

CROSSBEARERS FOLLOW UP STUDIES FOR NEW CHRISTIANS



“IF ANYONE WOULD COME AFTER ME, HE
MUST DENY HIMSELF AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS
DAILY AND FOLLOW ME.”

CROSSBEARERS



CROSSBEARERS:

A STUDY SERIES FOR THE NEW DISCIPLE

STUDIES CHOSEN FOR MATURITY INTO A CROSSBEARER:

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REMEMBER

Objectives: The two main objectives of this study are to **encourage disciples to remember how God has worked in their life** and **teach disciples how to take communion**.

The longer we are disciples; spiritual Alzheimer's can set in – we can begin to forget how God rescued us, how He has worked in our lives and how sinful and lost we are without Him. Remembering these things are a powerful weapon against Satan's schemes and attacks. If Satan can get us to forget, it is only a matter of time before we will be tempted to return to the world.

The Scriptures:

Remember God.

Exodus 16:1-3

Israel, even after being rescued from Egypt and experiencing the miracle at the Red Sea, was very quick to forget what God had done for them. When times became difficult the Israelites began to lack faith and trust in God. When Israel would cross the Jordan, to enter into the promise land, God commanded them to carry large stones from the middle of the Jordan River (which had been parted like the Red Sea) to be a "memorial for the people." (Joshua 4:1-7)

We too can set up "stones of remembrance" to help us remember God's power, love, and faithfulness in our lives. (*Keep a journal of answered prayers, take or make objects that will remind you of God's goodness and faithfulness and how he has worked in your life.*) Remembering God's past faithfulness is essential to trusting Him in the future!

Deuteronomy 8:10-18

Another danger, as we grow older as disciples, is forgetting God and His role in our lives. We can begin to believe that our lives and our blessings are the result of our own talents and abilities. God says that we will be tempted to forget Him not only in challenging times, but also in times of prosperity.

Remember the Cross.

Acts 20:7

It appears from the evidence of the New Testament and that of early church history that the disciples broke bread together at least once a week.

1 Corinthians 11: 23-30

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. His instructions were clear, "do this in remembrance of me." Christ's sacrifice and covenant are holy and precious. The Bible teaches us that taking communion calls for self-reflection and unity among the believers. Before taking communion, reflect on the following:

- Is there lingering sin I ought to confess?
- Is there a relationship in the church that needs to be mended?

Luke 22:14-20

The Passover was a CELEBRATION of how God rescued his people. Communion serves the same purpose for us today. It is an opportunity to reflect on God's love and mercy and how he has rescued us.

- The bread – representative of Christ's body, broken for his people
- The wine/juice – representative of Christ's blood, poured out for his people
- By taking communion we (1) acknowledge/remember Christ's sacrifice for us and (2) reconfirm the covenant relationship that he established with us. (3) we celebrate / give thanks for being rescued by God.

Remember Heaven!

Philippians 3:12-21

Q: How much did Paul think about the struggles and challenges of his past?

Q: How often do you think about heaven? Do you see being in heaven with God as your ultimate goal?

Q: How can you tell if someone's citizenship is heaven?

The Spiritual Exercise: Write out your conversion story. Keep it in a safe place and take it out and read it every year on your spiritual birthday (the anniversary of your baptism). Take communion together.



GOD LOVES YOU

The Objectives: The two main objectives of this study are to **teach disciples how to have an accurate (biblical) view of God** and **inspire them to build a daily relationship with God**.

Q: How do you think your experiences growing up have shaped your view of God?

Q: How was your relationship with your father? How do you view authority? Do you have any negative experiences with authority figures in your past?

Our relationship with our earthly fathers and our past experiences with other authority figures can have a profound effect on how we view God. God is NOT distant, aloof, or disinterested; He is NOT angry or short-tempered; God is not unjust or unloving. God is the perfect father and he desires to have a real, daily relationship with us.

The Scriptures:

You are important to God.

Luke 15:3-6

If you were the only person who needed to be rescued...God would come running after you! He loves you so much. This is who God is.

You are valuable to God.

Luke 15:8-10

Q: Have you ever searched frantically for something you lost? What?

Q: Would you go through the garbage or mud for a single penny? How about a \$100 bill or winning lottery ticket?

How valuable an item is determines our earnestness in finding it, and what we would be willing to do (even get dirty) to recover it.

There are many scriptures in the Bible that show us how valuable we are to God. In the Old Testament, God called his people, his "treasured possession" (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, 26:18; Psalm 135:4). In the New Testament, he calls us sons and daughters, a royal priesthood, a chosen people, a holy nation, the body and bride of Christ and tells us that he loved enough to send his One and Only Son to die for us. (Ephesians 1:4-8; 1 Peter 2:9; John 3:16)

The Bible teaches us that we are very valuable to God!

Psalms 40:1-4

Q: From what mud/mire did God save you?

God longs to be with you.

Luke 15:11-32

Q: When you sin and hurt God, does it make you hesitant to spend time with God?

Q: Do you think the prodigal son was initially eager to return to his father after what he had done?

Q: How did the father respond when his son returned home? Describe the father's love for his son.

Q: How does God feel if we choose to stay in the muck/mire of sin rather than repent and return home to him?

Q: How will God respond when we choose to repent, come home and spend time with him?

