12:2). The focus shifts when we become new believers in Christ. Under the grace of God, we seek to change how we think and what we believe because that is what determines what we do. This is why repentance is so important for the new believer. Repentance literally means “a change of mind.” The grace of God is a dynamic enablement. We no longer try to live the Christian life in our own strength. We have received the promise of the Holy Spirit, and we live by His strength.

Trying to change our behavior without changing who we are and what we believe will result in two different outcomes. We will either be driven to try to measure up to external standards but fail, or we will rebel against them. Regarding the former, our external conformity to the law never matches our inner turmoil. Jesus said to the teachers of the Law, “On the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness” (Matthew 23:28). Regarding the latter, the rejection of external standards leads to lawlessness and social chaos. A rule without a relationship leads to rebellion.

What happens in a community when people attempt to live under the law instead of grace? What happens to the people?

What changes in our lives when we receive the gift of God’s grace? How does it affect our attitude and our actions?

Why is repentance important for a believer in Christ?

How has legalism had a negative effect on you?

If you wanted to improve your behavior, how would you go about doing so?



> *It would not be right that the grace of the Spirit should come to one who was graceless or full of offense. We are blessed first by the taking away of the curse [of the law]. Then, justified by faith, we receive the grace of the Holy Spirit. So the cross has dissolved the curse, faith has brought righteousness, and by God's own righteousness the grace of the Spirit has been given.*
>
> John Chrysostom (AD 347–407)

SESSION THREE

Living Boldly

Joshua was about to cross the Jordan River and lead God's people into the Promised Land. Four times in the same chapter God told Joshua to be strong and courageous (see Joshua 1:6, 7, 9, 18).

Shortly after Pentecost, the Early Church was experiencing some major opposition from the religious establishment, which prompted them to pray. "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4:31). Boldness is the mark of a Spirit-filled believer. "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7 NASB).

Telling someone to be strong and courageous in this fallen world is a serious challenge, because fear is the number one mental health problem in the world. "Fear not" is the most-repeated command in Scripture, but telling someone to not be afraid only adds guilt to their fear. Fear of anything other than God is mutually exclusive with faith in God. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The fear of God is the one fear that can expel all other fears.

Daily Readings

1. The Fear of God	Isaiah 8:12–14
2. Overcoming the Fear of Death	1 Corinthians 15:50–55
3. Overcoming the Fear of People	1 Peter 3:13–22
4. Overcoming the Fear of Failure	1 Samuel 17:1–58

5. Freedom From Fear 2 Timothy 1:1–18

1
The Fear of God

Isaiah 8:12–14

Key Point

God's omnipotence and omnipresence make Him the ultimate fear object, which dispels all other fear objects.

Key Verse

It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread. Then He shall become a sanctuary.

Isaiah 8:13–14 NASB

Fear is the most basic instinct of every living creature. An animal without fear will soon become some predator's dinner. Fear is the natural response when our physical and psychological safety is being threatened. Rational fears are necessary for our survival. Irrational fears or phobias are based on false perceptions or lies. Anxiety is like fear without an adequate cause. We are anxious because we don't know, whereas fear has an object. In fact, we categorize fears by their objects. Acrophobia is a fear of high places. Claustrophobia is a fear of enclosed places. Xenophobia is the fear of strangers.

In order for a fear object to be legitimate, it must be perceived as imminent (present) and potent (powerful). Poisonous snakes might be a legitimate fear object for you, but you are probably experiencing no fear of snakes as you read this, because there are none present. If one suddenly appeared in your room, you would be immediately overcome with fear, because it would pose an imminent and potent danger. However, if the poisonous snake were dead (imminent, but not potent), you wouldn't have to fear it. A fear object is no longer legitimate if it loses just one of its attributes.

God is the ultimate fear object, because He is omnipresent and omnipotent. “The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread” (Isaiah 8:13). Normally a fear object is something or someone from which we want to run and hide, but not so with God, for He becomes our sanctuary when we fear Him. We revere God because we have the highest respect for His attributes, but the fear of God goes deeper. God has the power to judge. “If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared” (Psalm 130:3–4 NKJV).

Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would “delight in the fear of the LORD” (11:3). We should, too, because Jesus took our punishment on Himself. Consequently, “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment” (1 John 4:18). Does that mean we no longer fear God? No, because “the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever” (Psalm 19:9) and “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10). The wise person fears God, because in fearing God, he or she will have no cause to fear anything else. God is the only fear object that eliminates all other fear objects, because nothing and no one else can be elevated above Him.

We maintain a deep reverence for God because of who He is and because we are accountable to Him. “So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others” (2 Corinthians 5:9–11). Fear is a powerful motivator, and knowing that we are accountable before God should motivate us to do everything pleasing to Him.

What is the difference between rational fears and phobias? Why is fear a natural instinct?

What characteristics make something a legitimate object of fear? What happens if either of those attributes is removed?

Why is God an ultimate fear object? Why should we revere Him?

How has the fear of something other than the fear of God prevented you from having faith in God? Which one is controlling your life?

How has the fear of the Lord motivated you to serve Him?



There is a twofold species of fear. The first kind is accompanied with reverence. This is the type of fear that citizens show toward good rulers and that we show toward God. Right-minded children show this fear toward their fathers. . . . The other kind of fear is accompanied with hatred. This is the type of fear that slaves feel toward harsh masters and that the Hebrews felt. For they made God a Master, not a Father.

Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215)

2
Overcoming the Fear of Death

1 Corinthians 15:50–55

Key Point

Physical death is still imminent, but it is no longer potent.

Key Verse

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful servants.

Psalm 116:15

Fear was the first emotion Adam expressed after the Fall (see Genesis 3:10), and because of the Fall the most repeated command in Scripture is "fear not." What Adam and Eve lost in the Fall was life, and according to Scripture, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26). Because we are alive in Christ, death is no longer a legitimate fear object. Even though physical death is still imminent (see Hebrews 9:27), it is no longer potent. "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55).

There is no reason for us as believers to fear death. "We are confident . . . and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). Our physical life is temporal and perishable, but the spiritual life we have in Christ is eternal. "The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:53). Our perishable physical life must be joined with the imperishable life of Christ so that when we physically die, "death [will be] swallowed up in victory" (verse 54).

In order to be with God in heaven, we must physically die and receive a resurrected body, because "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"

(verse 50). When we physically die, we will be absent from the body but present with the Lord for eternity. If we have not received spiritual life before we physically die, we will face eternity in hell. Therefore, we should place the highest value not on our physical life but on our spiritual life in Christ.

Paul says, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). If we are free from the fear of death, we are free to live responsible lives today. Being free from the fear of death is not a license to commit suicide, nor is it a license to needlessly throw ourselves in harm’s way. Our physical life is an entrustment of which we are to be good stewards. “Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2).

The fear of death should never prevent us from doing our duty. This point is well illustrated by the story of a fierce storm that had left a trawler in mortal danger. The Coast Guard was summoned to rescue the crew. A young seaman was paralyzed with fear at the prospect of going out to sea in such hazardous conditions. He pleaded with the captain, “We can’t go out; we will never come back.” The captain replied, “We must go out; we don’t have to come back.”

This world is not our home. We have been allowed to remain on this planet for a purpose. If we fear the Lord, we will seek above all else to fulfill our calling. Paul said, “I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith” (Philippians 1:23–25).

Throughout the Bible, God commands His people to “fear not.” Why is death no longer a legimitate fear object in the life of a believer?

What happens to believers in Christ when they physically die? How did this fact enable Paul to say that to “live is Christ and to die is gain”?

Why is suicide so wrong if we are free from the fear of death?

How has freedom from the fear of death enabled you to pursue your calling and purpose in Christ?

What lingering effects does the fear of death still have in your life?



It is not death itself that is gain, but to die in Christ. Life is Christ. The one who has hope in Him is always alive, both now and forever. . . . Therefore they achieve nothing, whether they hand me over to death or to tortures in life. Neither alternative harms me. Life under torments is not punishment for me, since Christ is my life. And if they kill me, that too is no punishment for me, since Christ for me is life and to die is to gain.

Gaius Marius Victorinus (c. fourth century AD)

3
Overcoming the Fear of People

1 Peter 3:13–22

Key Point

In spite of what others may do to us, they cannot take our soul, because only God has the right to determine who we are.

Key Verse

Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.

Proverbs 29:25

The early Christians were fearless, as evidenced by the record of their adventures in Acts. On one occasion Luke observed, “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (4:31). Boldness is the mark of a Spirit-filled Christian. “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7). We surrender control of our lives to any fear object we elevate above God. But if we fear the Lord, we have self-control. Fearing God is an act of worship, because we are recognizing the supremacy of Him above all others.

Jesus said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Saul, the first king of Israel, sinned because he was afraid of the people and gave in to them (see 1 Samuel 15:24). The 12 spies Moses sent into Canaan discovered it to be a fruitful land, but 10 of them gave a bad report because they feared the people who lived there. They said, “We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them” (Numbers

13:33). Fear had distorted what they saw, but Joshua and Caleb had the right perspective: “Do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us” (14:9).

No one denies that people can do incredible emotional and physical harm to each another, but we should not give another human being the right to determine who we are. We are children of God, and only He has the right to decide who we are—and who we are meant to become. The fear of man will compromise our witness, and we will end up trying to please others and fail to please God. Paul said, “If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10).

A servant of Christ will seek to do that which is good. Peter asked, “Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?” (1 Peter 3:13). The unfortunate truth is that some may seek to harm us, but that cannot alter who we are, nor should that fear control us. “But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.’ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord” (verses 14–15).

Fear of man is the primary reason why we often fail to share our faith. It is an irrational fear, because it is not based in truth. The truth is we are called to be witnesses, and those who are lost need to know the truth that will save them. But many may not hear the gospel message if we allow the fear of man to control our lives. The only way to overcome the fear of man is to feel the fear, but do the right thing anyway. If we do the thing we fear the most, the death of an irrational fear is certain.

Why is boldness the mark of a Spirit-filled Christian? Why do those who fear God above everything else have such boldness?

How does the fear of man influence our perspective? How does the fear of God influence our perspective?

In what ways does the fear of man compromise our witness for Christ? How does such fear rob us of our identity?

Who right now is controlling your actions because you fear him or her? Why?

What power do you allow others to exert over your life?



> *Peter is speaking here [1 Peter 3:14–15] of things like abuse, damage and bodily injury which come to us from our enemies. These and similar things are the common lot of believers, both because they are good imitators of Christ and because they know that such things, far from doing them any harm, actually bring glory to those who endure them with patience. At the same time, harm does in fact come to those who do such things, because they are storing up eternal punishment for themselves.*
>
> Bede (AD 673–735)

4
Overcoming the Fear of Failure
1 Samuel 17:1–58

Key Point

It is better to have tried and failed than to have never tried at all.

Key Verse

Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again.

Proverbs 24:16

The fearful ask, “What do I stand to lose if I do?” The fearless ask, “What do I stand to gain if I do and lose if I don’t?” Israel was confronted with these options when the Philistines sent Goliath to challenge their champion. “On hearing the Philistine’s words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified” (1 Samuel 17:11). Their fear of failure kept them from going up against the giant.

David asked, “What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (verse 26). David reasoned he would gain a lot if he fought Goliath, and Israel would be disgraced if he didn’t (see verse 25). The Israelites had seen the giant in relationship to themselves, but David saw him in comparison to God. The Lord had delivered David from a lion and a bear, and he believed God would deliver him “from the hand of this Philistine” (verse 37).

