

# Spiritual Growth Study Series

12 Studies for New Disciples



Minneapolis-St. Paul Church of Christ

*Inner Action Ministries*

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# Study 1 - Living by Grace

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We are saved by grace as we embrace and accept God's gift and unmerited favor found in the life of Christ. But it is an undeserved gift that does demand a response on our part. We must never think that we somehow earn God's favor but when we truly understand it, we will respond in the way that God's Word calls us to.

## Grace and our Response

### Romans 5:20-6:2

- What does Paul mean when he says that "where sin increased, grace increased all the more"?
- How does grace reign?
- What should be our attitude towards sin (or the response towards sin) based on grace?
- Why do you think grace should result in us being dead to sin?
- When we embrace the life of Christ, we grow in God's favor, and our ongoing appreciation for his grace results in our desire to continue to die to self.

### Titus 2:11-14

- To what does Paul refer when he says that "the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people"?
- What does grace teach us?
- For what do we wait while the grace of God (the life of Christ) continues to teach us?
- What kind of a people does Jesus Christ want?

### Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 15:10

- Ephesians 2:10 says that we are saved so that we can engage in good works (for the will of God). How do these verses connect grace to that thought?

### Galatians 1:6; (See also Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 12:15; Jude 1:4)

- Grace is certainly unmerited, but why would this passage assert that one can desert the grace of Christ and imply that we must continue to live in the grace of the life of Christ?
- We must be on guard because we can abandon it and walk away from it?

## No Condemnation

### Romans 8:1

- This verse helps us understand the balance in understanding how grace can be free and unmerited and yet how the Scriptures can call us to lives of holiness and warn us not to abandon the life of grace.
- God does call us to the high standard of the life of Christ (Matt. 5-7) and living as Jesus did (1 John 2:6) but we must never forget that we are saved by grace and not the standard of the law or being perfect.
  - The life of grace enables us to grow in Christ and calls us ever higher
  - But there is no condemnation for those in Christ
- What does it mean that there is no condemnation?
- Read Ephesians 4:1
  - Grace calls us to the perfection of Christ but reminds us that we are saved by his life and not our effort
  - That means that we should remember that we should always be growing in the life of Christ, always know that we will fall short, and never forget that as long as we remain in the grace of Christ's life we will not be condemned

## Grow in Grace

### 2 Peter 3:18

- What do you think it means to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”?
  - What are some of the ways that we can do that?

### Things to Ponder

- Take some time to reflect on the amazing nature of God’s grace. What does it mean to you personally?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for *teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?

# Study 2 - Talking With God

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One of the most important aspects of a relationship with anyone is communication. It is no different in our relationship with God. Speaking with God, prayer, is vital to both our spiritual growth and our ongoing depth and understanding of our relationship with God.

## The Importance of Prayer

### Mark 1:35

- Jesus was extremely busy but even he found time to pray because he knew he needed it to strengthen his flesh (Luke 6:12; Hebrews 5:7)
- He consistently found times and places that were free from distraction and focused on his time with the Father
- Do you find prayer to be an important daily activity?
- What are some of the things that could potentially hinder you from consistent prayer?

### Psalm 63:1

- Do you have this kind of earnestness for your time to speak with God each day?
- Do you truly rely on him through prayer?

## We Need to Learn

### Luke 11:1-13

- Jesus' disciples had to be taught much about prayer
- Learning to pray is a process
- What important truths about prayer and how to go about it do we learn from this passage?
- What are some ways that you could go about learning to pray effectively and consistently?

### Matthew 6:8

- One extremely important element of learning to pray is knowing why we pray
- Why pray if our Father already knows what we need?
- Think of a parent and a child
  - Would you give a child absolutely everything that they want before they even ask?
    - You wouldn't because then they would never learn gratitude for you meeting their needs after asking
    - They would never learn recognition of the parent as their provider
    - They would never learn to appropriately rely on their parents
    - They would never learn the boundaries of what they should and should not ask for
    - They would never learn to not be selfish as they see how much they actually ask for things and the cost of meeting those needs
    - They would never have the opportunity to learn what they can do on their own without needing the parent to do it for them

### Luke 18:9-14

- What attitude does God want us to learn to have as we pray?
- What happens to those who exalt themselves?
- What happens to those who humble themselves?
- What does this teach us about prayer?
- Which of these two examples are closer to the way you approach prayer?

## Obstacles to Prayer

### 1 Peter 4:7

- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here?
- What can you do to overcome a lack of alertness or concentration when you pray?

### Psalm 66:18

- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here? How do you think this can hinder our prayers?
- What can we do to overcome cherishing sin in our heart?

### Mark 11:24

- What potential obstacle to prayer is alluded to here?
- What can be done to overcome a lack of faith?

### Mark 11:25

- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here?
- How can a lack of forgiveness for others hinder our prayers?