God loves us and desires to have a daily relationship with us. The only thing we can do to mess that up is to forget how much God loves us and allow Satan to convince us that we are better off with the pigs (in the muck/mire of sin) or that God will not accept us if we return.

The Spiritual Exercise: Take some time and write a letter about your upbringing, and specifically, how it may have affected your view of God. Work on having a biblical and accurate view of God.



TALKING TO GOD & FASTING

The Objectives: The two main objectives of this study are to **teach the disciples to have a prayer life** (start a prayer journal) based on the six sections of the Lord's Prayer and give them **a basic understanding of prayer and fasting**.

Q: How important is communication in a relationship?

Good communication is at the heart of every relationship. A relationship with God thrives on communication as well. In prayer we both speak to and listen for God on a personal level.

The Scriptures:

Mark 1:35

Jesus was a busy man, but always found time to pray and found places that were free from distraction.

Q: What are the potential challenges in your life for finding the time and place to pray?

Why do we need to pray?

Luke 11:1-4

Give us each day our daily bread...When a first century Jew heard "daily bread" they would have immediately remembered the exodus. In Exodus 16 (manna from heaven), the Israelites had to rely on God for nourishment. As they collected the manna, they could only collect enough for one day (anything extra would turn to maggots). This made God's people go to God everyday to get what they needed to survive.

In the same way today, we must understand that we cannot have a weekly Christianity. We cannot survive spiritually if we just rely on weekly times of fellowship and worship for our spiritual nourishment. Like the Israelites we must learn to go to God everyday to sustain us.

Q: What would have happened to the Israelites if they had stopped going daily into the desert for manna?

Q: What will happen to us if we do not go spend time with God daily?

JESUS USED THIS BASIC MODEL WHEN TEACHING HIS DISCIPLES TO PRAY:

- "Our Father" — **Acknowledge God**
- "Hallowed be your name" — **Praise God** (Read some Psalms for inspiration!)
- "Your Kingdom come" — **Pray for others** (The church, family, enemies, leaders, & anyone you want to see in heaven!)
- "Give us each day our daily bread" — **Pray for your daily needs** (Think spiritual, emotional, and physical needs; Pray through your daily schedule)
- "Forgive us our sins." — **Confess and ask God for forgiveness** (Pray specifically through your sins. Remember, the more aware you are of your sin...the more grateful you will be for Jesus!) (Luke 7:36-50)
- "Lead us not into temptation." — **Put on your spiritual armor.** (Pray for God's protection.)

Luke 11:5-13

Q: What does Jesus' story teach us about our prayer lives?

- Be bold. (Verse 8)
- Know that God loves you and wants what is best for you! (Verse 13)

Philippians 4:6-7 / 1st Peter 5:7—God cares for you! Prayer is a time where we can bring our burdens, anxieties and worries to God.

1st Thessalonians 5:17—"Pray continually;" prayer is something that should become a continuous habit. Even when we are engaged in other activities, we can always include God in our thoughts and heart.

Q: How would "continual prayer" change the way you engage your day-to-day activities and schedule?

The Spiritual Exercise: Start a prayer journal using the outline that Jesus gave his disciples. Have a regular distraction-free time to pray everyday, and find special/inspiring places to have prayer times. Next week use your time together to pray (using Luke 11 / prayer journals).



FASTING

The Objectives: The main objective of this study is to give you a **basic understanding of fasting, including why, when, and how to fast.**

In brief, fasting is something that people do when they are drawing close to God, seeking out his will and depending on him. Like Jesus in the desert, fasting is another way we learn to depend on God.

The Scriptures:

Matthew 9:14-15—Jesus expected that after he departed, his disciples would dedicate themselves to the spiritual act of fasting.

The Bible teaches us that there are many reasons we should fast:

- Repentance
 - David fasted after sinning with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:15-16, 22)
 - Nineveh fasted as a whole nation for God's mercy (Jonah 3:5-8, 10)
 - Paul fasted after being confronted by Jesus (Acts 9:9)
- To draw near to God
 - Moses fasted for 40 days (Exodus 34:27-28)
 - Used in conjunction with worship (Luke 2:36-37, Acts 13:1-3)
- For God's deliverance
 - Daniel prayed for God to deliver Israel from slavery (Daniel 9:3)
- To seek God's will in appointing and guiding leadership (Acts 14:23)
- For other people
 - David fasted for sick friends (Psalm 35:13)
 - God called his people through the prophet of Isaiah to not be self-centered in their worship, prayers, and fasting (Isaiah 58:6-8)
 - In the days of Isaiah, when the nation of Israel fasted, they were fasting for their own personal deliverance, but they were not concerned for other people around them that were starving, naked, and homeless. God wanted them to have a heart, to fast about other people's spiritual needs as well as their own, and to bring forth good works of helping the needy. God is telling us that fasting brings us closer to God's will, and His will is to have humility, love, and concern for others. This is the most important principle of fasting, to draw closer to God and to seek His righteousness and His will in our lives.