The Bible is a historical account of failures. Moses struck the rock in anger and failed to reach the Promised Land. Elijah slew 450 prophets of Baal but ran from Jezebel. Peter told the Lord that he would be willing to die for Him, but

then, fearing for his life, denied three times that he even knew Jesus. David slew Goliath, but he also slept with Bathsheba and brought pain to his family. Many of the heroes mentioned in Hebrews 11 would be considered flops by modern-day standards. But they were not mentioned because of their accomplishments; they were commended for their faithfulness (see Hebrews 11:39–40).

To stumble and fall is not failure. To stumble and fall again is not failure. Failure comes when we say, "I was pushed," and then fail to get up again. We have failed ourselves if we blame others for our lack of progress or rationalize why we can't get back up again. We have failed others when we don't assume our responsibility in the Body of Christ. There are two kinds of failures: moral failure and failure to meet certain objectives. Moral failure cannot be blamed on anyone but ourselves. If we have sinned, we need to confess it to God (see 1 John 1:9), receive His forgiveness and cleansing, and get up from where we have fallen.

We all have failed to accomplish one or more of our life objectives, but that doesn't make us failures. A mistake is never a failure unless we fail to learn from it. Those who are afraid to fail never try. They follow the path of least resistance. Allowing the fear of failure to control our lives is like putting a car in reverse and jamming on the brake. We may reduce our losses, but we never accomplish anything to the glory of God. We like the security of the tree trunk, but the fruit is always on the end of the limb!

Remember, success is 90 percent attitude and 10 percent aptitude. Every step toward maturity will be met with new challenges and obstacles to be overcome. You will feel the fear of failure as you grow in Christ, but if you fear the Lord, you will overcome that fear of failure. You will be able to look back and say, "It was unshakable faith in God and persistence that got me through."

What is the difference between the way the fearful and the fearless look at a situation?

How did David's faith in God override his fear of Goliath?

How do we fail ourselves when we blame others for our lack of progress? How do we fail others when we don't assume the responsibility God has given us?

How have your mistakes and self-perceived failures in the past actually helped you to become a better person?

How is the fear of failure keeping you from stepping out in faith?



Let us then bravely bear the ills that befall us. It is in war that heroes are discerned; in conflicts that athletes are crowned; in the surge of the sea that the art of the helmsman is shown; in the fire that the gold is tried. And let us not, I beseech you, have concern for only ourselves, but let us rather look out for the rest, and that much more for the sick than for the whole.

Theodoret of Cyr (AD 393–457)

5
Freedom From Fear

2 Timothy 1:1–18

Key Point

Do the thing you fear the most and the death of fear is certain.

Key Verse

"Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.

1 Peter 3:14–15

Paul begins his second letter to Timothy by encouraging him to be faithful. He probably suspects that fear will be Timothy's chief obstacle, so he writes, "The Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline" (verse 7). Based on what God has given you, you can take certain steps to ensure that no fear—other than the fear of God—is controlling your life.

The first step is to submit to God and resist the devil (see James 4:7). You start by resolving all personal or spiritual conflicts. You can do this by working through "The Steps to Freedom in Christ." By doing so, you will experience the presence of the Wonderful Counselor and eliminate any possible interference by the evil one.

The second step is to analyze your fears. Start by asking God to reveal what it is you are actually afraid of and what is controlling your life. The root of any phobia is a belief that is not based in truth. Your false beliefs need to be rooted out and replaced by God's truth. The Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth as you submit to Him and study God's Word. You may also decide to seek the godly counsel of others who can help you identify your fears. You need to

discover the lies behind irrational fears, renounce each one, and choose to believe the truth.

The third step is to analyze how your fear has impacted your life. How has it prevented you from living a responsible life, compelled you to do that which is irresponsible, or compromised your Christian witness? Fear is a powerful motivator for good or evil. If irrational fear has caused you to lead a sinful lifestyle, it is not enough for you to be sorry. You need to confess and repent of any lies you have believed and irresponsible ways you have acted.

The fourth step is to face the fear and work out a plan of action. Irrational fears are like mirages—they seem real until you move toward them. However, if you back away from irrational fears, they gain even greater control of your life. You may need the assistance of a pastor or godly counselor who will help you take the first step toward resolving your fears and eradicate any long-standing fears slowly. If you are afraid to ride in an elevator, don't start with the tallest building in town. Find a two-story building and gain confidence with each new step you take.

Determine in advance what your response will be to all possible reactions to your plan. What are the possible consequences of standing up to a fear object? Thinking this through will help solidify your initial plan of action and help you answer whether you can live with the consequences. Christians can always live with the consequences of doing what is right and living a responsible life, whereas nobody can adequately prepare for living an irresponsible life. You should be more afraid of *not* doing God's will than doing the will of another fear object.

Commit to carrying out the plan of action in the power of the Holy Spirit. Doing so will be the key to overcoming your phobias. If it is judicious, have someone pray for you and hold you accountable for the plans you have made.

The first step in overcoming fear is to submit to God and resist the devil. What personal or spiritual conflicts do you need to resolve?

The second step is to ask God to reveal the true source of your fears. What did God show you that you are actually afraid of? What is controlling your life?

The third step is to determine how your fear has affected your life. How have your fears prevented you from living a responsible life? How have they served to compromise your witness for Christ?

The fourth step is to face your fear. What plan—with the help of the Holy Spirit—will you put into place to begin to overcome your fears?

Who are some people in your life who can help you through this process? Make a point to seek them out to help you identify the source of your fears and take the first step toward resolving them.



We are persecuted when God allows the tempter the power to persecute us. But when God does not want us to suffer this, even in the world that hates us, we wonderously have peace and are of good cheer, because of Him who said, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." And truly He has overcome the world, because the world is strong only insofar as its Victor wants it to be. He has received from the Father the victory over the world. And because of His victory we can indeed be of good cheer.

Origen (AD 184–253)

The Sin of Rebellion

The Bible is an historical account of humankind's propensity to rebel. Adam and Eve rebelled in the Garden of Eden. Cain rebelled against the teachings of God. All the ancient people were in rebellion except Noah, and their rebellious acts resulted in the flood. The people were rebellious again when they built the Tower of Babel, which caused God to scatter them throughout the land. Miriam and Aaron rebelled against Moses. Lot rebelled against Abraham. Esau rebelled against Jacob. Absalom rebelled against David. The whole world is in rebellion

against God. We were all rebellious by nature, and even as believers we are continuously tempted to do it our way.

The seriousness of rebellion can be illustrated by the life of Saul, the first king of Israel. God had given clear instructions to Saul: "Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out" (1 Samuel 15:18). However, Saul decided on his own to keep some of the spoils of war and spare the life of Agag, the Amalekite king (see verses 20–21). He tried to justify his actions to Samuel, but the prophet replied, "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry" (verses 22–23).

Rebellion may be humanity's worst sin. Saul rebelled because he feared the people more than God (see verse 24), and he decided for himself how he was going to worship Him. Like Saul, we may not see our own rebellion, which is more an attitude than an action. Rebellion is a problem of the heart. Standing up on the outside while sitting down on the inside will not escape God's notice, for He looks on the heart. God is not pleased with just going through the motions of worship. David came to that understanding after his sin with Bathsheba: "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise" (Psalm 51:16–17).

SESSION FOUR

Godly Relationships

If you see a tall fellow ahead of the crowd, a leader of music, marching fearless and proud, and you know of a tale whose mere telling aloud would cause his proud head to in anguish be bowed, it's a pretty good plan to forget it.

If you know of a skeleton hidden away in a closet, and guarded and kept from the day in the dark; whose showing, whose sudden display would cause grief and sorrow and lifelong dismay, it's a pretty good plan to forget it.

If you know of a spot in the life of a friend (we all have spots concealed, world without end) whose touching his heartstrings would play or rend, till the shame of its showing no grieving could mend, it's a pretty good plan to forget it.

If you know of a thing that will darken the joy of a man or a woman, a girl or a boy, that will wipe out a smile or the least way annoy a fellow, or cause any gladness to cloy, it's a pretty good plan to forget it.

—Judd Mortimer Lewis

Daily Readings

1. Relating to One Another	Luke 6:20–42
2. Discipline and Judgment	Zechariah 8:14–17
3. A Proper Defense	Isaiah 53:1–12

4. Acceptance and Affirmation	Romans 15:1–7
5. Overcoming Rejection	Acts 15:36–40

1
Relating to One Another

Luke 6:20–42

Key Point

As believers in Christ, we are responsible for our own character and the needs of those around us.

Key Verse

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Luke 6:31

One of the greatest challenges in life is learning to love one another in a fallen world. The Lord exhorted us to love even our enemies (see Luke 6:27–36) and to restrain from judging one another (see verses 37–42). It is only the grace of God that enables us to love those who hate us. Consider the dynamics involved when two people are at each other's throats. Chances are they will be attacking the other person's character while looking out for their own needs.

There is no way two people can get along if that is what they are doing. Before God, we are responsible for our own character and the needs of those around us. Romans 14:4 says, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand." Philippians 2:3–5 tells us, "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 others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus."

What would life be like if we all assumed responsibility for our own character and committed ourselves to loving one another? Surely that is what Scripture requires of us. Conforming to God's likeness is His plan for our lives, and out of

this developing character we meet one another's needs. So why doesn't this transforming love seem to be present even in our churches and Christian homes? It will happen in heaven, but in this world we live with imperfect people and none of us has matured to perfection. Perhaps we need to start by taking the plank out of our own eyes before we consider looking at the speck in someone else's eye (see Luke 6:41–42).

Jesus instructed us how to respond to those who don't abide by His teaching: "Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:27–28). In other words, respond to others' bad attitude with deeds of kindness, speak well of those who speak ill of you, and pray for them when their bad attitude and speech digress to bad behavior. Nobody can keep you from being the person God created you to be, so don't let immature people determine who you are and how you should respond. When treated poorly by others, do not respond in kind. Instead, "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (verse 31).

You get out of life what you put into it. If you want a friend, then be a friend. If you want someone to love you, then love someone. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you" (verses 37–38).

It is one of life's great compensations to know that you cannot sincerely help another person without helping yourself in the process. Whatever life asks of you, give a little more and it will come overflowing back to you: "A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (verse 38).

What two great responsibilities do we have in terms of ourselves and others?

What is keeping us from loving one another?

How are we to respond to those who don't speak well of us or mistreat us?

In what ways haven't you acted responsibly in a past or in a present difficult relationship?

What do you find most difficult in loving the unlovely?

The traces of the divine image are clearly recognized not through the likeness of the body, which undergoes corruption, but through the intelligence of the soul. We see the divine image in its righteousness, temperance, courage, wisdom, discipline and through the entire chorus of virtues that are present essentially in God. These can be in people through effort and the imitation of God, as also the Lord points out in the Gospel when He says, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" and "Be perfect, as your Father is perfect."

Origen (AD 184–253)

2
Discipline and Judgment

Zechariah 8:14–17

Key Point

Judgment is related to character, which we are not to judge; while discipline is related to behavior, which should be carried out in love.

Key Verse

God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.

Hebrews 12:10

Judicial and civil decisions are made in the courts of our land when people commit crimes or fail to work out their differences with one another. Judges are to "render true and sound judgment" (Zechariah 8:16) based on evidence brought by witnesses. They aren't judging people when they settle differences and determine guilt or innocence. They are determining guilt or innocence based on the law of the land and by the testimony of witnesses. Only God can righteously judge us.