### 1 Peter 3:7

- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here?
- How do you think that unresolved sin and problems within a marriage (or close relationship) can hinder our prayer?

### Luke 18:1-8

- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here?
- How can a lack of faith and/or perseverance be a hindrance to prayer? What can we do about it?

### 1 John 5:14

- What potential obstacle to prayer is described here?
- How can praying contrary to God's will be such a potential hindrance?

## Things to Ponder

- What do you like the most about prayer?
- Is there anything about prayer or praying consistently that is a struggle for you?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for *teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?

# Study 3 - Knowing God

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The last thing that God wants from his people is for us to muddle around in blind obedience to his word without knowing why we obey and without having a relationship with him. Obeying rules without knowing why is really the essence of what religion is. Christianity is most certainly not a religion. At least true Christianity is not. God wants us to know him and have a relationship with him. That is his desire and that should be our desire as well.

## What Does God Want From His People?

### Jeremiah 9:23-24

- A “boast” in the ancient world was something in which you trusted and relied on to bring you status and identity. How does this help you understand what these verses are saying?
- Why does God not want his people to rely on some of the things listed in these verses?
- Why does God want our “boast” to be in him?

### Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Hebrews 8:11)

- God promised that a New Covenant would come with an identifying characteristic that his people would know him intimately because they had chosen to be in relationship with him
- This doesn't mean that we don't need to be taught things about following Jesus or having a relationship with God but that at his people we don't need to be taught about who he is
- God wants us to go beyond just following rules and being religious
- He wants us to be in relationship with him and his people
- Why do you think this is a desire of God's?

## How Can We Know God?

### Through His Word

#### Matthew 4:4

- We can know God through his word by completely relying on it as a the source of our thoughts, beliefs, actions, and direction in life
- What are some of the things in our world that compete for our attention as the source of our thoughts, beliefs, actions, and direction in life?

#### Romans 16:25-26

- We can come to an intimate knowledge of God through his word which enables us to obey him
- How does obeying God help us to grow in our intimate knowledge of him?
- Why is it important that our relationship with God is the source of our obedience?
- What do you think the following sentence means: “Rules without relationship leads to rebellion”
- We want to move past just obeying God without knowing why or without knowing him; that is religion
- God want us to have a relationship with him and his people not religion

### Through Jesus

#### John 10:2-5, 14

- If a stranger walked in and claimed to be your best friend and gave the name of your best friend as his own name, you would know better because you know your friend

- If a stranger walked in and introduced himself but used some other fake name that you had never heard, then you probably wouldn't know the difference because you don't that stranger
- In the same way, we should know Jesus so well that we immediately know his voice whether it comes through his word, the godly advice of another person, or anything else; we should also know when hear things that claim to be from Jesus but are not

### **John 14:7**

- As we come to know Jesus through our relationship with him, we will also know the Father
- What are some of the things that we learn about the Father by looking carefully at the life and ministry of Jesus?

### **Through Prayer**

#### **Philippians 4:6-7**

- What sorts of things can we take to God in prayer?
- How can we get to know God better through prayer?
- As we pray we will get to know God better and he will reveal himself and his nature to us
- We should not be discouraged that this is a process that takes time, just like any relationship
- We can know God immediately as our Father but it does take time to truly know him and be known at the deepest intimate levels

### **Things to Ponder**

- What are some of the things you have learned about your relationship with God through his word already?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for *teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?

# Study 4 - Being Family

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In 1 Corinthians 5:15 we are told that one of the primary reasons that Jesus died on the Cross for his people was so that we could be part of a community of people that no longer live for themselves but for one another. To do so takes a radical change of mind and of way of life (Romans 12:1-2) to which you have already committed yourself. It means becoming part of a people who live not for our own selfish interests but for the interests of our new family in Christ (Philippians 2:1-5). This is not an automatic process, however. It takes constant thought and study so that we can re-train ourselves out of selfish mindsets, individual personal spiritual mindsets, or even religious traditional mindsets. Church is not a building or something we go to once or twice a week. It is the collection of God's called out people, called to live a different way from the world around us. This study will look at some of the key aspects of being God's family.

## **Living Like Family**

### **Acts 2:42-27**

- This is not a picture of a typical religious group in the first century; this was a group that was living like a family did with one another
- What important elements do you see being embraced by this community that we can apply to our own time? Can you find at least five?

## **Family Identity**

### **Luke 14:25-27**

- In certain contexts, such as this one, "love" and "hate" were used in Jesus' day as part of inheritance language
  - They took on the meaning of "embrace" as part of one's covenant family markers or "reject"
- Thus, Jesus was saying that we must reject all the things of the world whether they be family, wealth, worldly inheritance, or even our own merits as markers of our relationship with God
- The family of God found in Christ is the marker of our spiritual identity and status as God's people
- This means that we find our security, comfort, identity, and source of honor from being part of God's family and nothing else
- Is this still a challenge for you or something that find exciting and encouraging?