THE BIBLE ALSO TEACHES US HOW TO FAST:

- Fasting should be done in humility and secrecy (Matthew 6:16-18)
- Fasting should be accompanied by prayer and Bible study. (Nehemiah 1:4; Nehemiah 9:1-3; Joel 2:12; Acts 13:1-3)
- Fasting can be partial (*abstaining from only specific things*) or absolute (*no food or water at all*).
 - Absolute fast (Ezra 10:6; Esther 4:16)
 - Partial fast (Daniel 10:3)
- Fasting can be done corporately (group) or individually (personal).
 - Corporate – 1 Samuel 7:5-7; Ezra 8:21-23; Acts 13:1-3
 - Personal – Daniel 9:3; Psalm 35:13

Fasting should be a regular part of a Christian's life. Fasting helps us draw near to God, depend on Him, and be strengthened and empowered by Him. Those who had a great relationship with God in the Bible (Moses, Elijah,

The Spiritual Exercise: *Before beginning a fast, please consult a doctor if you have any relevant health issues and remember that God desires us to be good stewards of our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Decide to fast (to be closer to God, for a friend, for repentance, etc.). Pick a day and the type of fast that you will dedicate yourself too. Keep the fast between yourself and God.*



BIBLE STUDY

The Objectives: The two main objectives of this study are to **teach disciples how to have effective, daily Bible studies** and **teach them to use basic Bible tools** (*concordances, etc.*)

Having gone through the Word study, you should have a sufficient understanding for how important God's word is. The following study delves a little further into the importance of personal Bible study.

The Scriptures:

Luke 4:1-13—It was the "habit" of Christ to overcome temptation by knowledge of the Scriptures. He knew them so well; he was even able to see where Satan was misusing them! (v.10-12; 2 Peter 3:15-16)

Satan's temptations and deceptions will be something we battle day-in and day-out, overcoming them means building the Christ-like habit of answering the temptations with the Word of God.

Q: What kinds of temptations does Satan bait you with? How can Scripture help you overcome?

Psalm 1:1-3—The Bible does not actually say that we should have a "Quiet Time" everyday...it actually goes much further! The blessed man is the one who meditates on God's word day and night (not just for 30 minutes in the morning)!

Q: What is the difference between "meditation" and "just reading"?

Q: How has meditation on the Word led you to "prosperity" in your life (v.3)?

Psalm 119—The longest chapter of the Bible extols the benefits and virtues of God's Word.

- Keeping a pure and upright life comes from hiding God's word in your heart (v. 9– 10)
 - Jesus teaches us that man's heart is a source of sinfulness (Mark 7); our hearts are changed by the work of the Holy Spirit and by "hiding God's word in our hearts" we can take preventive measures to keep us from sinning
- We should not delay to obey God's commands (v. 59-60)
 - Bible study is rendered worthless if we do not put what we learn/know into practice (James 1:22-25)

Q: What are some reasons why you might "delay" to obey God's commands?

Acts 8: 26-29—The Ethiopian Eunuch was a busy, important man who found the time to study God's word. (*Elaborate more on the desire to learn and the heart of the Ethiopian Eunuch*)

PRACTICAL BIBLE STUDY TIPS:

- Decide in advance what you want to study.
 - Suggestions:
 - Study one book of the Bible (read, outline, study)
 - Study a section of a book (i.e. Sermon on the Mount, Last Supper, etc...).
 - Study one topic (i.e. Grace, faith, impurity, etc. / Use concordance).
 - Study the life of one character (Abraham, Moses, David, Ruth, etc...).
 - Study out a sermon you've heard, be a Berean (Acts 17: 11).
 - Ask a question you don't know the answer to and dig for an answer.
- Read out loud
- Read different translations
- Use a notebook to write down thoughts and questions about your Bible study.
- Share what you are learning with others.

The Spiritual Exercise: Have a Bible study together. Learn to use a concordance and any study tools that will complement your Bible study.



THE BODY OF CHRIST

The Objectives: The two main objectives of this study are to **teach disciples about their relationships and roles within the body of Christ (the Church)** and to **help them consider how their individual gifts can be used to serve the body of Christ.**

When we enter the body of Christ, relationships are radically transformed! Instead of having ourselves as the center of our focus, we are to 'consider others better than ourselves' (Philippians 2:3). The Bible teaches us that church is not something we attend; it is an opportunity to serve and tend to the needs of others.

The Scriptures:

Our Relationships

John 13:34-35

Jesus commanded us to love each other as he has loved us. This quality of love and our relationships with one another are what make us distinct as Christians. Jesus' willingness to serve and sacrifice for his disciples was the ultimate expression of His love. We need to demonstrate that same love (service and sacrifice) for one another.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN PRACTICE?

Look after each other's material needs—1 John 3:17.

Being concerned about each other's spiritual well being—Colossians 1:28.

Mark 3:35

We are Jesus' brothers and sisters if we do God's will. Because of this common purpose, Christian relationships transcend even blood relations.

Our Role

Ephesians 4:14-16

Everyone has a role to play and work to do in the church; finding that role and doing that work is essential for the church to be built up and grow into maturity.

1st Corinthians 12:12-26

Everyone is essential to the body functioning as God intended it! Even the weakest part is incredibly important! We must value everyone's gifts and roles in the church and understand that we need one another! We rejoice and hurt together (that's sincere love, from the heart!—1 Peter 1:22)

What's Your Gift?

A spiritual gift is a particular talent/ability that God has put in your life. While some spiritual gifts were "miraculous" (it is our belief that these gifts were specific to the apostolic age and are no longer available to us today); the "non-miraculous" gifts are just as powerful and critical for building up the body of Christ.