God commands us not to judge one another, but He instructs us to discipline those caught in sin for the purpose of restoring fellowship. Knowing the difference between the two has profound implications for how we relate to others. Judgment is related to a person's character, while discipline is related to a person's behavior. Suppose you catch your son telling a lie and you say to him, "Son, what you just said right now isn't true." You are not judging him. You are confronting him for the purpose of discipline. If you said, "Son, you are a liar," that would be judging him.

Some attempts at discipline are nothing more than character assassination. If you called someone dumb, stupid, or arrogant, how could he resolve that? He couldn't instantly change his character. We are losing ground when we shovel dirt at one another. However, if you pointed out a behavior problem, he could own up to his sin, confess it, repent, and seek forgiveness from those he had offended. He may have to live with the consequences of the sin and make restitution, if warranted, but he could be reconciled with God and others.

Character is what we build up in one another, and we are not to tear it down. Many of the problems in our churches and families would disappear if we memorized Ephesians 4:29 and never violated it: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." When we tear each other down, we grieve the Holy Spirit (see verse 30). Let us do no evil to our neighbor. Let us speak the truth in love. In civil matters, let the judges in our courts decide our guilt or innocence based on witnesses, and let God be the judge of our character.

Discipline has to be based on observed behavior. We have to personally see or hear what others have said or done before we can rightfully confront them. The Mosaic Law required two or three witnesses in order to carry out a capital punishment (see Deuteronomy 19:15). Christians are likewise instructed to have two or three witnesses before bringing a sinning believer before the Church (see Matthew 18:15–20).

If you catch a person in sin, confront that person with the purpose of winning him or her back. If the person refuses to repent and there are no other witnesses, end the matter there. Discipline is not the same as punishment. Punishment is retroactive. Discipline is future-oriented. God doesn't punish us when we sin; He disciplines us so that we don't do it again. The punishment we deserved has already fallen on Christ.

On what basis does a judge base a person's guilt or innocence?

What is the difference between judging someone as opposed to disciplining him or her? Why does God instruct us not to judge others but to discipline them in love?

Why should God be the only judge of our character? How do we attempt to put ourselves into His role when we judge others?

How do you typically respond when someone judges your character?

In what ways have you judged other people? What steps can you take so that it doesn't happen again?



Do not judge, that is, unjustly, so that you may not be judged, with regard to injustice. With the judgment that you judge shall you be judged. This is like the phrase "forgive, and it will be forgiven you." For once someone has judged in accordance with justice, he should forgive in accordance with grace, so that when he himself is judged in accordance with justice, he may be worthy of forgiveness through grace. . . . "Do not condemn." That is, do not seek vengeance for yourselves. Or, do not judge, from appearance and opinion and then condemn, but admonish and advise.

Ephrem the Syrian (AD 306–373)

3
A Proper Defense
Isaiah 53:1–12

Key Point

If you are right you don't need a defense; if you are wrong you don't have one; and in either case you gain nothing by defending yourself.

Key Verse

Do not repay evil for evil or insult for insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

1 Peter 3:9

What should we do when someone wrongly judges us and attacks our character? Should we be defensive? As in everything else in life, Jesus set the standard for how we should live with one another. "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:21–23).

Isaiah 53 provides one of the clearest prophecies of Christ in the Old Testament. "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (verse 5). Christ suffered in silence for our sins and never once opened His mouth to defend Himself (see verse 7). Our situation is somewhat different, because we are not sinless. However, there are two reasons why, outside of the example of Christ, we still shouldn't defend ourselves.

First, if the judgments of others are right, we don't have a defense. Even though they are wrong to judge us, it would do no good to defend ourselves. Our attempts to defend our character will often intensify the efforts of those judging us. Instead, we should follow Christ's example by not retaliating and trust Him who judges justly. Then we must thank God that our sins are forgiven, accept the fact that we are a work in progress, and learn from the experience. Proverbs 19:25 says, "Rebuke the discerning, and they will gain knowledge." Such attacks on our character reveal how secure or insecure we are in Christ. There is no need to defend ourselves if we know that Christ is our defense.

Second, if the judgments of others are wrong, we don't need a defense. This situation is actually harder to deal with than the first, because there is no truth in what they are saying. Should someone personally and falsely attack our character, we should just listen. After they have finished pointing out every little character defect, their gun is empty. The last thing we want to do is hand them some more ammunition. If we attempt to defend ourselves against any of their allegations, it will just make them more convinced that it is their responsibility to convince us of our imperfections. That only leads to more accusations and verbal excursions.

Suppose we respond by saying, "I'm sorry you are upset with me. What do you suggest I do?" That may create an opportunity for ministry, for two reasons. First, by not trying to play the role of God in their lives—as they were trying to do in ours—we leave room for the Holy Spirit to bring conviction. When we play the role of the Holy Spirit in someone else's life, it misdirects their battle with God onto ourselves, and we are not up for the task. Second, nobody tears down another person's character from a position of strength. They are wrong to judge us, and it is helpful to know that in some way they must be hurting. There is some reason they are angry and upset. It would be far more profitable to discover their difficulty than to try to defend ourselves.

What is gained if we return evil for evil and insult for insult?

How was Jesus wrongly accused during His time on earth? How did He react to those who accused Him?

How should you react if the judgments of others accurately reflect your character? What steps should you take before God to rectify the situation?

How should you react if the judgments of others are wrong? Why is it still important not to attempt to defend yourself in such circumstances?

How can you balance personal attacks on your character with the understanding of who you are in Christ?



Peter forbids us to return evil for evil and even commands us to bless those who harm us, but he also reminds us by quoting Psalm 34:12–16 that God keeps an eye on both the good and the bad and will reward us in eternity for the kindness which we show when we choose to do good to those who persecute us. Furthermore, he will also punish our persecutors if they do not repent, but if they do repent we shall also receive a crown of thanksgiving, because we have prayed to the Lord for their salvation.

Bede (AD 673–735)

4
Acceptance and Affirmation

Romans 15:1–7

Key Point

Those who are accepted and affirmed by authority figures will voluntarily be accountable to them.

Key Verse

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Romans 15:7

Ultimately we are accountable to God, but to ensure proper care and discipline in our churches and homes, we also need to be accountable to one another. As you think about how this can happen in your situation, consider the following words: (1) "authority," (2) "accountability," (3) "affirmation," and (4) "acceptance." Now ask yourself, *From which end of the list does God come to me?* He certainly had the authority. Your answer to that question will reveal what kind of a parent you are and how you do ministry.

Scripture leaves little room for doubt as to the answer. God first came to us with acceptance through Jesus Christ: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Then came the affirmation: "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (8:16). Those who are accepted and affirmed will voluntarily be accountable to authority figures, but if authority figures demand accountability without acceptance and affirmation, they will never get full disclosure.

Jesus never said, "Listen, people, shape up because I am God." Jesus had no human or earthly position of authority, and yet "the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of

the law" (Matthew 7:28–29). People recognized Jesus' authority because it was based on His character. Jesus dined with sinners so they knew they were accepted, even when their own religious leaders had rejected them. The Gospels reveal that sinners loved to be around Jesus and that He waged war against hypocritical religious leaders. Sinners who desperately need Jesus often stay away from churches because of what they perceive to be religious hypocrisy on the part of churched believers.

Jesus' followers also related to others in a spirit of love and acceptance. In 1 Thessalonians 2:6–8, Paul speaks of his manner toward the believers: "As apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well."

Acceptance and affirmation are two of the most basic needs we all have. We only need to observe little children to know this—they unashamedly ask for both. "Did I do good, Mommy?" "Do you like the picture I drew?" We don't grow out of those needs, but all too often we stop extending acceptance and affirmation to adults and to our children as they grow older.

Consider the dialogue between an authoritarian parent and a tardy child. "Where were you?" the parent asks. "Out!" says the child. "What were you doing?" demands the parent. "Nothing!" exclaims the child.

Does that sound familiar? It is all too common in our homes, churches, and schools. Overbearing authoritarianism repels intimate disclosure. True accountability cannot be demanded; it is voluntarily given. We can force some external accountability through threats and intimidation, but people will not intimately disclose to authority figures unless they know they are loved, accepted, and affirmed. As Christian leaders and parents, we may not always be able to control those under our authority, but we can always love them.

How much can be gained when authority figures demand accountability from others without first giving them acceptance and affirmation?

How did people recognize the authority by which Jesus spoke?

In 1 Thessalonians 2:6–8, how did Paul say he treated the believers in that church? How does he instruct us to treat those over whom we have authority?

What do you require of others before you feel it is safe to share yourself?

What should you do if you realize that you have been asking for accountability from others but now realize your demeanor is the reason it wasn't forthcoming?



> *"Although as the apostle of Christ we could have claimed a position of honor among you, still while in your midst we were children, as if a nurse were cherishing her own children." A little one is gentle and for that reason decidedly amenable, mild and simple, without deceit or pretense, direct and upright of mind. Childlikeness is the foundation for simplicity and truthfulness.*
>
> Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215)

5
Overcoming Rejection

Acts 15:36–40

Key Point

There is no competition within the kingdom of God, as He has uniquely equipped each of His children and has a place for every one of them.

Key Verse

You come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him.

1 Peter 2:4

We all know what it feels like to be unduly criticized and rejected, especially when it comes from people we want to please. None of us can be the best at everything, and sometimes we fail to live up to other people's expectations. Paul and Barnabas wanted to embark on a second missionary journey, but they had a sharp disagreement over Mark, who had deserted Paul earlier. Paul's refusal to bring Mark resulted in a split between him and Barnabas. Ultimately, Paul rejected Mark (see Acts 15:36–40).

We have been born and raised in a worldly system that chooses favorites and rejects others. From an early age, we strive to please significant others to gain their approval. But this fallen world is a dog-eat-dog, survival-of-the-fittest system.

In their natural state, people choose to adapt to this world system in one of three ways. First, some try to beat the system. They try to earn their acceptance and strive for significance through their appearance, performance, and social status. They feel driven to get to the top because they falsely believe that winning is their passport to acceptance, security, and significance. They are

characterized by perfectionism and emotional insulation, which usually leads to anxiety, stress, and burnout. They are prone to manipulating people and circumstances for their own end, so it is difficult for them to yield control of their lives to God. Eventually their abilities diminish—and younger, stronger, and more capable controllers replace them.

Second, some give in to the system and embrace its warped standards. The strongest, prettiest, and most talented are "in," while they are "out" because they don't measure up in those categories. By giving in to this worldly system, these people succumb to society's false judgment of their worth. They often find it difficult to accept themselves, because others haven't. Some have trouble relating to God because they blame Him for making them deficient in the eyes of the world.

Third, some rebel against the system. They respond to rejection by saying, "I don't need you, and I don't want your love!" They need love and acceptance like everyone else, but they refuse to acknowledge it. They often underscore their defiance and rebellion by dressing and behaving in ways that are objectionable to the general population. Rebels are marked by self-hatred and bitterness. They are irresponsible and undisciplined. They think that God and "religious" people are trying to squeeze them into a socially acceptable mold.

All three responses eventually lead to defeat. The kingdom of God is totally different. Nobody wins in the world's system, but we all win in the kingdom of God. We are not in competition with one another. Paul says, "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12). We are loved and accepted unconditionally by God. Each of us is an essential part of the Body of Christ. Helping another person succeed enhances our success. The more we build one another up, the more we build ourselves up.