## **Loving Like Family**

### **John 13:34-35**

- Jesus calls his people to love (which according to 1 John 3:16 means that we lay our lives down for one another) each other
- This will be the mark of who Jesus' true family is
- In what ways can you love other disciples right now?

## **Caring for One Another**

### **Acts 4:34**

- Families in New Testament times expected to care for another by sharing possessions with each other as each had need

- This is the way that the early church lived and it is the expectation for God’s people to provide for one another

## **James 2:15-17**

- What does James say about one who calls other Christians “brother and sister” but is unwilling to care for their physical and material needs?
- Of course, this should be a relationship of mutual love and those who attempt to manipulate or abuse the situation should be lovingly dealt with (see 2 Thessalonians 3:10-13)
- Does this still seem challenging for you? Why?

## **Making Decisions as Family**

### **Philippians 1:23-26**

- Paul was torn between what he wanted to do for his own benefit and what would benefit the Christian family
- He made his decision based on what was best for the entire family
- When we truly embrace that God has given us a new family and that we belong to one another (Romans 12:5) we will desire to make decisions based on the benefit of the whole family and God’s will (James 4:13-17) and not just what seems best for us
- What does this mean practically as it applies to you?

## **Things to Ponder**

- What are some of the big differences as it plays out in our attitudes and daily living of living as members of a mutual family as opposed to Christianity being a mere personal spiritual experience that often appeals to our own selfish natures?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for *teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?

# Study 5 - Bearing With One Another

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A very dangerous problem that seeps into the hearts of many Christians, especially young Christians is the idea that they should always be treated perfectly within the church. We tend to look at the ideal life of Christ to which we are called and think that we will never be hurt within the church. That's simply a false way of thinking, though. We must pay careful attention to the Scriptural calls to bear with one another through hurts and disappointments because they are promises that we will fail one another. Knowing this helps to defend our hearts against disillusionment which is one of the most powerful and dangerous human emotions.

## **Every Good Thing**

### **Philemon 1:6**

- How do we understand every good thing that we have in the life of Christ?
- Why do you think this would be true?
- Does this mean that everything that we experience within the body of Christ will be pleasant at the time?

## **Bearing With One Another**

### **Ephesians 4:2-3; 16**

- Although we will be like Christ one day, what we will be has not been made entirely known yet and we are still in the process of being transformed (1 John 3:2)
- This means that as imperfect, albeit well-meaning people, we will sin against one another, hurt one another, and disappoint one another—in fact passages like these practically promise that we will be hurt and let down
- What should our response be at those times?

### **Colossians 3:12-14**

- There is an assumption here, and a reality, that we will have opportunities to have grievances towards one another
- Our goal is to be prepared to forgive, love and live in peace with one another as much as is within our control (Hebrews 12:14-15)
- Why is it so hard for us to forgive when others let us down?

### **1 Peter 2:19-24**

- How does this passage help direct our thoughts and attitudes during times when we feel that we have been mistreated, ignored, or let down?

### **Matthew 7:3-5**

- Jesus tells us that we should see other's sin as little and our sin as big
- Is that the way that we usually do it?
- How would it change things if we truly approached perceived hurts and wrongs at the hands of others as little things and saw our own sin as big and needing to be dealt with swiftly?

### **Ephesians 3:10**

- The church, with all of its flaws and mistakes, is the display of God's wisdom to the world
- God's wisdom through the church is not displayed by us all being perfect—even the world can get along with people that treat them perfectly

- God's wisdom is shown when imperfect people bear with one another and remain loyal to one another because of our love for God

### **1 Timothy 3:15**

- There is much about the church and our family in Christ that we will love and cherish but there will also be tough time—there will be times when we have to work against our emotions and put down our desire to be treated justly and seek unity and love rather than justice
- What is another term used here for the church?
- What do you think it means that the church is referred to as the pillar and foundation of truth?
- Why is it important to remember that?

### **1 Peter 4:9-10**

- We should constantly look for ways to be hospitable towards one another, to give to one another, and to use our gifts to build one another up
- When we use our gifts what does that enable God to pass through us to others?
- If we do not use the gifts that God has given us we are denying that portion of God's grace to the rest of the body

### **Things to Ponder**

- It is well known that Americans are raised to be consumers and have things just the way that we want. How does this deeply embedded ethos work against us in being the type of people that we are called to be as a biblical church?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for *teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?

# Study 6 - Radical Forgiveness

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Genuine forgiveness is one of the most difficult things for a human being to do. Yet it is an absolutely vital aspect of life for those in Christ. Forgiveness is not only necessary for the Christian community to function as God intends and for us to remain unified in Christ, it is also indispensable because it is one of those things that God says determines how he will act towards us. If we refuse to forgive others then God will show us that same treatment. Forgiveness, then, is not only something that we should understand well but something that we should embrace wholeheartedly and live out lavishly.