- Non-miraculous gifts—Romans 12:4-8
- Leadership gifts—Ephesians 4:11

1 Peter 4:10

Whatever gift you have received should be used to serve God's people. As individuals, God has placed gifts, talents and abilities in our lives to be used to build up his kingdom in unique ways.

Q: What are some of your gifts? How can you use those gifts to serve God's people?

Examples: Leadership, Children's Ministry, Ushering, Youth Ministry, Administration, Hospitality, Benevolence

The Spiritual Exercise: Find an area in the church where you can serve. Next week when you get together go out and serve or offer hospitality to someone together.



A BROTHER IS BORN FOR ADVERSITY

(Confession/Restoring One Another)

The Objectives: The two main objectives of this study are to **teach disciples how to confess their sins and restore others who have sinned.**

The Bible says that a friend loves at all times and a brother (family) is born for adversity (*Proverbs 17:17*). Our spiritual friendships and our spiritual family (the church) are designed to love us, support us, and help us find strength in God as we face the adversities of life.

Q: What kinds of adversity or challenges do you think you will have or have had already as a disciple of Jesus?

- Persecution, temptation, family challenges, health issues, financial hardships, conflict in relationships, problems at school, problems at work, etc..

The Scriptures:

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Q: What is the advantage of having a close spiritual friend?

The Bible tells us: "Pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" We need people in our spiritual lives to help us up when we struggle and fall or it is only a matter of time before we will experience grief and despair!

Confession

1 John 1:5-10

"Walking in the light" means our lives are an open book and on display. The Bible tells us that "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."

Q: Can we be close to God if we live in darkness or dimness (living in a little darkness)?

Claiming to be without sin equates to deceiving ourselves and calling God a liar. Confessing our sin allows us to "walk in the light;" this has 2 effects:

- We have fellowship with one another (builds deep, authentic friendships).
- Jesus' blood purifies us and allows us to have a relationship with God.

Q: What are some obstacles that would prevent you from being open about your life and confessing sin?

Proverbs 28:13

Concealing sin will cause downfall but we will find mercy if we confess and renounce our sins.

Restoring One Another

Galatians 6:1-2

Q: What should we do when someone confesses their sin to us?

IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES IN RESTORING ONE ANOTHER:

NEVER be harsh! Do not overreact. God calls us to "restore gently."

Never say things like, "Amen, brother, thanks for being open." God calls us to help them come to repentance "to RESTORE them".

Make sure that they bring things into the light (no dimness). Make sure you are getting enough information to really pray specifically and also help them to come to repentance.

Always ask them "What do you think repentance looks like?" The goal is to help them to bring everything into the light and help them to repent (be restored) so that times of refreshing can come (Acts 3:19)

Pray. Praying together after confession is always helpful.

James 5:15-17

It is vitally important to pray for one another after confession so that God can truly bring about healing.

The Spiritual Exercise: Have a time of confession together. Role play how you would confront someone who has fallen into sin and how to respond to those who confess their sins to you.



DISCIPLING

The Objectives: The two main objectives of this study are to **help disciples understand the importance of discipling** and **to inspire them to develop dynamic and healthy one another relationships**.

Discipling is simply the training and learning process of becoming like Jesus. Discipleship and discipling is woven throughout virtually every page of the NT. In the spirit of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), where the apostles are commanded to “disciple the nations” and “teach obedience”, church members “disciple” and “teach obedience” to one another through individual and group settings.

The Scriptures:

Christ-Centered Discipling

1 Corinthians 11:1

In our discipling relationships; Christ is the standard and our lives are examples.

Q: What is the difference between setting an example with our lives and making our lives a standard?

Q: Why is it important to know this distinction?

We need to have the humility and desire to imitate the Christ-like qualities in one another. However, the foundation and focus of our discipling relationships should always be our desire to be just like Jesus.

Teach & Admonish

Colossians 3:16

Q: What should always be “richly” apart of our discipling relationships?

Q: What is the difference between “teaching” and “admonishing”?

Teaching is to impart skills or knowledge. This is proactive discipling.

Admonishing is to warn or notify of a fault; to reprove gently or kindly, but seriously; to exhort; To counsel against wrong practices; to caution or advise; to warn against danger or an offense. This is reactive discipling.

We need both “proactive” and “reactive” discipling to have a healthy walk with God.

Proverbs 27:4-5

The Bible teaches us that it is better to be corrected harshly in love, than to have someone who does not love you enough to correct you at all.

Q: Do you have spiritual friends that you trust enough to allow them to correct / challenge you on a regular basis?

Q: Are people who tell you “what you want to hear” rather than “what you need to hear” really a good friend?

One-Another Passages

There are dozens of “one-another” passages in the Bible. These passages give simple direction for how Christians should and should not act toward one-another. These passages help govern and instruct our discipling relationships.

- Hebrews 3:13—encourage one another daily
- Hebrews 10:24 – spur one another on toward love and good deeds
- Galatians 5:13—serve one another
- Galatians 6:2 – carry each other’s burdens

Q: Do you have these kinds of “one-another” relationships? Do you actively seek them out for your life?

Important Discipling Practicals:

- Have a designated discipling partner and/or group in your life; meet regularly.
- Have dynamic “discipling times” with your partner/group: confess sins, share burdens, talk about what you are learning from God, pray together, share your faith together, challenge one another’s faith, etc.