Mark must have discovered this wonderful truth, because eventually he and Paul reconciled. While doing time in a Roman prison, Paul wrote in his last epistle, "Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11).

What characterizes those who attempt to adapt to the system of this fallen world by trying to earn acceptance through their looks, performance, or social status?

What characterizes those who simply give in to the world's system and embrace its warped standards?

What characterizes those who rebel against the world's system? What do they refuse to acknowledge and embrace?

Which of these three worldly approaches do you tend to take? How has that changed since you became a Christian?

How can you, as a Christian, respond to those who reject you and your beliefs?



Under the old dispensation, the priesthood and the kingship were two different things. No one could be both a king and a priest. But afterward came the gospel, which united these two offices in Christ. From this it follows that the people whom He has chosen will be both royal and priestly at the same time. Some people wonder how it is possible, seeing that we are called from all the nations on earth, for us to be regarded as one holy people. The answer to this is that although we are from many different nations, the fact that we have all repented of our sins and accepted a common mind gives those who have repented one doctrine and one faith. When there is a soul and heart common to all believers, then they are called one people.

Didymus the Blind (AD 313–398)

SESSION FIVE

Freedom of Forgiveness

Once, I held in my tightly clinched fist . . . ashes. Ashes from a burn inflicted on my 10-year-old body. Ashes I didn't ask for. The scar was forced on me.

For 17 years the fire smoldered. I kept my fist closed in secret, hating those ashes yet unwilling to release them. Not sure if I should. Not convinced it was worth it. Marring the things I touched and leaving black marks everywhere. I tried to undo it all, but the ashes were always there to remind that I couldn't.

I really could not. But God could! His sweet Holy Spirit spoke to my heart one night in tearful desperation. He whispered, "I want to give you beauty for your ashes, the oil of joy for your mourning, and the garment of praise for your spirit of heaviness." I had never heard of such a trade as this. Beauty for ashes? My helpless and hurting emotions for His ever constant peace?

How could I be so stubborn as to refuse an offer such as this? So, willingly—yet in slow motion and, yes, while sobbing—I opened my bent fingers and let the ashes drop to the ground. In silence, I heard the wind blow them away. Away from me . . . forever. I am now able to place my open hands gently around the fist of another hurting soul and say with confidence, "Let them go. There really is beauty beyond your comprehension. Go ahead—trust Him. His beauty for your ashes."

Daily Readings

1. The Ministry of Reconciliation	Leviticus 3:1–17
2. Be at Peace With Each Other	Mark 9:42–50

3. Seeking the Forgiveness of Others	Luke 7:36–50
4. Forgiving Others	Ephesians 4:29–32
5. Forgiving From the Heart	Matthew 18:21–35

1
The Ministry of Reconciliation

Leviticus 3:1–17

Key Point

We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Key Verses

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.

2 Corinthians 5:18–19

All the animal sacrifices prescribed under the Old Covenant in passages such as Leviticus 3:1–17 are no longer needed under the New Covenant. Christ, who died once for all, has become our sin offering (see Hebrews 10:10). We fulfill the burnt offering when we offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God (see Romans 12:1). The fellowship offering—which was given in voluntary gratitude for past blessings, answered prayer or a bountiful harvest—now pictures the fellowship we have with God on the basis of Christ's death on the cross. It has traditionally been called the "peace offering" because the root Hebrew word, *shalom*, means "peace."

We worship with thanksgiving and praise because we have been reconciled to God, who has made us new creations in Christ. As members of the Body of Christ, we have been reconciled to God. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are

therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:18–20).

Christians are ambassadors of Christ and ministers of reconciliation. We are witnesses of Christ's resurrection because we are new creations in Christ and have His resurrected life within us. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we say to all who will listen, "We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (verse 20). Like God, we don't count their sins against them, because what they do is just symptomatic of the real problem: their separation from God.

The message of reconciliation always begins with God, but it encompasses the relationships we have with others. It begins with God because any attempt to unite members of the fallen human race on any basis other than Christ has always failed. When we are reconciled to God, we become brothers and sisters in Christ, and that is the basis for our unity. The Body of Christ will remain fragmented as long as we associate purely on the basis of human reason, race, and religion.

The basis for Christian unity is our common heritage in Christ. That is why Paul exhorts us, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:2–6).

The possibility of being reconciled to God and others originates with Him, not humanity. We must personally choose to be reconciled to God by faith, but it is universally inclusive. We must voluntarily receive reconciliation as a gift and voluntarily share it as a ministry. The message has been entrusted to humankind to be delivered to all, but it is owned and accredited by God. It achieves what otherwise is impossible and is gratefully experienced by all those who have received it. It is the greatest gift that one can receive, yet it is meant to be given away.

How are the three offerings mentioned in Leviticus 3:1–17 fulfilled under the New Covenant?

Why must reconciliation begin with God before we can be reconciled to others?

What is the basis for Christian unity? What hinders that unity from being realized in churches and denominations?

How have you been personally reconciled to God?

On what basis can you now be reconciled to others?



Can you see how great God's love is for us? Who was the offended party? He was. Who took the first steps toward reconciliation? He did. Some will say that He sent the Son in His place, but this is a misunderstanding. Christ did not come apart from the Father who sent Him. They were both involved together in the work of reconciliation.

John Chrysostom (AD 347–407)

2
Be at Peace With Each Other

Mark 9:42–50

Key Point

Reconciliation occurs when repentance and forgiveness removes the enmity that exists between two parties.

Key Verse

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Romans 12:18

When Jesus finished His work on earth, He went to be with the Father. The eternal purpose of God is now being worked out through the Church empowered by the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 3:10–11). As children of God, we are the salt and light of the world (see Matthew 5:13–16). We have no light in and of ourselves, but we have the life of Christ within us (see John 1:4). Light does not produce life; rather, the eternal life of God produces light.

Our purpose is to glorify God in our bodies. The glory of God is a manifestation of His presence. Therefore, we glorify God when we manifest, or make known, to others the life of Christ within us. Bringing light into a dark world is what makes life meaningful. It doesn't matter what size our light is, because there is not enough darkness in the world to put out the light of one small candle. The truth spoken in love always shines through the darkness.

It has been said that you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. That may be true, but you can create a powerful thirst by putting salt in their oats. Salt enhances the flavor of life. When unbelievers see the children of God living a liberated life in Christ, they can't help but want what they have. Salt also

acts as a preservative against the evil forces that would seek to corrupt us. Therefore, “Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other” (Mark 9:50). Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). Any mortal can divide a fellowship, but it takes the grace of God to bring reconciliation to Himself and establish unity among His people.

Paul says, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18). However, it may not always be possible. If another person refuses to be reconciled, there is little we can humanly do other than to petition God. Regardless of how others respond, we must assume our responsibility to be peacemakers and continue carrying on the ministry of reconciliation. Our responsibility is to be a witness; God’s responsibility is to save them. We cannot assume responsibility for the lives of others, but we must assume responsibility for our own attitudes and actions. We cannot make others what we want them to be, and they cannot keep us from being the people God created us to be.

For reconciliation to occur, the enmity that exists between two people must be removed. Our reconciliation with God is now possible because the enmity that existed between Him and us was removed when Christ sacrificed His life for our sins. “The death he died, he died to sin once for all” (Romans 6:10). It can be argued that God has forgiven the sins of all people who have ever lived, but not all are reconciled to Him. That is why the Church has been given the ministry of reconciliation.

To establish and maintain a peaceful coexistence with each other, we have to repent, seek the forgiveness of those whom we have offended, and forgive those who have offended us. What we have freely received from God, we freely extend to others.

As children of God, how do we serve as the salt and light of the world?

How do we glorify God in our bodies?

Reconciliation with others is not always possible. What do we do in instances where the other person refuses to restore the relationship?

If you want to be like Jesus, why should you be the one to take the initiative to seek reconciliation instead of waiting for the other person?

What enmities currently exist between you and another person?



The apostle [Paul] here gives a very balanced command because he knows perfectly well that peace depends on both parties, and the other party may well be hostile and block peace. What he asks is that our mind should always be ready for peace and that the blame for any discord should lie with the other side and not with us. Of course, there are times when this command cannot be applied; for example, we cannot have peace and fellowship with evil. It is one thing to love people but quite another to love crimes. . . . Therefore, those who are perfect will love the sinner but hate his sin.

Origen (AD 184–253)

3
Seeking the Forgiveness of Others

Luke 7:36–50

Key Point

Our purpose in seeking forgiveness from others is not to get them to own up to their offense but to assume responsibility for our sin.

Key Verse

Settle matters quickly with your adversary.

Matthew 5:25

The poignant story of the sinful woman's devotion to Christ in Luke 7 reveals the gratitude we should feel when we realize that we are forgiven. Nobody had ever treated her like Jesus did, because nobody ever forgave her like Jesus did. She could hardly contain her love for Jesus, because she, who had been forgiven much, loved much. "Whoever has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47).

Apparently, the degree to which we have been forgiven has some effect on our capacity to love others. Maybe it is the degree to which we understand how much we have been forgiven that affects our capacity to love, since we have all sinned greatly and have been forgiven much. The self-righteous Pharisee had no capacity to love because he had no sense of his need for forgiveness.

We sought the forgiveness of God and received it at the time of our salvation. According to Jesus, now we need to seek the forgiveness of those whom we have offended. "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23–24). In other words, if we have offended someone, we

shouldn’t attempt to worship God if we have not gone to that person first and sought reconciliation.

The text is not suggesting we practice some morbid introspection by trying to determine any and all possible ways we may have offended someone else. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to cause us to “remember,” and it is the offense known by the other party with which we must deal. It doesn’t make any difference if the other person offended us more than we offended them. Our purpose for seeking forgiveness is not to get others to own up to their offense. We have to assume responsibility for *our* sin.

There are eight essential steps you must take when seeking the forgiveness of others for the purpose of reconciliation. First, identify in your own mind the offense you committed and the attitude behind it. Second, make sure you have already forgiven the person for any wrong on his or her part. Third, think through the precise wording you will use when asking for his or her forgiveness. Label your action as wrong, confess only as much detail as necessary for the offended person to understand, and make no defenses, alibis, or excuses. Do not project blame nor confess for another. Your confession should lead to a direct question: “Will you forgive me?”

Fourth, seek the right place and the right time to approach the offended. Fifth, make your quest for reconciliation in person and face to face. If the offense was an immoral indiscretion that could result in legal action, have a responsible third party present. Sixth, make restitution if it is warranted. Seventh, do not document your confession or write a letter. A letter can be easily misread or misunderstood, read by the wrong people, and be kept when it should be destroyed. Finally, if the person refuses to forgive, prayerfully commit your case to your heavenly Father and worship God with a clear conscience. You have done your part.

Why was the sinful woman in Luke 7:36–50 able to express such love for Christ? What is the connection between forgiveness and love?

What is the difference between the conviction brought by the Holy Spirit and our own personal assessment?

What should our ultimate purpose be in seeking forgiveness from others? Why is that only dependent on us and not the other person?

Is there someone from whom you need to seek forgiveness? How should you proceed?

What should you do if the other person doesn't accept your apology?



Having mentioned first the judgment, then the council, then hell, and having spoken of His own sacrifice, Jesus adds, "Come to terms quickly with your accuser, while you are on the way to court." That is, don't be saying, "What if I am the injured party? What if I have been plundered and dragged before the tribunal?" Even this kind of circumstance fails to qualify as an excuse or occasion for refusing to be reconciled.

