

# Discipleship Foundations

10 lessons in spiritual growth for newly baptised believers

By Pastor James West

## Lesson 1

# Understanding Who God Is

**Key Verses:** John 17:3; 2 Peter 1:2; Jeremiah 9:24; Isaiah 26:3; Philippians 3:8-10; Ephesians 1:17;

Ask: What is the most important thing about you?

‘What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.

For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.

We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God.’ (Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*)

Hand out Jim Berg’s ‘*Stabilising Truths for Noisy Souls*’ pdf printout:

<http://www.quietinganoisysoul.com/downloads/memory-cards.pdf>

God wants to teach us to live by faith. He wants us to learn to view all of life through the new lens of our relationship with Him. He wants to show us that He is in control, that He has a plan, and that He is sufficient for our every need. If we understand Who God is, it provides stability for our souls, and brings peace to our lives. (Run through the chart as a group. Ask which statement stands out to each of the students.)

2 Peter 1:2 ‘Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.’

This Scripture teaches us that God’s grace (undeserved help and favour) and peace can be ours as we grow deeper in our relationship with Him. It has to do with knowing what He is really like, and living in light of that knowledge.

When we read the Scriptures, we should be constantly asking ourselves, ‘What does this show me about my God?’

Believers who don’t know God very well are not content. They are anxious and unhappy about many things. If they were to be very honest about what they are thinking, they would probably say something like this: ‘God is not enough for me. What He has done, and what He is doing is not enough for me. I must have something more.’ What is the ‘something more’ that you think you need?

**Homework:** Draw three columns on a page, with these headings at the top:

I must have...

I must be....

I must do...

The items that you will list under these headings represent the thoughts which are fuelling your discontent.

- Write no less than 3 items under each heading. You don't need to show this list to anybody.
- Confess these to God as sin, and determine to forsake these thoughts by God's grace, and to replace them with thoughts that are true about God.
- Identify which item is bringing the most agitation to your soul, and then match one of the stabilising truths to your issue.
- Look up the verses beside the stabilising truth, and write down your observations from each verse that will help you to deal with your current way of thinking and dealing with the problem.

## Lesson 2

# How to Spend Time with God

In the Bible, we have many examples of people who spent much time with God. Some of these were described as 'walking with God.' Micah 6:8: 'He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'

This walk which we speak of is a life which is spent *in step* with God's will and God's ways. If we are not interested in God's will and God's ways, then we cannot walk with Him. Amos 3:3: 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?'

The hymn-writer John Henry Sammis expressed how wonderful and fulfilling the Christian life can be when he penned these words:

*When we walk with the Lord  
In the light of His Word,  
What a glory He sheds on our way;*

## Bible Reading and Meditation

Have you seen God's glory in the Word recently? When we see God's beauty, then we are changed to become more like Him. 2 Corinthians 3:18: 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.' In the Bible, God has shown us everything necessary for a Godly life. If we read it, we will find it contains historical accounts, prophecies, teachings of spiritual truth, including wisdom for life and decision making. But the most wonderful thing about the Bible is that it reveals God's glory to us.

God's goal is for us to be inwardly changed to become like Christ (Romans 8:29). The Scriptures speak of men and women who were changed by the experience of beholding God's glory. We too, will be changed only as we behold His glory (2 Corinthians 3:18) in the Word. This means, then, that we will need to spend much time thinking over what the Scriptures show us about God if we are going to see any true and lasting change towards Christ-likeness in our lives.

It is important to read through large portions of Scripture, and it is also important to stop and think upon a single verse. I often find that I cannot sink deeply in my thoughts about God and His glory, unless I focus intently on a particular verse or phrase that God has brought to my particular attention. I am in the habit of writing devotionals, and that is one of the primary ways that I meditate upon the Scriptures. It forces me to think and reflect and dig really deep. In the process, I find God illumines truth about Himself to me. I also use a hand-written journal, and when I listen to preaching, I take notes. I don't want to forget what God shows me (Proverbs 6:21).

When meditating upon some particular Scripture, I find the following three questions extremely helpful.

1. *What does this show me about God?*
2. *What does this show me about myself?*
3. *What should I do about it?*

Bear in mind that God is the One Who reveals Himself, and until He does, there can be no illumination. Therefore, *ask* Him to reveal His glory to you.

## Prayer and Praise

Prayer is key to a fruitful Christian life (John 15:16; 16:24), but it is the first thing that breaks down when we are not walking properly with God. It is like a person's heart beat. It is the vital breath of the believer.

We often do not receive, simply because we do not ask (Jas 4:2). Our Heavenly Father already knows our needs, and is willing and able to meet them (Matt 6:8). We ought not to carry anxieties, but to cast them upon Him: 1 Pet 5:7: 'Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.'