The Spiritual Exercise: Have a time of good point/bad point; as a way to learn to encourage and spur one another on. Start out with coming up with 3 good points (areas they are Christ-like) about one another and then sharing 1 bad point (an area they need to repent/grow in) about one another. See how many “one-another” passages can you find in the Scriptures?



THE COMPASSION OF JESUS

The Objectives: The two main objectives of this study are to **inspire disciples to see the world through Jesus' eyes (from His perspective)** and **encourage them to have the heart and compassion of Jesus.**

The Scriptures:

Matthew 9:35-38

Q: What did Jesus do "when he saw the crowds"? What does it mean to have compassion for people?

Hebrews in the days of Jesus saw compassion as "being moved" to kindness, benevolence, or love.

Q: Have you ever seen anything that moved you to kindness, benevolence, or love? (*charitable commercials for starving children, homeless people on the street, disaster victims on news, etc.*)

Q: What does he mean "sheep without a shepherd"?

A sheep without a shepherd has no one looking out for them, no one protecting them from the predators of the world. The Bible tells us that Satan is a devouring lion in our daily spiritual lives. People we pass everyday have no one to care for them spiritually, they are all alone and wandering without direction. This is how we should see people as we go through our day.

Mark 6:30-44

Life can be exhausting! Jesus and his disciples were tired and hungry and left to get some rest. However, when they got to where they were going they found more people in need.

Q: What was Jesus' heart? What motivated Jesus to meet the needs?

Q: Think of times that you have had a long, tiring day (of work, school, family responsibilities, serving in the church); were you still willing to have compassion for the needs of others?

We may feel like the disciples, who didn't feel like they had the physical or emotional resources to meet the needs of others. However, we must never forget that if we are willing to act faithfully, God will give us the resources to meet the needs of others and be strengthened ourselves.

Mark 1:40-42

Jesus was willing to risk his personal well-being, his reputation, and even his life to help this man. Jesus had the heart to love the people who were looked down upon and were regarded as outcasts because of their physical, moral, or social condition.

Q: Would you be willing to risk your well-being, your reputation, and even your life to help someone?

Q: Do you love those around you who may be considered outcasts by others because of their physical, moral, or social condition?

Mark 2:13-17

Jesus saw not only people's physical and emotional needs, he saw their spiritual needs. These people may have looked okay on the outside but were spiritually sick, hurting, and needy!

Q: Do you see the spiritual needs of those around you?

Psalms 116:5-6

The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion and when I was in great need, he saved me.

As disciples of Jesus we must always remember why we serve, why we evangelize, and why we deny ourselves for the needs of others...we do these things to be like God...who is full of compassion and who, when we were in "great need" saved us!

The Spiritual exercise: Imitate Jesus' heart for people by having compassion that leads you to action. Decide to see the spiritual and physical needs of those around you and have a heart to help!



PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL

The Objectives: To **equip and inspire disciples to bold, respectful, and (most of all) effective evangelism.**

Evangelism is part of living out the Great Commission of Matthew 28 and a responsibility all Christians have. To “evangelize” literally means to “proclaim the gospel”. When it comes to evangelism, few young Christians possess both boldness and tact. People usually go to one extreme or the other: so tactful that they say little, if anything, or so bold that tact and respect is thrown to the wind. This Bible study teaches us the balance we need to effectively “proclaim the gospel.”

The Scriptures:

Motivation

2 Corinthians 5:10-21

We proclaim the gospel (trying to persuade men) because we know and fear God. Furthermore, Christ’s love “compels” us to live our lives for Him as His ambassadors. Understanding that God has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

Boldness

Romans 1:16-17

The gospel is nothing to be ashamed of because it has the power to save.

Luke 9:23-26

If we are ashamed of Jesus and his words, he will be ashamed of us.

Spiritual Principles for Effective Evangelism

Matthew 10:11-14

Be discerning and do not be focused on or discouraged by those who aren’t serious about God.

I Thessalonians 2:7-8

Invest in a friendship, don’t just get together to do Bible studies; have fun together, study books together, eat meals together...share your life!

Matthew 5:14-16

Be an Example. It is God’s intention that our lives shine in the world for all to see and for our good deeds to bring him glory

Q: Does the example of your personal life, academics, finances, work ethic, etc. bring glory to God and make the gospel attractive, or would you be ashamed to show people how you behave in certain areas of your life?

Acts 4:29-31

Pray for boldness! God will answer your prayers.

1 Peter 3:15-16

Show gentleness and respect.

Helpful Hints

- 1) Push yourself to be friendly and to start conversations wherever you go.
- 2) Have a notebook/journal where you collect names and phone numbers of those you are reaching out to; this doubles as a follow-up list and as a prayer list.

The Spiritual Exercise: Make a list of people you would like to see become a disciple in the next year (family, friends, co-workers, classmates, etc.). Add this list to your prayer journal. Pray that God will open a door for you to share your faith with the people on your list. Pray for boldness and then go proclaim the gospel together.



HELPING THE POOR

The Objectives: To **teach disciples the importance of helping the poor** and **to inspire them to serve and sacrifice** for the poor and needy.

We can help those less fortunate than us in various ways, by contributing money to charity causes, by volunteering or simply by taking opportunities to help those less fortunate on a personal level. In any case, it is very important that a disciple adopts the heart to serve those in need.