John Chrysostom (AD 347–407)

4
Forgiving Others
Ephesians 4:29–32

Key Point

Forgiving another person from your heart is the most Christlike decision you will ever make.

Key Verse

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 4:32

It is inevitable that we will suffer at the hands of others, no matter how righteously we live. Physical and emotional abuse can leave us feeling bitter, angry, and resentful. Our old nature seeks revenge and repayment, but the Spirit says, "Forgive them, just as Christ has forgiven you." *But you don't know how they have hurt me!* As long as we hold on to our bitterness, they are still hurting us. Forgiveness sets us free from our past and stops the pain. We don't heal in order to forgive; we forgive in order to heal.

Forgiveness is not forgetting. God says, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (Hebrews 8:12). That doesn't mean God forgets; it means He will not use our past sins against us in the future. He will remove them as far from us as the east is from the west (see Psalm 103:12). We know that we haven't forgiven others if we continuously bring up their past and use it against them. Forgetting may be a long-term by-product of forgiving, but it is not the means by which we forgive. Nor are we tolerating sin when we forgive others. God forgives, but He never tolerates sin. We have the right to set up scriptural boundaries to stop future abuse.

Jesus forgave us by taking upon Himself the consequences of our sin. To forgive others as Christ has forgiven us means that we are agreeing to live with the consequences of their sin. That may not seem fair, but we will have to do it anyway. Everybody is living with the consequences of somebody else's sin. We are all living with the consequence of Adam's sin. The only real choice is whether we will do so in the bondage of bitterness or in the freedom of forgiveness.

As long as we refuse to forgive, we are emotionally chained to past events and the people who hurt us. The purpose of forgiveness is to set the captive free and then realize we have been the captives. It is for our own benefit that we forgive others.

But where is the justice? The cross is what makes forgiveness morally correct. Christ died once for *all* our sins. We will never have perfect justice in this lifetime, which is why there is a coming final judgment. The old nature wants revenge, but God said, "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). But why should we let them off the hook? That is precisely why we should forgive—because we are still hooked to them. If we let them off our hook, are they off God's hook? What is to be gained in forgiving others is freedom from our past. We have to believe that God will exact justice in the final judgment.

Forgiving others doesn't mean we refuse to testify in civil courts for the sake of social justice. Nor does it mean we avoid confronting a brother or sister who is living in sin. Forgiving others makes our heart right before God and allows us to experience our freedom in Christ. Only then can we righteously testify in court and confront others.

Why don't we naturally want to forgive others?

What does God mean when He says He will remember our sins no more? How does that apply to how we live with others?

What kind of boundaries do we need to set up to stop further abuse?

You may not like living with the consequences of another person's sin, but what are your alternatives?

Can you have an intimate relationship with your heavenly Father if you refuse to forgive others as He has forgiven you? Why or why not?



Patience means practicing forgiveness. To give patience is a far greater gift than to give money. The one who gives money to one who asks of him does indeed do a fine and admirable deed, but such a gift touches only the body. Spiritual gifts touch the soul with redemption. Hence, one who forgives does good both to his own soul and to that of the one who received forgiveness.

John Chrysostom (AD 347–407)

5
Forgiving From the Heart

Matthew 18:21–35

Key Point

You have to acknowledge your true feelings if you want to forgive from your heart.

Key Verse

If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

Psalm 130:3–4

If you have offended someone, don't attempt to worship God when you are convicted to seek reconciliation (see Matthew 5:24). Go first to the person who has something against you, seek forgiveness, and be reconciled. If someone has offended you, don't go to that person. Go first to God and forgive that person as Christ has forgiven you.

Many people wrongly think they have to go to the people who offended them in order to forgive them. That may be impossible and often is unadviseable. The person we need to forgive may be dead or unreachable. In some cases it would be unwise, because confronting an offender who is unrepentant may actually set a person up for more abuse.

Jesus says we should continue forgiving as many times as necessary (see Matthew 18:22) and then tells a parable to put our need to forgive others in perspective. "Ten thousand talents" was way beyond a lifetime wage (verse 24). Repaying the debt was not possible; therefore, the servant had no choice but to throw himself on his master's mercy. In comparison, "100 denarii" was equal to three months' wages (verse 28). His master had forgiven him an enormous debt,

but the man showed no mercy to his fellow servant. God requires us to be merciful as He has been merciful and to forgive as He has forgiven us.

How do you forgive others from your heart? Start by asking the Lord to reveal to your mind the people you need to forgive, including all those you have negative feelings toward. Don't overlook the need to let yourself off your own hook. Second, face the hurt and the feelings of hatred. If you are going to forgive from the heart, you have to allow the painful memories to surface. If you are unwilling to admit to the pain and the emotional damage, the forgiveness process will be incomplete. Humanly we try to suppress our emotional pain, but God will surface names and events so we can face them and let them go. To admit that you hate your parents, for instance, only means that you can now forgive them. Your feelings toward others will change after you forgive them. What is to be gained is your freedom.

Third, realize forgiveness is a crisis of the will. You choose to bear the consequences of the person's sin. You choose to let go of the past and grab hold of God. You choose not to seek revenge. Don't wait until you feel like forgiving, because you will never get there. God is not asking you to like the person who offended you; He is asking you to forgive as you have been forgiven so He can set you free and heal your damaged emotions. Let Him be the avenger. Stop the pain by forgiving from your heart every person who has offended you for every offensive thing he or she did. You can do this by praying, "*Lord, I forgive* [person] *for* [verbally express every hurt and pain the Lord brings to your mind and how it made you feel]."

Fourth, after you have forgiven every person for every painful memory, finish by praying, "Lord, I release all these people to You, and I release my right to seek revenge. I choose not to hold on to my bitterness and anger, and I ask You to heal my damaged emotions. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen."

How is it to our benefit to forgive others?

In Hebrews 12:15, the writer warned us not to let a root of bitterness spring up whereby many people will be defiled. How does our bitterness not only affect us but others?

Why is it necessary to forgive from the heart?

How is the person who offended you still hurting you?

If you refuse to forgive another person, which one of you is most negatively affected by that decision? Why?



> *Paul's words contain a great mystery. "For," he says in effect, "God took a chance in forgiving you. He placed His own Son in jeopardy. To forgive you he even sacrificed His Son. But you have received forgiveness time after time, at no risk or expense, yet you do not forgive!"*
>
> John Chrysostom (AD 347–407)

The Great Commandment

In Matthew 22, Jesus silenced the Sadducees who questioned Him about the resurrection, which they didn't believe in (see verses 23–33). Hearing this, the Pharisees wanted to test Jesus. "One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?'" (verse 36). The Pharisees knew that the first four laws of the Ten Commandments concern our relationship with God and the rest with how we relate to others (see Exodus 20:1–17).

Jesus replied, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments'" (Matthew 22:37–40). The Pharisees didn't ask Jesus for the second greatest commandment, but He gave it to them anyway. These two commandments define the whole purpose for the Word of God. We are to love God with our entire being. The second commandment necessarily flows from the first: If we love God with our whole being, we will also love our neighbor as ourselves.

The Pharisees knew that Jesus was right, but they struggled with the second part. So another expert in the law asked, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). Jesus answered by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan (see Luke 10:30–37). The Samaritans were foreigners and hated by the Jews. The Jews considered them to be half-breeds both physically and spiritually. Both groups were openly hostile to each other. But in the parable, the Samaritan proved to be the good neighbor by his deeds.

Loving our neighbor has no national boundaries, nor does it recognize any sectarian or religious differences. “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister” (1 John 4:20–21).

Our relationship with God is inextricably bound up with our relationships with others. We cannot have a righteous relationship with God in exclusion of others. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:43–45).

SESSION SIX

Living by the Spirit

A young pilot had just passed the point of no return when the weather changed for the worse. Visibility dropped to a matter of feet as fog descended. Putting total trust in the cockpit instruments was a new experience for him, for the ink was still wet on the certificate verifying he was qualified for instrument flying. There was blackness everywhere he looked. The turbulence didn't seem to matter when he could see, but now every movement of the plane was magnified.

The landing worried him the most. His destination was a crowded metropolitan airport with which he wasn't familiar. In a few minutes he would be in radio contact with the tower, but until then he was alone with his thoughts. Flying with no visibility, he became aware of how easy it would be to panic. He was tempted to reach for the radio and broadcast "Mayday!" Instead, he forced himself to go over the words in his flight training manual. His flight instructor had required him to practically memorize the book. He didn't care for the assignment at the time, but now he was thankful. Just thinking about how the plane was built to fly gave him some comfort.

Finally, he heard the voice of the air traffic controller. Trying not to sound apprehensive, the young pilot asked for landing instructions. "I'm going to put you in a holding pattern," the controller responded. *Great!* thought the pilot. *That's all I need—a few more hours up here!* However, there were no alternative choices. He had to trust the man in the tower whom he couldn't see, and obey the commands coming by way of the radio. There was no way he could land safely without the controller's help. To keep from giving in to fear, the pilot thought again of the words in the flight manual. As he did, the words of an old hymn—"trust and obey, for there's no other way"—took on new meaning.

Aware that this was no time for pride, he informed the controller, "This is not a seasoned pro up here. I would appreciate any help you could give me." "You

got it!” he heard back. For the next 45 minutes, the controller gently guided the pilot through the blinding fog. As course and altitude corrections came periodically, the young pilot realized the controller was guiding him around obstacles he couldn’t see and away from potential collisions. With the words of the instruction book in his mind, and with the gentle voice of the controller, he landed safely.

The flight controller worked on the assumption that the young pilot understood the instructions in the flight manual, and he based his guidance on that. Ironically, the controller had actually written the flight manual. The same is true with the Holy Spirit, who authored our training manual. He too guides us through the maze of life, helping us steer clear of obstacles and enabling us to land safely on the other side. This combination of God’s Word and the Holy Spirit’s guidance is how we navigate through life under the covenant of grace.

Daily Readings

1. Living in God’s Strength	Galatians 5:13–26
2. Overcoming Legalism	2 Corinthians 3:5–18
3. Overcoming Licentiousness	1 Corinthians 8:1–13
4. Filled With the Spirit	Ephesians 5:15–22
5. Releasing the Holy Spirit	1 Thessalonians 5:16–22

1
Living in God's Strength

Galatians 5:13–26

Key Point

Living by the Spirit is neither legalism nor license, and is the only means by which we overcome the desires of the flesh.

Key Verse

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Galatians 5:25

Under the Old Covenant, the children of Israel had to learn to abide by the Law in their own strength. But they could not do it, and neither can we. "The law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian" (Galatians 3:24–25). As children of God, we are under the New Covenant of grace, and we live by faith in the power of the Holy Spirit. However, the old nature/flesh still wants to have its way. "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh" (5:17). They are in opposition because the flesh operates independently of God, while the operation of the Holy Spirit is always dependent on God the Father.

How do we live by the Spirit? If we answered that question by giving three steps and a formula, it would put us back under the law. The Holy Spirit is a "He," not an "it." Living by the Spirit is a relational concept, not a formula. Actually, this passage in Galatians 5 tells us more what living by the Spirit is not, but that is extremely helpful, because it gives us the parameters in which we freely live.

First, living by the Spirit is not legalism. “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (verse 18). “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. . . . If you let yourselves be circumcised [for religious purposes], Christ will be of no value to you at all” (verses 1–2). In other words, “Don’t go back under the law.”