## **A God of Forgiveness**

### **2 Chronicles 7:14**

- God has always set an example of forgiveness
- Forgiveness is important because God forgives and calls his people to be likewise forgiving

### **Micah 7:18**

- What does this passage tell us about the nature of God?

## **Why We Forgive**

### **Matthew 18:21-35**

- What important principle about forgiveness and mercy does this parable teach us?
- What is most difficult for you about forgiving others?
- How many times are we to forgive others?
- Why do you think Jesus used such an incredible number?
- It is important to remember that the sins that others perpetrate against us, could never match up to the severity of our debts and sin against God
- What stunning principle does Jesus lay out in verse 35?
- Does it seem that God might take the importance of us forgiving others more seriously than we often do?
- Why do you think God takes so seriously the concept of us forgiving others?

### **Matthew 6:14-15**

- Do you think that Jesus really meant this?
- What are the implications of this passage when it comes to our forgiveness of others?

### **Mark 11:25-26**

- What does Jesus say to do if we need to forgive others?
- Why would forgiveness take precedence over the act of praying in a situation like this?
- We forgive others so that the reality of stepping into God's presence and connecting with his will through prayer is not interrupted
- If we are not living a life of forgiveness then we step out of God's reality and his forgiveness
- What are some of the things that stand in the way of you radically forgiving others?

### **Colossians 3:12-14**

- We forgive because it is part of the life of Christ that we have put on when we died to self
- We have a portion of that life because Christ forgave us
- Refusing to forgive others demonstrates that we haven't really entered into the reality of the life in Christ and fully understood what God has done for us

- This doesn't mean that we just quickly give lip service forgiveness to others
  - It demands that we deal with the depths of our hurt and bitterness and keep working towards true forgiveness from the heart

### **Things to Ponder**

- Spend some more time truly contemplating the connection between God's forgiveness for us and our forgiveness for others
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for *teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?

# Study 7 - A Discipling Community

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“Disciple” is a term that referred to being a learner so discipling is simply a form of ongoing learning. There are many different ways that we can go about that lifelong learning process in the body of Christ but one of those important ways that should not be overlooked is the process of being mentored or “discipled” by another Christian. “Discipling” and teaching one another is an important part of God’s plan for us to grow spiritually.

## **The Heart of Being Discipled**

### **Colossians 1:28-2:1**

- The goal of discipling is to become fully mature (“perfect”) in the life of Christ
- There will be times of difficult and disagreement in any relationship but we must remain focused on the goal and operate from a motivation of genuine love for one another
- Discipleship is challenging and will never be easy, but it will be rewarding
- What do you most look forward to learning from other disciples?
- What do you think will be some of the challenges or negative temptations in the process of continuing to teach and train one another in the life of Christ?

### **1 Corinthians 11:1**

- We want to follow the example of those that are showing us practically how to follow the example of Christ
- No person is perfect and so we should only imitate them in the areas that they are following Christ
- 2 Timothy 2:2 refers to teaching and discipling one another as a process of passing it on from one person to the next
- We not only want to imitate those who are imitating Christ but we also want to be learning to set an example that others can follow
- Why is it important that each Christian be committed to imitating and learning from others?
- Why is it important that each Christian be committed to being imitate-able and willing to teach others?

### **Matthew 28:18-20**

- We must certainly learn the significance of repentance, baptism, and the full process of entering into the life of Christ, but we must also continue to learn well beyond that
- What are some of the areas of following Christ and living a consistently godly life that you think you most need to grow in yet?

### **Proverbs 10:17**

- What does this verse call us to value?
- What warning does it give us?
- Have you valued a process like mentoring or discipling in your past or have you tended to stay away from such things?
- Why is it so important as a follower of Christ?

### **Proverbs 11:14**

- Why is it important to have advisors?
- Why is it important to have many advisors?
- How often do you seek out advice and ask questions?
- How much of a part does humility play in all of this?

- What types of things do you think would be profitable to get advice on and learn to approach in a godly manner?

### **Proverbs 15:12**

- What motivation does this verse give us to go after discipling in our lives and make sure that we get it consistently?

### **A Practical Approach**

#### **Hebrews 10:24-25; 3:12-14**

- We should try to maintain contact with one another in one form or another on a daily basis
  - Why is that important?
- As part of that, we should also have a regular time (even as often as weekly) to meet with a discipling partner

### **Things to Ponder**

- What do you think might be the biggest obstacle in your life (time, humility, etc.) in engaging in the community process of discipling one another?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for *teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?