The Scriptures:

Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus judges between the “sheep” and “goats”. Sheep = those who give to others indiscriminately. “Goats” = those who do not, and simply take for themselves. The Bible says that we will be judged on how generous and helpful we are to the poor and needy!

Q: Who can you identify in your life that is among the “least of these”?

Q: How can you serve them?

Proverbs 21:13

The way that we respond to the poor/less fortunate has implications for the way that God will treat us.

Proverbs 14:31

We are honoring God when we are kind to the poor.

James 1:27

God has a heart for those who are in distress, who are vulnerable and unable to take care of themselves.

Galatians 2:9-10

The preaching of the gospel around the world is to be accompanied with service to the poor. They go hand-in-hand.

Q: Why do you think it was so important for the apostles to establish that the spread of the gospel be done along with service to the poor?

Q: Why is it important for us today to accompany our preaching with service?

Q: How eager are you “to remember the poor?”

As we proclaim the gospel, we must “continue to remember the poor.” When we do this we honor God and are a light to the world. As Jesus said, “let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” (*Matthew 5:16*)

The Spiritual Exercise: Give a regular poor contribution, make every effort to serve the needy in your community (*Be on the lookout for local HOPE Worldwide projects in the church*) or even consider praying about the possibility of adoption.



CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE: CORD OF THREE STRANDS

Introduction: God's word and power provide us with everything we need for a happy, godly, fulfilling life in every area (2 Timothy 3:17, 2 Peter 1:3, John 10:10). The area of marriage is crucial, and if a marriage is not going well, serious spiritual problems will also be present. Marriage is a vital area for discipling. Indeed, Christian marriage is one arena in which disciples will dramatically outshine the many worldly examples surrounding them. A great marriage draws others to Jesus!

The Scriptures:

God's Plan

Genesis 2:24, Proverbs 18:22

Explain:

Marriage meets our deepest needs. Your husband or wife should be your closest friend.

- **Matthew 19:9**—marriage is for life.

Spiritual Marriage Principles:

Communication

Ephesians 4:29 – Build up with your words, do not tear each other down! (Proverbs 12:18, 18:21)

James 1:9 – Be quick to listen. (Proverbs 18:13)

Colossians 3:13, Ephesians 4:26 – Deal with resentments or bitterness / Do not bury them

Proverbs 15:22 – Plans fail for lack of counsel – Be partners in planning. (Set up a regular planning time to work together on scheduling, finances, household needs, etc.)

Selfishness

Colossians 3:19, 1 Peter 3:7 – Know what GOD expects! Husbands should NEVER be harsh! Husbands must serve their wives, being considerate. Husbands should do their share of the housework, cleaning, taking care of the children...

1 Peter 3:5-6 – Know what GOD expects! Wives must learn submission. Wives should never nag or be bossy. Proverbs 21:19, 25:24, 27:15

Ephesians 5:22-33— The husband has been called by God to be the spiritual leader of his family.

Marriage Discipling / Counseling

The scriptures teach us many things about marriage: our roles, responsibilities, our need for unity, how we should speak to one another, how we should treat one another, etc. We need to be "taught to obey" these scriptures just like we are taught how to have a deeper relationship with God, to love and serve others, and to serve the poor. Sometimes our marriage is the last place we practice our Christianity, when in truth, it should be the first place!

Acts 5:1-11—do not "protect" each other when there is lukewarmness, sin or compromise

Proverbs 15:22—take advice.

Q: Is either one of you closed to input?

Every marriage needs counseling; no one is above it. Marriages need discipling. "Four-way openness": husbands and wives having permission from each other to speak to the other's discipler if there are unresolved problems. This is a powerful safeguard and a good test of sincerity.

Spirituality

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Talk about spiritual things when you are together.

Pray with your spouse daily.

Considering studying a spiritual book together (*marriage, parenting, or just a spiritual book in general*).

Romance

1 Corinthians 7:5—do not deprive one another.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 – Do not forget to love like the Bible describes (*this is the best recipe for romance!*) Remember the special touches: cards, flowers, presents, surprises....

The Spiritual Exercise: Do something this month to build up your marriage spiritually.

(*Examples: Pray together, seek out marriage discipling/counseling, share your faith together, start reading a marriage book together, etc.*)



SELF-DISCIPLINE

Introduction: How many of us have had great dreams for how God was going to use us—how he would mold us into what he wanted us to be? Yet when the going got rough and the process became painful, we resisted—perhaps even took a couple of steps backward! Few of us are naturally disciplined; discipline must be learned. And yet without it, how do we suppose that we will take the gospel into all the world? Surely this is fantasy! Discipline, therefore, must be built into our Christian lives from the earliest possible moment.

The Scriptures:

1 Timothy 4:7

Train yourself to be godly. Physical training (e.g. sports) is of limited value, but spiritual training is immeasurably valuable. The Christian life is a process of training in righteousness.

Laziness

Hebrews 6:12

Do not become lazy. Laziness is a constant threat to the life of every Christian, young or old. Imitate those who are patient, faithful and disciplined. Look for good examples; learn from them. Realize laziness is a sin.