Second, living by the Spirit is not license. Paul tells us, “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh” (verse 13). In other words, living by the Spirit does not enable us to do whatever we want to do (see verse 17). The Holy Spirit enables us to do God’s will. So, if living by the Spirit is neither legalism nor license, what is it? It is liberty. “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Living by the Spirit is the only means by which we overcome the power of the flesh. “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Galatians 5:16). If we have a choice as to whether we live by the Spirit or by the sinful nature, how can we know which we are choosing? What do our lives reveal? “The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like” (verses 19–21).

However, the fruit of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (verses 22–23). Notice the contrast between deeds and fruit. Only the latter is a living spiritual principle.

Why is the flesh in opposition to the Spirit?

How is living by the Spirit neither legalism nor license?

How does the Holy Spirit bring freedom?

How can you know whether you are living by the flesh or living by the Spirit?

What part of your old nature/flesh do you find most difficult to give up?



The whole essence of the gospel is to think according to the Spirit, to live according to the Spirit, to believe according to the Spirit, to have nothing of the flesh in one's mind and acts and life. That means also to have no hope in the flesh. "Walk then," he says, "in the Spirit"—that is, "Be alive. If you do so you will not consummate the desires of the flesh. You will admit into consciousness no sin, which is born in the flesh."

Gaius Marius Victorinus (c. fourth century AD)

2
Overcoming Legalism

2 Corinthians 3:5–18

Key Point

If we live by the Spirit we will not carry out the desires of the flesh.

Key Verse

But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead.

Romans 7:8

Paul tells us, “No one who relies on the law is justified before God, because ‘the righteous will live by faith’” (Galatians 3:11). Scripture clearly teaches that believers are no longer under the law. So why does the Church still struggle with legalism? Why do some choose to live as though they are still under the law?

Some Christians actually prefer to have someone tell them what is right and wrong. Others are ignorant of their spiritual life in Christ and the means by which they live under the New Covenant. Troubled by the problems of immorality, they seek the simple solution of laying down the law.

If we want to relate to God under the law, we need to know what Scripture has to say about legalism. First, “All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law’” (verse 10). Trying to live by the law only produces guilt, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Legalists are driven people who never reach perfection. Perfectionism is a self-destructive process.

Second, “If a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law” (Galatians 3:21). The law is powerless to give life. Telling people that what they are doing is wrong does not give them the power to stop doing it. “He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Third, the law actually has the capacity to stimulate our desire to do what it was intended to prohibit. “When we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. . . . Sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in [us] every kind of covetous desire” (Romans 7:5, 8). To illustrate this truth, tell your children, “You can go here, but you can’t go there!” The moment you say that, where do they all want to go? Adam and Eve were commanded not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but they did (see Genesis 2:15–17; 3:6). The forbidden fruit seems to be the most desirable, as does the grass on the other side of the fence.

God’s commandments are not restrictive; they are protective. They reflect the nature of God and are therefore good. The glory of the Lord was revealed when He engraved the law in letters on stone (see 2 Corinthians 3:7–8). But trying to live a righteous life by the law can only lead to discouragement, defeat, and death. “If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness” (verse 9). Only by the Spirit of God can we live righteous lives and not carry out the desires of the flesh. Only by faith can we be justified. Only by the grace of God can we grow in Christ. “We all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory” (verse 18).

Why do you think that many in the Church struggle with legalism?

In what ways are those who try to live by the law under a curse? What type of curse does perfectionism bring?

How does the law actually stimulate our desires for sin rather than deter us from it?

Have you tried to live a righteous life under the law in your own strength? If so, how did that work?

How can you live a righteous life under the covenant of grace?



> *He [Paul] did not say "walk in the Spirit so that you will not have desires of the flesh" but "so that you will not gratify them." Not to have them at all, indeed, is not the struggle but the prize of struggle, if we shall have obtained the victory by perseverance under grace. For it is only the transformation of the body into an immortal state that will no longer have desires of the flesh.*
>
> Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430)

3
Overcoming Licentiousness
1 Corinthians 8:1–13

Key Point

Liberated Christians restrict their freedom for the sake of a weaker brother, and they abstain from violating the conscience of another.

Key Verse

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?

1 Corinthians 6:15

It is false reasoning to assume that if we are completely forgiven and under grace, we don't have to live according to the law. Living by the Spirit is not a license to do whatever we want. The licentious person disregards rules and regulations. "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Romans 6:1–2). God has delivered us from the bondage of sin. Why would we want to return to living in chains? We are not under the law, but we are not lawless. We have an eternal standard, but neither legalism nor license is the means by which we live righteous lives. Living under the grace of God by faith in the power of the Holy Spirit is not a license to sin; rather, it is a gracious means not to sin.

We are free in Christ to live a moral life, but there are times we should restrict our freedom. In 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul says, "'I have the right to do anything'—but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything'—but I will not be mastered by anything." Our freedom becomes license when we abuse our rights and indulge ourselves. We have the freedom to eat whatever we choose, but while one piece of dessert can be good, four pieces are not. We have

to master our appetites or they will master us. Always remember that the fruit of the Spirit is self-control (see Galatians 5:23). To continue experiencing the freedom we have in Christ, we have to live responsible lives in the power of the Holy Spirit and do all things in moderation.

A second instance in which we should restrict our freedom is when to do so is for the good of another. "'I have the right to do anything,' you say—but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything'—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others" (1 Corinthians 10:23–24). Paul qualified our freedom with the principle of love. "Be careful . . . that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak" (8:9). We have to learn to restrict our freedom for the sake of a weaker brother or sister. If what we are doing is morally permissible, but offensive to others, we shouldn't do it. We never have the right to violate another person's conscience. "When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ" (verse 12).

License is a form of spiritual deception referred to as Gnosticism. People think they can indulge their flesh without violating their spirit. They falsely reason, "What I do in the flesh doesn't matter; it is only what I do in the Spirit that matters." The Corinthians reasoned that food was both necessary and pleasurable. When their stomachs signaled hunger, it was to be satisfied. They also argued that sex was both necessary and pleasurable, and therefore any sex drive had to be satisfied. But Paul answered their argument when he wrote, "The body . . . is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (1 Corinthians 6:13). We cannot separate our bodies from who we are. Our bodies are temples of God.

Why is living under God's grace not a license to indulge ourselves?

Why is it important to do all things in moderation?

In what ways can our freedom actually lead another believer to stumble?

In what ways have well-meaning Christians been a stumbling block for you?

In what ways have you ever violated another person’s conscience?



One who is free and follows the Spirit and the truth in the higher sense may look beyond the mere letter of Scripture with its types and precursors. But he should not therefore despise the less mature nor give them cause to lose hope to those who cannot grasp the deeper sense. For even if they are weak and fleshly in comparison with those who are spiritual, they remain the Body of Christ.

Origen (AD 184–253)

4
Filled With the Spirit
Ephesians 5:15–22

Key Point

Spirit-filled Christians are always grateful and make melody in their hearts to the Lord.

Key Verse

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18

Paul writes, “We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body . . . and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Spirit’s indwelling (see John 14:17; Romans 8:9), sealing (see 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13), and baptism (see Galatians 3:27) all occur at the time of regeneration and are therefore never commanded. The Early Church began with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost but soon learned that there would be an ongoing need to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers is what sets them apart from the rest of humanity. A Christian is simply one in whom Christ dwells. Although the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in every true believer, not every believer is fully yielded to Him. Spirit-filled believers are yielded to God, and their lives are characterized by His presence.

“Being filled” has the idea of being under control. The fruit of the Spirit becomes evident in the lives of believers who are yielded to Him (see Galatians 5:22–23). It is a cooperative arrangement between God and His children, since “self-control” is a fruit of the Spirit. Our lives become manageable when we

choose to be filled with His Spirit. The unmanageable deeds of the flesh become evident when we dethrone God and exult self.

According to Paul, the responsibility falls on the believer to be filled with the Spirit. “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). The evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit is revealed in the ways we communicate with each other and with God (see Ephesians 5:19–20). The idea of being filled with the Spirit is not like an empty glass that needs to be filled. The idea is more like a balloon full of air that can become much bigger and sail much higher if it is filled with more air. In the same way, we who are already temples of the Holy Spirit can be filled even more if we fully open ourselves to the divine breath of God.

Our potential to bear fruit increases as we grow in Christ. As new believers, we are like lawn-mower engines who can do good work. As we grow, we become like tractor engines who can do greater works, but neither can accomplish anything without gas. We never outgrow our need for God. We cannot fulfill our purpose without the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and we can be if we confess our sin and yield to Him.

Make it your daily practice to do so with a simple prayer: “Father, I come before You as Your child. I thank You for Your grace and mercy by which I am saved. I confess I have not always yielded myself to You. I have been self-willed, self-centered, and self-sufficient. I choose to believe I am alive, free, and forgiven in Christ. I choose to live by faith according to what You say is true. I yield myself to You as my Lord and my Savior and ask You to fill me with Your Holy Spirit so I may glorify You in my body. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.”

How do we know when we are filled with the Spirit?

How is the filling of the Holy Spirit a cooperative arrangement with God?

What is wrong with saying, “I’m perfectly capable of managing my own life”?

Has there been a time when you realized that your life is spinning out of control? How much control do you really have over your destiny?

What is keeping you from crucifying the flesh and finding true self-control by yielding yourself to God?



> *One drunk with wine sways and stumbles. But one who is filled with the Spirit has solid footing in Christ. This is a fine drunkenness, which produces even greater sobriety of mind.*
>
> Ambrose (AD 340–397)

5
Releasing the Holy Spirit

1 Thessalonians 5:16–22

Key Point

When we yield ourselves to God and trust Him to work through us, we allow Him to release the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Key Verse

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.

John 7:37–38

Jesus encouraged His disciples to be persistent in prayer (see Luke 11:10) and assured them that God would not give them bad gifts. He said, “If you then . . . 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!” (verse 13). God fulfilled that promise at Pentecost, and He still gives it to those who seek Him for salvation and the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Yielding ourselves to God is a question of trust. Those in doubt wonder what God would do with their lives and how He would manifest His presence in them if they yielded themselves to His Holy Spirit. We can trust God because we know He has our best interests at heart. Only good can come from seeking God with all our heart. Jesus said, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them” (John 7:37–38). Jesus was referring to the internal presence of the Holy Spirit who is waiting to be released. The Spirit-filled Christian is always joyful, prays continuously, and is forever grateful (see 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).

When Moses saw the burning bush, he was startled because the fire did not consume it (see Exodus 3:3). If the bush had been burning because of the natural substance of which it was made, it would have been consumed immediately. It continued to burn because God was in the bush. The same is true of us. If we try to serve God out of our own strength, we will burn out. We don't live our natural lives for God; He lives His eternal life through us. We serve God by His strength, not by our strength. Therefore, "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt" (1 Thessalonians 5:19–20). God can choose to work supernaturally through anybody—He even spoke through Balaam's donkey (see Numbers 22:28)!

When God works through us, He does not bypass our humanity or trample our personalities. As Spirit-filled Christians we are fully human, and God works through our uniqueness. We are fully alive and fully free to fulfill our potential, which can only be accomplished in Christ. Scripture admonishes us not to quench the Spirit or grieve the Spirit (see Ephesians 4:30).