# Study 8 - A Life of Confession

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One of the most important ongoing actions that we can take as Christians is regularly confessing our sin both before God and other Christians. The problem is that this action, especially to other Christians, is one of the most unnatural things that we can do. Human instinct tends toward self-preservation and rationalization not humility and confession. Yet, God tells us that if we regularly confess our sin, he will forgive us. Confession is vitally important to understand and to engage in as a regular discipline.

## **Luke 11:1-4**

- When Jesus taught us how to pray, it included confessing our sins to God. Confession is a part of our life in Christ.
- Confessing our sins to God shows that we recognize our own sin and our constant need for him

## **Why Confess Our Sin?**

### **Proverbs 28:13**

- When we confess our sins honestly, we renounce them and show that we want to get rid of them
- We find mercy and are able to grow in our relationship with God

### **Psalms 32:1-5**

- We remain in God's forgiveness when we confess
- When we don't confess our sins we show that we are still clinging to them (and some aspect of our old lives outside of Christ) and put ourselves in danger of moving outside of the life of Christ where we have forgiveness

### **1 John 1:5-10**

- When we have fellowship with one another, the blood of Jesus cleanses us and the word comes to life
- If we do not confess, it is the same as saying that we are without sin. Our lives in Christ should be transparent –there is no hiding (darkness) in God
- Confession should be a part of our daily life – in our prayers and in our conversations with one another

### **James 5:16**

- Confess to one another so we can pray for each other and find healing
- It is God's plan for us to confess to each other
- Outside of Christ there is fear of being transparent and talking about sin for fear people will hold it against us or feel differently about us. In Christ, we help each other with our struggles and sin through prayer, the word and relationship
- A refusal to confess our sins to other believers often demonstrates that we fear what man thinks of us over what God knows of us

### **Acts 19:18-20**

- A community of believers that engages regularly in confession shows that they value God's will over the perceptions of man
- A community that confesses will put itself into position to be used powerfully by God

### **Ecclesiastes 12:13**

- Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10)

- When we are afraid or ashamed to confess sins to other humans, it demonstrates that we fear their opinions more than God's
  - We have repeated that thought several times throughout the study but that is because it is such a vital thought that is so difficult to truly embrace

### **Psalm 44:20-21**

- God knows the secrets of our hearts?
- He knows what we do and the motives behind them.
- We cannot hide our sins from God and God is whom we should be concerned about, so there is no benefit to hiding them from other Christians

### **Philippians 2:1-8**

- It takes humility to confess our sins to God and one another
- If we imitate Christ and consider ourselves nothing, we will have nothing to hide
- We won't concern ourselves with reputation or what people think, but we'll have the same concern that Jesus did...doing God's will (John 17:4)

### **Action Points**

- Go back through the notes from this lesson and make a list of new insights or things that you have learned about confession of God that you didn't previously know
- What specific action points will you take this week in response to this lesson?

### **Things to Ponder**

- What is the most difficult aspect to you about confessing sin consistently to one another?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for *teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?

# Study 9 - Battling Temptation

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We will all face temptation on a daily, if not hourly basis. Temptation is inducement to do something appealing that we know to be wrong or harmful. The reality is that every sin and rebellious action that we take against God starts with temptation of one sort or another. We are constantly at war with temptation but to be successful in that battle we must know what we are fighting and where we need to fight it.

## The Battleground

### Ephesians 6:10-18

- We are in a spiritual battle whether we like it or not
- We will all fight a spiritual battle and we need to know the truth that knowledge and its proper use wins battles (Hosea 4:6)
- God gives us the tools to defeat Satan but that doesn't mean that we use them
- Where does Satan most often attack us? In our thinking.
  - Thoughts; Ideas; Conclusions, and Suggestions (T.I.C.S.)
- Every action that you have ever taken is a result of your thoughts
  - Actions result from these T.I.C.S.
- We must know that our spiritual battle will take place in the mind so that we can fight the battle well

### 1 Peter 5:8

- What does this tell us about Satan?
- Lions tend to hunt by separating one individual from the pack
  - The quickest way that Satan will do this is through our thought life

## Mind Control

### 2 Corinthians 11:3

- How was Eve led astray?
- Every unfortunate or sinful action that we have taken goes back to T.I.C.S. that we acted on
- There is an old but true saying that says:  
*Sow a thought, reap an action; Sow an action, reap a habit; Sow a habit, reap a character; Sow a character, and reap a destiny. . . But it all begins with a thought*
- What areas of your thought life can be the most difficult or tempting for you:
  - Anger over circumstances
  - Bitterness towards others
  - Lust
  - Etc.