Suggested—Proverbs 12:1, 24:30-34, 26:13-16

Idleness

1 Thessalonians 4:11ff

Be constructive members of society and of the church. Hard-working people win the respect of others. Try not to be dependent on anybody. Do not go into or remain in debt.

2 Thessalonians 3:6ff

Follow the example of disciplined people. Do not be a “busybody”—appearing busy, but not really achieving anything.

Discipline

Hebrews 12:11-12

No discipline seems pleasant, but it yields a more satisfying life. Make your life count!

Suggested—1 Corinthians 9:24-27, 2 Timothy 2:4-6, Hebrews 5:14

PRACTICALS:

- Make a timetable of how you use your time. Get suggestions.
- Set goals.
- Spend time with a disciplined person and learn from him or her.
- If you are not a punctual person, make an effort to be early.

Suggested Reading: *The Disciplined Life* by Richard Taylor and *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

The Spiritual Exercise: Do one of the practical suggestions mentioned above, or read one of the recommended books.



ACADEMICS: OBSTACLE OR OPPORTUNITY?

Introduction: God certainly expects excellence of Christian students: if not excellent results, at least excellent effort. Too often undisciplined students become Christians and then use evangelism or “the church” as an excuse for mediocre performance. We must help our students to see that academics are a God-given responsibility. There is nothing unspiritual about studies. The unspiritual course to take is to neglect academics. Without perseverance the student suffers great loss in character, discipline, confidence, and credibility—not to mention future prospects.

The Scriptures:

Clear Commission

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

God called us to be Christians as students for a reason! We have a responsibility to glorify God in academics and evangelism.

Colossians 3:22-23

Attitude is more important than *aptitude*. Academics are a vital part of a student’s spiritual life. To have consistent motivation, work for God, not for self.

Evangelistic Example

1 Thessalonians 4:11

A consistent example has an impact! Classmates will be drawn to those who can help others.

Mark 7:37

People were amazed by Jesus’ all-around excellence. You will amaze family and friends if you excel in all areas. Conduct your ministry *through* academics, not *in spite* of academics.

Powerful Preparation

James 1:2-4

Persevering with academics leads to spiritual maturity: discipline, focus and faith.

Suggested—Proverbs 6:6, 18:9, Philippians 2:14-16, 1 Timothy 3:7, 4:15-16

Spiritual Principles for Academic Success:

Get Help / Advice

Proverbs 11:14

Many advisors make victory sure. So seek discipling in your academics and get input from professors, lecturers and classmates.

Be Diligent in Your Studies

Proverbs 13:4; 21:5

There is no substitute for diligence. So attend every lecture. This is also very important for your example. Take good notes and catch up on missed lectures.

Go through homework within a day of receiving it, and plan how you will get it done.

Keep current at all times (for conscience’s sake, as well as for practical reasons)!

The Spiritual Exercise: Do, at least, one of the practical suggestions mentioned above during your next academic week.



THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY: PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Introduction: The family is the most basic unit of society. To understand the desperate plight our society is in, you need only to look at the desperate straits the average family is in! In stark contrast to families in the world—with their narrow outlook, poor communication, brewing resentments, undisciplined children and decaying marriages—the Christ-centered family is a breath of fresh air and a ray of hope.

The family following God's word is a happy, communicative, warm, loving, committed and fruitful family. Just as Christian marriage is God's wise plan for men and women to love and live together, so the Christian family is God's answer to the ungodliness and selfishness of society. Family is the forum he has chosen for character development in his most precious gift to parents: their children.

The Scriptures:

Spiritual Focus

- Chain of command: Christ—husband—wife—children.
- If you want a great family life, you need discipling!
- Aim to have an evangelistically fruitful family.

Bringing Up Children

- Security and happiness:
 1. Time—you will need to reorder your priorities!
 2. Affection—without it, they will become insecure, cold, introverted and awkward around strangers. Spiritual examples (parents)—Ephesians 6:4, Deuteronomy 6:7
- Discipline:
 1. Proverbs 23:13-14—it is unloving not to give it. Discipline is training.
 2. Colossians 3:21—encouragement is necessary.
 3. Proverbs 22:15, 29:15, 17, 19, 21—God commands discipline.
 4. The husband is the chief discipler.
 5. Wife and husband should agree on the "rules," lest the children pick and choose whom to obey!
 6. Proverbs 22:6—areas of training: Respect toward authority, speech and openness, affection, manners, tidiness, moodiness.
 7. Have regular discipling times with each child.

Other Important Matters

- Regular, consistent family devotionals.
- Be on time to church. Allow extra time, particularly considering the children. Plan to come early!
- Pray with the children before they go to bed.
- Have a weekly family time.
- If you have Christian children, work with the preteen or teen ministry. Embrace feedback. Do not be defensive.

Practicals

- Create a simple system of allowances and incentives for the children.
- Take the whole family out evangelizing. Reach out to other families as a family.
- Ask Christians you respect to recommend helpful books.

The Spiritual Exercise: Have a fun-filled, spiritually focused, family devotional.