On the other hand, we shouldn't believe every spiritual manifestation is from God. We should "test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:21–22), because there are many spiritual counterfeits in this world. Scripture admonishes us to avoid two extremes. First, we should not participate with those who hold to a form of godliness but deny its power (see 2 Timothy 3:5). Second, we should not follow those who appear to be zealous for God but whose zeal is not based on knowledge (see Romans 10:2). To be spiritually safe, we must be knowledgeable of the truth and be spiritually discerning. If our motives are pure, we can yield ourselves to God and trust Him to work through us in any way He chooses. In doing so, we release the Holy Spirit and manifest the presence of God within us.

How does trust play a factor in how much we choose to yield ourselves to God? Why can we always place our trust in God?

What would our churches and homes be like if we fully trusted God to fill us with His Spirit?

Why do we need to test all things?

How are you trusting God to work through you in a way that pleases Him?

What tension do you personally feel about holding to a form of godliness but denying its power and being zealous for God but lacking knowledge?



> *We can thus see why Paul, not wanting the grace of the Spirit given to us to grow cold, exhorts us, "Do not quench the Spirit." The only way we can continue to be partakers of Christ is to cling until the end to the Holy Spirit, who was given to us at the beginning. Paul said, "Do not quench" not because the Spirit is under the power of men but because evil and unthankful men certainly do wish to quench the Spirit. Demonstrating their impurity, they drive the Spirit away by their unholy deeds.*
>
> Athanasius of Alexandria (AD 296–373)

A Gentle and Quiet Spirit

The Greek word for submission is a military term, and it means to "arrange under." If we are submissive to God, we will also be submissive to civil government (see 1 Peter 2:13–17), parents (see Ephesians 6:13), husbands (see 1 Peter 3:1–4) and wives (see Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:7), employers (see 1 Peter 2:18–23), and church leaders (see Hebrews 13:17). The charge to be submissive to governing authorities always comes with a promised blessing. It is for our own spiritual protection that we should be submissive. Scripture warns us that the first rebel is roaring around like a hungry lion, and it admonishes us to come under God's protective authority.

It is a mature act of faith to trust God to work in your life through something-less-than-perfect leaders who will undoubtedly be in positions of authority over you at some time in your life. You submit to the position of authority regardless of the person's capabilities. Should governing authorities demand that you do or

not do something that is contrary to the will of God, then you must obey God, as the Early Church did (see Acts 4:18–20). Rather than be disrespectful, offer them a creative alternative, as Daniel did (see Daniel 1:8–16). You also don't have to obey those who overstep the scope of their authority. Policemen can direct traffic and write tickets, but they cannot come into your church and command you to worship a certain way.

Submission never means surrendering who you are. In fact, being submissive is essential for your identity and freedom in Christ, which are unrelated to who you report to in this world. Nobody can keep you from being the person God created you to be. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). We may be ridiculed for being Christians, but "it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people" (1 Peter 2:15).

Should we suffer unjustly while serving under an earthly master for doing good, it 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" (verse 21). We should all strive for "the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (3:4). Esther was such a woman, and because of her willingness to be submissive to the king, who was her husband, she saved the nation of Israel.

Leader's Tips

The following are some guidelines for leaders to follow when using the VICTORY SERIES studies with a small group. Generally, the ideal size for a group is between 10 and 20 people, which is small enough for meaningful fellowship but large enough for dynamic group interaction. It is typically best to stop opening up the group to members after the second session and invite them to join the next study after the six weeks are complete.

Structuring Your Time Together

For best results, ensure that all participants have a copy of the book. They should be encouraged to read the material and consider the questions and applications on their own before the group session. If participants have to miss a meeting, they should keep abreast of the study on their own. The group session reinforces what they learned and offers the valuable perspectives of others. Learning best takes place in the context of committed relationships, so do more than just share answers. Take the time to care and share with one another. You might want to use the first week to distribute material and give everyone a chance to tell others who they are.

If you discussed just one topic a week, it would take several years to finish the VICTORY SERIES. If you did five a week, it is possible to complete the whole series in 48 weeks. All the books in the series were written with a six-week study in mind. However, each group is different and each will have to discover its own pace. If too many participants come unprepared, you may have to read, or at least summarize, the text before discussing the questions and applications.

It would be great if this series was used for a church staff or Bible study at work and could be done one topic at a time, five days a week. However, most study groups will likely be meeting weekly. It is best to start with a time of sharing and prayer for one another. Start with the text or Bible passage for each topic and move to the discussion questions and application. Take time at the end to summarize what has been covered, and dismiss in prayer.

Group Dynamics

Getting a group of people actively involved in discussing critical issues of the Christian life is very rewarding. Not only does group interaction help to create interest, stimulate thinking, and encourage effective learning, but it is also vital for building quality relationships within the group. Only as people begin to share their thoughts and feelings will they begin to build bonds of friendship and support.

It is important to set some guidelines at the beginning of the study, as follows:

- There are no wrong questions.
- Everyone should feel free to share his or her ideas without recrimination.
- Focus on the issues and not on personalities.
- Try not to dominate the discussions or let others do so.
- Personal issues shared in the group must remain in the group.
- Avoid gossiping about others in or outside the group.
- Side issues should be diverted to the end of the class for those who wish to linger and discuss them further.
- Above all, help each other grow in Christ.

Some may find it difficult to share with others, and that is okay. It takes time to develop trust in any group. A leader can create a more open and sharing atmosphere by being appropriately vulnerable himself or herself. A good leader doesn't have all the answers and doesn't need to for this study. Some questions raised are extremely difficult to answer and have been puzzled over for years by educated believers. We will never have all the answers to every question in this age, but that does not preclude discussion over eternal matters. Hopefully, it will cause some to dig deeper.

Leading the Group

The following tips can be helpful in making group interaction a positive learning opportunity for everyone:

- When a question or comment is raised that is off the subject, suggest that you will bring it up again at the end of the class if anyone is still interested.
- When someone talks too much, direct a few questions specifically to other people, making sure not to put any shy people on the spot. Talk privately

with the “dominator” and ask for cooperation in helping to draw out the quieter group members.

- Hopefully the participants have already written their answers to the discussion questions and will share that when asked. If most haven’t come prepared, give them some time to personally reflect on what has been written and the questions asked.
- If someone asks a question that you don’t know how to answer, admit it and move on. If the question calls for insight about personal experience, invite group members to comment. If the question requires specialized knowledge, offer to look for an answer before the next session. (Make sure to follow up the next session.)
- When group members disagree with you or each other, remind them that it is possible to disagree without becoming disagreeable. To help clarify the issues while maintaining a climate of mutual acceptance, encourage those on opposite sides to restate what they have heard the other person(s) saying about the issue. Then invite each side to evaluate how accurately they feel their position was presented. Ask group members to identify as many points as possible related to the topic on which both sides agree, and then lead the group in examining other Scriptures related to the topic, looking for common ground that they can all accept.
- Finally, urge group members to keep an open heart and mind and a willingness to continue loving one another while learning more about the topic at hand.

If the disagreement involves an issue on which your church has stated a position, be sure that stance is clearly and positively presented. This should be done not to squelch dissent but to ensure that there is no confusion over where your church stands.

Victory Series Scope and Sequence Overview

The Victory Series is composed of eight studies that create a comprehensive discipleship course. Each study builds on the previous one and provides six sessions of material. These can be used by an individual or in a small group setting. There are leader's tips at the back of each study for those leading a small group.

The following scope and sequence overview gives a brief summary of the content of each of the eight studies in the Victory Series. Some studies also include articles related to the content of that study.

The Victory Series

Study 1 **God's Story for You: Discover the Person God Created You to Be**

Session One: The Story of Creation
Session Two: The Story of the Fall
Session Three: The Story of Salvation
Session Four: The Story of God's Sanctification
Session Five: The Story of God's Transforming Power
Session Six: The Story of God

Study 2 **Your New Identity: A Transforming Union With God**

Session One: A New Life "in Christ"
Session Two: A New Understanding of God's Character
Session Three: A New Understanding of God's Nature
Session Four: A New Relationship With God
Session Five: A New Humanity
Session Six: A New Beginning

Study 3 **Your Foundation in Christ: Live by the Power of the Spirit**

Session One: Liberating Truth
Session Two: The Nature of Faith
Session Three: Living Boldly
Session Four: Godly Relationships
Session Five: Freedom of Forgiveness
Session Six: Living by the Spirit

Study 4 **Renewing Your Mind: Become More Like Christ**

Session One: Being Transformed
Session Two: Living Under Grace
Session Three: Overcoming Anger
Session Four: Overcoming Anxiety
Session Five: Overcoming Depression
Session Six: Overcoming Losses

Coming Soon

Study 5 **Growing in Christ: Deepen Your Relationship With Jesus**

Session One: Spiritual Discernment
Session Two: Spiritual Gifts
Session Three: Growing Through Committed Relationships
Session Four: Overcoming Sexual Bondage
Session Five: Overcoming Chemical Addiction
Session Six: Suffering for Righteousness' Sake

Study 6 **Your Life in Christ: Walk in Freedom by Faith**

Session One: God's Will
Session Two: Faith Appraisal (Part 1)
Session Three: Faith Appraisal (Part 2)
Session Four: Spiritual Leadership
Session Five: Discipleship Counseling
Session Six: The Kingdom of God

Study 7 **Your Authority in Christ: Overcoming the Enemy**

Session One: The Origin of Evil
Session Two: God and Evil Spirits
Session Three: Overcoming the Opposition
Session Four: Kingdom Sovereignty
Session Five: The Armor of God (Part 1)
Session Six: The Armor of God (Part 2)

Study 8 **Your Ultimate Victory: Standing Strong in the Faith**

Session One: The Battle for Our Minds
Session Two: The Lure of Knowledge and Power
Session Three: Overcoming Temptation
Session Four: Overcoming Accusation
Session Five: Overcoming Deception
Session Six: Degrees of Spiritual Vulnerability

Books and Resources

Dr. Neil T. Anderson

Core Material

Victory Over the Darkness with study guide, audiobook, and DVD. With over 1,300,000 copies in print, this core book explains who you are in Christ, how to walk by faith in the power of the Holy Spirit, how to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, how to experience emotional freedom, and how to relate to one another in Christ.

The Bondage Breaker with study guide, audiobook, and DVD. With over 1,300,000 copies in print, this book explains spiritual warfare, what our protection is, ways that we are vulnerable, and how we can live a liberated life in Christ.

Breaking Through to Spiritual Maturity. This curriculum teaches the basic message of Freedom in Christ Ministries.

Discipleship Counseling with DVD. This book combines the concepts of discipleship and counseling and teaches the practical integration of theology and psychology for helping Christians resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts through repentance and faith in God.

Steps to Freedom in Christ and interactive video. This discipleship counseling tool helps Christians resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts through genuine repentance and faith in God.

Restored. This book is an expansion of the *Steps to Freedom in Christ,* and offers more explanation and illustrations.

Walking in Freedom. This book is a 21-day devotional that we use for follow-up after leading someone through the Steps to Freedom.

Freedom in Christ is a discipleship course for Sunday school classes and small groups. The course comes with a teacher's guide, a student guide, and a DVD covering 12 lessons and the Steps to Freedom in Christ. This course is designed to enable new and stagnant believers to resolve personal and spiritual conflicts and be established alive and free in Christ.

The Bondage Breaker DVD Experience is also a discipleship course for Sunday School classes and small groups. It is similar to the one above, but the lessons are 15 minutes instead of 30 minutes.

The Daily Discipler. This practical systematic theology is a culmination of all of Dr. Anderson's books covering the major doctrines of the Christian faith and the problems Christians face. It is a five-day-per-week, one-year study that will thoroughly ground believers in their faith.