### Ephesians 4:22-24

- Satan deceives us through T.I.C.S.
- Every sin that we takes has its genesis with wrong thinking about God, about ourselves, and about the truth of the thing that is tempting us
- To be Christ-like involves controlling our thought life
  - When we don't do that we become enemies of God (Colossians 1:21)
- Jesus tells us in Matthew 5 that sins of the heart and mind are just as serious as sins of action

## 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

- What does this passage urge us to do with our thoughts?
- We have to measure every thought against the word of God like a ruler
- We cannot keep thoughts from coming but we can keep from dwelling on them
  - “We can’t keep birds from flying above our head, but we can keep them from nesting in our hair”
- We have to be extremely careful with our thoughts because most of the time they sound rational and appeal to our emotions
- Most of us go to great lengths to protect ourselves from viruses and we lock our doors to protect our belongings and yet we naively assume that we can expose our minds to anything we desire without having any negative effects whatsoever on us
  - What sorts of potentially dangerous things do you expose your mind to (TV, movies, music, friends, books, worldly ways of thinking)?
  - It’s not that these things are wrong in and of themselves but they can be dangerous if they contain things that expose our minds to ungodly ways of thinking and influence
- Taking every thought captive and measuring it can be time consuming but which takes more time:
  - To consider every thought and make sure that it is righteous
  - Or to clean up the mess from not controlling our thoughts

## Romans 12:2

- What areas of your thinking do you feel most need to be transformed?

## Think on the Right Things

### Philippians 4:8

- Before we allow ourselves to dwell on any thoughts they should meet the standards of all eight of these things
  - Something could be “true” (at least in our mind) and not meet the other seven criterion
- Keeping our minds focused is a full-time and difficult job
- Here are seven practical ways to keep our thoughts focused on the right things:
  - Read the Word
    - Our minds will never be more holy than our knowledge of the Scripture will allow
  - Memorize the Word
  - Use the Word and obey it
  - Watch and pray
    - Use prayer as an inoculation (before infection) rather than an antibiotic (used after an infection)
  - Substitute evil thoughts for righteous ones
    - Romans 12:21
  - Be honest
    - Be realistic about your temptations, the truth of them, and the reality of obtaining them
  - Confess to one another
    - James 5:16 – Get in the habit of confessing our sinful thoughts and not just our sinful actions

## Things to Ponder

- What areas of your thought life are the most tempting and challenging for you?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for *teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?

# Study 10 - Stewardship

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We live in a world where the pursuit of wealth and possession is considered to be among the highest pursuits possible. With all of that focus on wealth and possessions, though, we generally tend to make one very vital mistake. Nothing in the world belongs to us. None of our possessions is really our own. We are nothing more than stewards of what God has made available to us. It is a huge problem to think that resources belong to us when we are nothing more than stewards. Recognizing our role as God's stewards, then, is vital.

## **The Vocation of Humans**

### **Genesis 1:26-30**

- The vocation of humans that are in right relationship with God is to serve as stewards over God's creation
- A sure sign of being in rebellion against God is the need to provide for ourselves (Genesis 3:17-19) rather than acting on his behalf as a steward and allowing him to provide for us (Matthew 6:19-33)
- Psalm 8:4-9 demonstrates what humans, made in the image of God, were intended to be, but failed to live up to because of sin

### **Genesis 4:3-5; Genesis 14:17-20**

- Offering a portion of our resources to God as a recognition of his provision goes back beyond the law given in Exodus
- Giving part of our resources to God is part of our stewardship because it is a recognition that we are but stewards, someone that is managing someone else's resources, rather than our own

### **Luke 19:11-27**

- The context of this passage has to do with Jesus' criticism of Israel for being poor stewards of God's gifts to them
- The principle of stewardship, however, applies to the stewardship that is expected of all of God's people now
- Being a good steward means to manage someone else's resources well as if they were your own
- We are called to be stewards of everything that God has given us
- We are to live as ones who recognize that nothing we have is ours; it all comes from God

## **Stewardship in the Christian Life**

### **Matthew 28:18-20**

- Part of Adam and Eve's original call to stewardship was to be fruitful and multiply and to subdue the whole earth, managing it well as God's stewards
- Jesus calls his disciples to take on that original role that was designated for all humans as God's stewards
- We are to be stewards of his creation and expand his kingdom and rule
- To do this properly we must remember that we need to seek his kingdom first; anything less would be to be poor stewards

### **Luke 12:35-46**

- All Christians have been called to be stewards (servants) of God's resources
- Good stewards are always ready and always living in view of the reality to which we belong in Christ
- When we are selfish, self-focused, or not good managers we demonstrate a lack of belief in the reality of God's ownership and rule over all creation and our role as mere stewards of all to which he has entrusted us

- Do you recognize your role as a steward?
- What does it mean to recognize that everything you have belongs to God and you are just a steward?