DATING AND MARRIAGE

Introduction: Marriage and dating relationships are heavily influenced by cultural norms. Dating, as one would commonly understand it today, is a relatively recent phenomenon, developing in America and the West since the 1950's. Before that time, and in many places in the world today, marriage relationships were typically arranged by families or a formal "courting" took place. This was the case in Biblical times as well. Consequently, one will not find the term "dating" anywhere in the Bible. With regards to dating and guy-girl relationships, many of us may come out of the world with bad experiences or low expectations. The Bible offers some very important principles and viewpoints on guy-girl relationships that draw right boundaries and set us on a path for building successful friendships and dating relationships. In the church, we understand steady boyfriend-girlfriend dating to be a court-relationship that may eventually explore the possibility of marriage.

The Scriptures:

Yoked to Believers

1 Corinthians 7:39

This is neither encouragement nor suggestion; it is a clear command of God: "...he **must** belong to the Lord." Disciples marry disciples.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

The context to this scripture is about who we give our affection to. Paul told the disciples in Corinth that he and his companions had given their affection (hearts) to them (2 Cor. 6:11) but the Corinthians were "withholding" their affection from Paul and the other disciples (2 Cor. 6:12). Paul was telling them that they should be eager to give their hearts to other disciples but NEVER be yoked (give their affection and hearts) to unbelievers!

Types of Dating

Discuss the church's two general views of "dating".

- Friendly dating: guys and girls going out to encourage one another and get to know each other with no romantic strings attached and no expectations except friendship...this should happen a lot!
- Steady dating: having an exclusive boyfriend or girlfriend...this should happen after taking the time to build a regular friendship and consulting MANY advisors!

Need a Boyfriend/Girlfriend

Psalms 37:4

- Steady dating (i.e. getting a "boyfriend"/"girlfriend") in the world can take place for all the wrong reasons: insecurity (needing to "be with someone" in order to feel loved or special), social pressure, lustfulness, status.
- First and foremost, our delight should be in the Lord. He is the primary source for what our hearts desire in terms of intimacy, feelings of worth, security and confidence.
- Sometimes our impulse to want to "date" is premature or based on worldly motives. Ask this question: What is it that you are seeking in a dating relationship that cannot be attained in (1) your walk with God or (2) a regular platonic guy-girl relationship?

Spiritual Relationships (Guy/Girl) Principles

Be considerate of one another. Do not be a stumbling block. **1 Corinthians 10:32-33**

- o Go on dates with a double; home before midnight; dress appropriately, etc.

Be absolutely pure – **Ephesians 5:3** / 1 Timothy 5:2 In all guy-girl relationships (dating and non-dating) the standard of purity is very high. What kinds of things, short of sexual immorality, would still be a "hint" of sexual immorality/impurity? (Inappropriate kissing, touching, making out, etc.)

Get Advice - **Proverbs 19:2 / 19:20**

- Our worldly notions of dating should not be imported into God's kingdom; be humble enough to admit that you do not know how to successfully build a spiritual dating relationship with a Christian...you need advice!

The Spiritual Exercise: Write out a list of things / principles that God says are essential to building a spiritual friendship (*with the opposite sex*) and entering into a godly marriage. Make a list of people you can get advice from regarding building these relationships.



TITHES & OFFERINGS

Introduction: A scholar once noted that money/wealth is the second most mentioned topic in the Bible (after the topic of “love”). The way that we handle our money/wealth says a lot about our spiritual lives. Sometimes the attitude toward giving our weekly offering is that we are taking part of our paycheck and offering it to the church leaders/administrators. While it is true that this weekly contribution meets practical needs of the church (facilities, salaries, ministry budgets, missions growth), such a view does not capture the spiritual reality of our giving. The reality is that God has given us everything we have, and by giving this weekly offering we are returning a portion of that to God as a willing sacrifice. In this study, we’ll examine three ideas that should govern our attitude toward giving to God through our weekly contribution to the church.

The Scriptures:

A Spiritual Act...

• **Proverbs 3:9-10**

- o In the same way that the OT Israelites honored God with their tithes/firstfruits to the temple, we are honoring God with our contribution.
- What is your perspective on giving contribution? Do you see it as a spiritual act? Or do you view it as simply putting money in a church administrator’s hands?

A Sacrifice...

• **Mark 12:41-44**

- o the widow’s offering was the greatest in Jesus’ view because it involved the greatest personal sacrifice; it was not about the \$ amount, but about the sacrifice behind the amount
- What do you think is the difference between viewing contribution in terms of “sacrifice” instead of strictly “\$ amount”? How would that change your giving?

A Willing Heart...

• **2 Corinthians 9:6-7**

- o Paul communicates 2 important principle for “giving” in these verses
 - § Give much = receive much; give little = receive little
 - § God loves a cheerful giver
- What is the difference between giving “cheerfully” and giving “reluctantly”? Why do you think it matters to God what we are feeling in our hearts when we give?

Weekly Offerings to God...

- Pray and decide what is a willing and sacrificial amount to contribute (it is between you and God).
 - o Be consistent (weekly/monthly) and have integrity about your giving (if you miss a contribution, plan to “double up” the next time you give).
- Budget a saving plan and be organized about your contribution (**I Corinthians 16:1-4**)

Other Passages

Acts 2:44-47 – sacrificial attitude of early Christians

Acts 4:32-5:11 –Barnabas’ acceptable contribution vs. Ananias and Sapphira’s unacceptable contribution relationship with a Christian...you need advice!

The Spiritual Exercise: Look over your personal budget (*if you don’t have one, get some help and create one*). Pray. Decide what would be a sacrifice and commit that amount every week as an offering to God.