Specialized Books

The Bondage Breaker, the Next Step. This book has several testimonies of people finding their freedom from all kinds of problems, with commentary by Dr. Anderson. It is an important learning tool for encouragers.

Overcoming Addictive Behavior, with Mike Quarles. This book explores the path to addiction and how a Christian can overcome addictive behaviors.

Overcoming Depression, with Joanne Anderson. This book explores the nature of depression, which is a body, soul, and spirit problem and presents a wholistic answer for overcoming this "common cold" of mental illness.

Liberating Prayer. This book helps believers understand the confusion in their minds when it comes time to pray, and why listening in prayer may be more important than talking.

Daily in Christ, with Joanne Anderson. This popular daily devotional is also being used by thousands of Internet subscribers every day.

Who I Am in Christ. In 36 short chapters, this book describes who you are in Christ and how He meets your deepest needs.

Freedom from Addiction, with Mike and Julia Quarles. Using Mike's testimony, this book explains the nature of chemical addictions and how to overcome them in Christ.

One Day at a Time, with Mike and Julia Quarles. This devotional helps those who struggle with addictive behaviors and explains how to discover the grace of God on a daily basis.

Freedom from Fear, with Rich Miller. This book explains anxiety disorders and how to overcome them.

Setting Your Church Free, with Charles Mylander. This book offers guidelines and encouragement for resolving seemingly impossible corporate conflicts in

the church and also provides leaders with a primary means for church growth —releasing the power of God in the church.

Setting Your Marriage Free, with Dr. Charles Mylander. This book explains God's divine plan for marriage and the steps that couples can take to resolve their difficulties.

Christ-Centered Therapy, with Dr. Terry and Julie Zuehlke. This is a textbook explaining the practical integration of theology and psychology for professional counselors.

Getting Anger Under Control, with Rich Miller. This book explains the basis for anger and how to control it.

Grace that Breaks the Chains, with Rich Miller and Paul Travis. This book explains legalism and how to overcome it.

Winning the Battle Within. This book shares God's standards for sexual conduct, the path to sexual addiction, and how to overcome sexual strongholds.

The Path to Reconciliation. God has given the church the ministry of reconciliation. This book explains what that is and how it can be accomplished.

Rough Road to Freedom. This is a book of Dr. Anderson's memoirs.

For more information, contact Freedom In Christ Ministries at the following:

Canada: freedominchrist@sasktel.net or www.ficm.ca
India: isactara@vsnl.com
Switzerland: info@freiheitinchristus.ch or www.freiheitinchristus.ch
United Kingdom: info@ficm.org.uk or www.ficm.org.uk
United States: info@ficm.org or www.ficm.org
International: www.ficminternational.org
Dr. Anderson: www.discipleshipcounsel.com

Index

Aaron, 79
Abraham, 38, 50, 51, 54, 79
Absalom, 79
absolute truth, 5, 12, 17–19
acceptance, 6, 9, 82, 95–97, 100, 101, 153
accountability, 9, 95–98
acrophobia, 59–60
Adam, 18, 63, 78, 118, 134
affirmation, 82, 95
Ambrose, 144
Ambrosiaster, 32
Athanasius of Alexandria, 148
Augustine of Hippo, 44, 136
authoritarianism, 96
authority, 32–33, 95–97, 148, 159

Baal, 72
Balaam, 146
Barnabas, 99
Bathsheba, 22, 72, 79
Bede, 28, 70, 94
biblical truth, 14
burnt offering, 79, 105

Caleb, 68
Canaan, 68
Chrysostom, John, 16, 40, 52, 56, 108, 116, 120, 124
claustrophobia, 60
Clement of Alexandria, 62, 98
cognitive truth, 14, 15
coherence theory, 18, 19
Cyril of Alexandria, 20

David, 22, 71–73, 79
denarii, 122
Didymus the Blind, 102
Discipleship Counseling (book), 9, 157, 161
discipline, 6, 57, 67, 75, 82, 86, 87–89, 95

Early Church, 57, 141, 148

Elijah, 72
Ephrem the Syrian, 90
Esau, 79
Eve, 18, 63, 78, 134

Fall, the, 63, 157
fear object, 59–61, 63, 65, 67, 76
fellowship offering, 105–6
fruit of the Spirit, 130, 138, 142

Garden of Eden, 18, 78
Gnosticism, 138
Goliath, 71, 72, 73
Good Samaritan, 125

intervention, 22
irrational fears, 59, 76
Isaac, 38, 50
Isaiah, 14, 60, 92

Jacob, 79
James, 50–51
Jezebel, 72
John of Damascus, 48
Joshua, 57, 68
judgment, 6, 33, 60, 82, 87–90, 92, 93, 100, 116, 118
justification, 50, 53, 56, 129, 133

law, 13–14, 20, 29, 30, 32, 41, 42, 53–56, 87, 88, 96, 124–25, 129–30, 133–35, 137
legalism, 6, 55, 128, 129, 130, 131, 133–35, 138, 163
legalists, 134
license, 64, 129, 130, 131, 137–39
licentiousness, 6, 128, 137
Lot, 79
Luke, 14, 67, 83, 113

manifestation, 110, 146
Mark, 99, 101, 109
Miriam, 79
moral failure, 72
moral truth, 14, 15, 18
Mosaic Law, 32, 88, 124, 129, 134. *See also* law.
Moses, 68, 72, 79, 146

Nathan, 22
New Age movement, 18, 19
New Covenant, 32, 54, 105, 107, 129, 134
Noah, 38, 78

Old Covenant, 32, 105, 129
omnipotent, 59, 60
omnipresent, 59, 60
omniscient, 17
Origen, 24, 78, 86, 112, 140

Paul, 14, 30, 33, 50, 53, 64–65, 68, 96, 97, 99, 100–101, 106, 110, 112, 130, 136, 138, 142, 148
peace offering, 106
Pentecost, 57, 141, 145
perfectionism, 100, 134, 135
Peter, 68, 70, 72, 94
Pharisee(s), 54, 114, 124–25
Philistines, 71–72
postmodernism, 18
pragmatic view, 18, 19
Promised Land, 32, 57, 72

rational fears, 59, 61
reconciliation, 6, 104, 105–11, 114, 121, 163
recovery ministries, 22
regeneration, 141
repentance, 9, 22, 23, 54, 55, 109, 161

Sadducees, 124
Samaritan(s), 125
Samuel, 79
Saul, 68, 71, 79
scapegoat, 50
Sermon on the Mount, 125
shalom, 106
sinful woman, 113, 115
Solomon, 18, 32
spiritual disciplines, 9
Steps to Freedom in Christ, the, 9, 76, 161

Ten Commandments, 124
Theodoret of Cyr, 74
Timothy, 75
Tower of Babel, 79

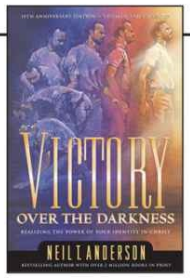
Uriah, 22

Victorinus, Gaius Marius, 66, 132

xenophobia, 60

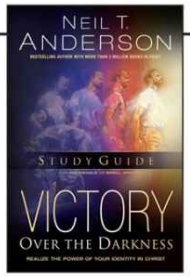
Dr. Neil T. Anderson was formerly the chairman of the Practical Theology Department at Talbot School of Theology. In 1989, he founded Freedom in Christ Ministries, which now has staff and offices in various countries around the world. He is currently on the Freedom in Christ Ministries International Board, which oversees this global ministry. For more information about Dr. Anderson and his ministry, visit his website at www.ficminternational.org.

Also From Neil T. Anderson



This bestselling landmark book gives you practical, productive ways to discover who you are in Christ. When you realize the power of your true identity, you can shed the burdens of your past, stand against evil influences, and become the person Christ empowers you to be.

Victory Over the Darkness



Great for small group or individual use, these thought-provoking personal reflection questions and applications for each chapter of *Victory Over the Darkness* will help readers grow in the strength and truth of their powerful identity in Jesus Christ.

Victory Over the Darkness Study Guide

BETHANYHOUSE

Stay up-to-date on your favorite books and authors with our free e-newsletters. Sign up today at bethanyhouse.com.

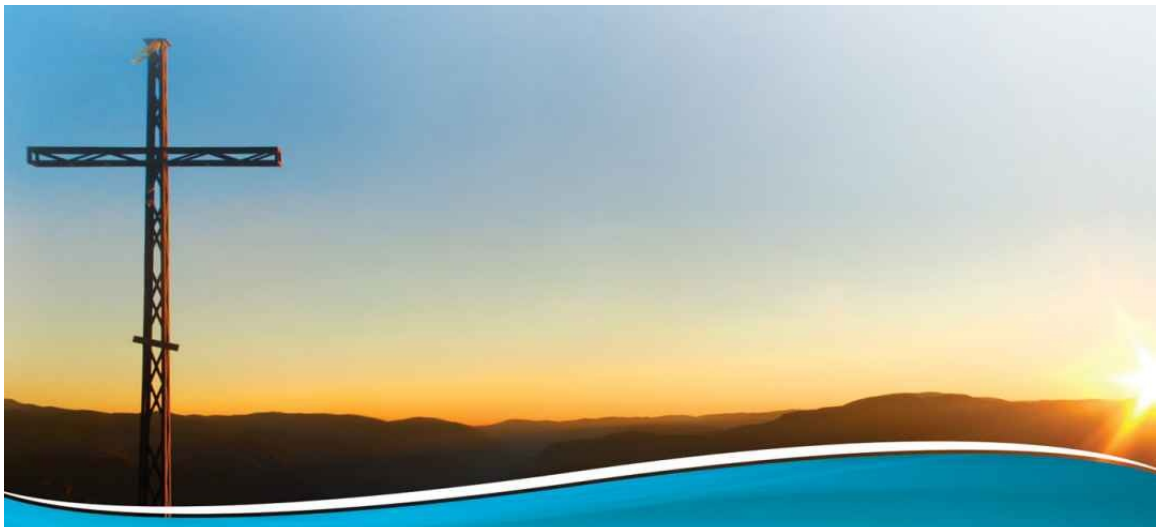
Find us on Facebook. facebook.com/BHPnonfiction

Follow us on Twitter. @bethany_house

Resources: bethanyhouse.com/AnOpenBook

Website: www.bethanyhouse.com

Facebook: Bethany House



Do Your Beliefs **Reflect the Truth?**

We all have faith in something. No doubt, the voices we listen to and follow will determine whether we live in freedom—or in bondage. Is your faith rooted in enduring truth? Or in the world's ever-changing messages? And how can you recognize one from the other?

In *Your Foundation in Christ*, Dr. Neil Anderson shows us how intricately intertwined we are with the God who created us, and how only His truth can set us free. In this third of eight VICTORY SERIES studies, you will discover what it means to live with Christ as your sure foundation, see your faith grow, gain power to live by His Spirit, and ultimately learn to overcome fear and live boldly for Him. This study, with six sessions, can be used individually or in a group, and includes a leader's guide, along with illustrations and questions for deeper reflection and practical applications.

Now is the time to deepen the roots of your faith, know more intimately the One who is truth alone—and courageously live out what you believe.



Dr. Neil T. Anderson is founder and president emeritus of Freedom in Christ Ministries. He was formerly the chairman of the Practical Theology Department at Talbot School of Theology. He holds five degrees from Talbot, Pepperdine University, and Arizona State University and has authored several bestselling books on spiritual freedom, including *Victory Over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker*.

BETHANY HOUSE
a division of Baker Publishing Group