### 1 Peter 4:10

- We are called to be stewards of the grace that God has given us
- It may be gifts, talents, abilities, time, knowledge, resources, etc.
- What are the things that God has given you and called you to be a good steward of?
- What does it mean for you to be a good steward of:
  - Gifts, talents, abilities
  - Time
  - The word of God
  - The Gospel of Jesus Christ
  - Resources and possessions

### Malachi 3:7-12

- This passage was written to the Old Covenant people of God but the principles of giving and stewardship came before the Old Covenant Law and continue to apply to God's people in the New Covenant
- They had demonstrated that they had drifted from God by being poor stewards and by refusing to give to God what was his in the first place
- God asked them for a mere tenth of all that he had given them as a reminder to them that everything had come from him and that they were simple stewards ("tithes" literally means "tenth")
- The difference in covenant means that our blessings come in the life of Christ rather than in physical and material blessings but we are still called to be stewards in every area of our lives, including our finances
- Being a good steward means more than just giving ten percent to God, though, it means managing all of our resources well and being good stewards so that we can give generously and lavishly to God and those in need

### Luke 17:18-30

- The problem for this young man was not that he was wealthy?
- The problem was that he was a poor steward because he wasn't willing to recognize that everything he had came from God
- God doesn't call everyone to give up everything we have, but as stewards we should be willing to if that is what he calls us to
- Are you a good steward with everything that God has given you?

### Luke 21:1-4

- Being a good steward is more about giving all that we have than it is just having a lot or even giving a lot
- It is being willing to recognize that everything we have (whether it be a lot or a little) comes from God
- What convictions about being a steward in all areas of your life have you gained from this study?

### Things to Ponder

- In what areas are you or have you been a good steward? Are there any areas in your own stewardship of resources, time, energy, gifts, etc., in which you need to grow?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for *teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?

# Study 11 - Announcing the Kingdom

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Once we entered into Christ we received a life of salvation, the life of the kingdom of God. But we didn't just receive that life to lounge around in it and enjoy it. We are called to announce the kingdom of God to others, through our words and our lives and call them to be disciples of Jesus as well.

## **Genesis 1:26-30**

- Part of God's design for humans was that we would represent him by working for him
- We are made to be in an intimate relationship with God and represent by spreading his rule

## **Genesis 3:17-19**

- Sin not only stripped man of the full image of God, it left men and women incapable of ruling over God's creation and expanding his rule

## **Exodus 19:3-6**

- God chose Israel, the descendants of Abraham, to be the restored humanity – the people that would do his will and rule with him in his kingdom
- A priest was someone who could go directly into the presence of God and represent others
- The Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God within us
- Israel, in the Old Testament, pointed to God's Kingdom but was never the realization of it
- The words "Kingdom of God" never occur in the Old Testament
- The few times that God says "My Kingdom" are references to the coming of the Messiah

## **Isaiah 11:1-9**

- God begins to promise the coming of this kingdom that would be brought about by the Messiah
- It would be characterized by concern for the spiritually poor, and by righteousness
- It was also intended for all people of all nations
- Why is it important to remember that God's kingdom would be good news for the poor and for people of all nations, tribes, and languages?
  - Are there any past prejudices that you have had or still struggle with that you need to learn to release in order to truly embrace that kind of Kingdom heart?

## **Mark 1:14-18**

- What was Jesus announcing that was now becoming available?
- Jesus came to usher the Kingdom of God into the present age in a new way through his ministry, and more fully through his death and resurrection
- God is transforming this present age through his Kingdom, preparing it for the age to come

## **Matthew 28:18-20**

- Following Jesus' resurrection he offers this charge to his disciples – words that clearly parallel the original instructions to Adam and Eve to be fruitful, fill the earth, and take charge of it
- In Christ, the Kingdom of God is restored
- What is one of the primary activities, according to this passage, of the Kingdom of God?
- Of whom are we to make disciples?
  - It's not just the people like us but all people

## **Luke 9:23-26**

- In order to truly announce the Kingdom of God, we have to leave our old lives fully behind (see Galatians 2:20)
- Why is this important as it relates to announcing the Kingdom to others? What is challenging about it for you?

## **2 Corinthians 5:15-21**

- We are called to be ambassadors of the Kingdom of God
- This involves evangelism and sharing our testimony, but it also embraces all aspects of our life
- The Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God in every area of life
- Spreading that Kingdom is important but simply announcing it is not the sole area in which we engage in spreading the Kingdom
- We should live the Kingdom daily and let others see what it looks like
- We anticipate God's age to come by living it in the present
  - What does this mean for you on a daily basis?

## **Romans 10:14-15**

- We don't reduce God's Kingdom to just the way we live
- We must also announce it
- People cannot come to faith in the life of Christ and enter into the Kingdom of God without hearing the Gospel preached to them from another person – that is the way that God has set up his plan

## **Acts 8:4; 13:31**

- The role of the early church was to act as witnesses of the Gospel, the resurrection of Christ, and to preach that wherever they went
- Who was sharing their faith here?
  - It wasn't just the leaders who were sharing their faith
- What is most challenging for you about sharing your faith with others?
- We, in a similar way, are called to be witnesses of what the Gospel is and what it has done in our lives
- We, too, should do this wherever we go
- This probably sounds a little scary which is normal, but if it sounds like a burden that we don't want to participate in, then we have to ask if we really understand what we have in the life of Christ

## **Things to Ponder**

- What is the most challenging or difficult aspect for you about announcing the Kingdom of God to others?
- What Scriptures most motivate you to share your faith with others even when you might not completely feel like it?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for *teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?

# Study 12 - Resurrection: The Great Hope

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It is perhaps unfortunate that so many people, including Christians have little understanding about what happens after we die. Very few Christians have a solid understanding of the Resurrection which is particularly curious considering the fact that the writer of Hebrews lists the Resurrection of the dead among the elementary teachings of the faith that everyone should know before even moving on to spiritual maturity (Hebrews 6:2). With that in mind, we undertake to at least study out some of the basics of the resurrection. Much of this might seem difficult to understand or new but it is not at all. These concepts of the resurrection were the bread and butter of the early church. Resurrection, as understood below, was the great hope of the early church. It was what continued to motivate them in the face of death and was the promise that kept them from fearing persecution and even death. It makes sense that it should be as important to us as it was to the early Christians.

## The Message of the Gospel

### 2 Timothy 2:8-11

- What does Paul say, in shorthand, is his gospel message
- The gospel is the declaration that Jesus was the Davidic Messiah that had defeated death and made that victory available to those who would have faith in his life

### 1 Corinthians 15:1-21

- Again Paul says that his gospel is the declaration of Jesus' victory over death
- He also says that Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee (or the firstfruits) of the rest of the "crop" which is our resurrection
- What does Paul say, in verses 12-19, is the negative ramifications if there is no resurrection from the dead
- For a sample of other passages that speak of the importance of the resurrection of the dead in the preaching of the apostolic church see: Acts 1:21-22; Acts 2:25-36; Acts 4:1-3; Acts 4:32-33; Acts 17:16-18; 31-33; Acts 23:6-8; Acts 24:10-21; Romans 1:1-6; Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 6:1-2

## What is the Resurrection?

### 1 Corinthians 15:42-49

- For Paul the problem was not with the body itself but with sin and death which had taken up residence producing corruption, dishonor and weakness
- Being human is good, being an embodied human in good, being a rebellious human, a decaying human, a human dishonored through bodily sin and bodily death is bad
- What needs replacing is not the body but the animating force that controls the will
- The words translated "natural" and "spiritual" have to do with what animates the body not the substance of which it is made
- Paul is saying that at the resurrection of those in Christ, our natures that are currently animated by our own human souls will be transformed by the Spirit to be animated by God's own Spirit – Our tendency to sin will be gone and dealt with
- Paul says in Romans 8:9-11 that the process of choosing to walk according to the Spirit rather than our own fleshly desires in the present age trains us for and anticipates that time when we will be transformed fully

### 2 Corinthians 5:1-8

- Paul describes a three stage process which includes:
- Our present unredeemed bodies (He refers to this as our earthly tents)

- The intermediate stage when we will have passed through physical death and into the presence of the Lord awaiting resurrection (He calls this “being naked”)
- The resurrection body (He calls this our heavenly dwelling because saying something was heavenly meant it was aligned with the will of God and because the Scriptures promise that the resurrection bodies and the new creation are being kept in heaven until God comes and restores all things including our bodies. See Matthew 19:28; Acts 3:19-21; Romans 8:20-24; Colossians 3:1-5; 1 Peter 1:3-5)

## **What the Resurrection Means in the Present**

### **Romans 6:1-14**

- Our baptism into Christ is not only the entrance into the death, life, and resurrection of Christ, it is also a present participation in that life
- The life and resurrection of Christ is not just a future hope
- We don’t just enter into a future resurrection but that we begin to live the reality of that future in the present

### **1 Corinthians 15:58**

- Paul writes this verse in summary of his long exposition on resurrection
- Dying to self, undergoing the persecution and trials of the Christian faith, and the work that we do in the Lord are not in vain because they will matter in the resurrection, in the age to come
- What we do now is an anticipation of the age to come, it is learning to live by the values of that time and is not simply doing things for the sake of being blindly obedient

## **Things to Ponder**

- Why is it so significant to understand the resurrection of believers as the inheritance and great hope of God’s people?
- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for *teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:16
  - Is there anything you learned from these Scriptures that was new for you?
  - Are there any new convictions that you have gained as a result of these Scriptures?
  - Are there any areas of your life or thinking which need to be corrected as a result of these Scriptures?
  - What specific steps are you going to take to apply the things you have learned from these Scriptures?