We ought to pray without anger, doubt, or sin in our hearts, otherwise our prayers will not be heard (1 Peter 3:7; Psalm 66:18; 1 Timothy 2:8).

When we come to God, we must pray with a believing mind. This does not mean that if I pray believingly, He will automatically give me one thousand dollars. I must simply believe that *if* it is what I need, He will provide it (Mark 11:24). I must seek to know His will through the Word, in order to pray in accordance with it (Romans 12:1-2).

I must not pray selfishly by using my prayer time as a complaining session, or as a time to vent my frustrations on God. I must be willing to surrender to God's will (Matt 26:39), and diligently pray for the needs of others (Jas 5:16). God will often turn our own trials into blessings when we begin to pray for others, or for our enemies (Job 42:10). We must pray for those who do the Lord's work (2 Thess 3:1). We must pray for more missionaries to be sent (Matt 9:38).

It is important to talk to God about what He shows you in the Word. Without His help, we cannot expect to be able to obey what He shows us.

Jesus taught us what our priorities in prayer ought to be through what is now known as the Lord's Prayer (see Matt 6:9-13). There are many examples of effectual prayer in the Bible, such as Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Paul, and Jesus Himself.

The Psalms are very good to pray through, for they are the very thoughts of God. They are also helpful when you feel dry and unable to pray.

A large part of prayer is praise and thankfulness. This is powerfully emphasized through David's writings, and also in the New Testament teaching on the Spirit-filled life. Consider the following Scriptures:

Hebrews 13:15: 'By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to his name.'

Colossians 3:16-17 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.'

A Spirit-filled Christian will be a thankful and singing Christian. When we lose our thankfulness, we also lose our effectiveness in prayer. We will become discontent, and our prayers will become despondent and lifeless.

Some hindrances to the believer's devotional life include: Unconfessed sin, lack of surrender, sleepiness, preoccupation, worry, and laziness. Take these things in hand, and put adequate measures in place continually to deal with them, otherwise they will hinder your whole walk.

### Conclusion:

When your morning devotional time of Bible reading and prayer is over, don't make the mistake of thinking that your communication with God is over for the day! It has only just begun. Your walk

with God must continue on into the rest of the day. You must continue in the same attitude in which you began the day (James 1:22-25), otherwise you end up becoming a hypocrite.

**Homework:**

1. Take time to read the following sections from the book *Changed Into His Image*, by Jim Berg:
  - *Illumination; When God Turns on the Light*, pp. 144-146
  - *This is Revival!* pp. 152-153
2. This week, take one verse of thought that stands out to you from your daily Bible reading, and, using a journal or a piece of paper, ask yourself the following questions about it, recording your observations for each:
  1. *What does this show me about God?*
  2. *What does this show me about myself?*
  3. *What should I do about it?*
3. Take notes on the sermons this Sunday.
4. In this lesson's section entitled *Prayer and Praise*, underline two statements which reveal weaknesses in your own life, and ask God to help you strengthen in those areas.

### Lesson 3

## God's Purpose for Us in Christ Jesus

**Key Scriptures:** Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Galatians 2:20; 3:27; Philippians 2:5; 3:10; Colossians 1:27

In the first lesson, we learned about the importance of understanding what God is like. In the second lesson, we learned about how to spend time communicating with God. In this lesson, we are going to look at God's plan for our lives.

Many believers are 'itching' for God to simply bless the plans they create for their own lives. What they don't appreciate is that God has already chosen them for His own purposes. Consider the following Scriptures:

John 15:16: 'Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.'

Ephesians 2:10: 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.'

Romans 8:29: 'For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son...'

This last Scripture shows us in a nutshell what God's goal is for our lives: Christlikeness. Having looked at the nutshell, let's look at the landscape.

### God's Panoramic Plan in Ephesians

The book of Ephesians is a bit like a panoramic photo of God's plan for our lives, describing the past, the present, and the future. But the interesting thing about this plan is that it is all about God's glory. It's not about pursuing our dreams, or tapping into our inner potential, or even about carrying out some sensational ministry for God. While serving God is often exciting and highly enjoyable in this life, God ultimately has eternity in view.

### Our Spiritual blessings in Christ

Paul spends the first three chapters of Ephesians describing this landscape:

Chosen from eternity past to dwell with the Father (1:4)

Our adoption arranged from eternity past (v. 5)

Our acceptance in Christ (v. 6)

Our redemption and forgiveness of sins (v. 7)

Our inheritance in Christ (v. 11)

The gift of the Holy Spirit (v. 13)

The resurrection power available to us (v. 19)

Now part of the church, Christ's body (v. 22)

Regenerated from our dead and disobedient state (2:1-6)

Seated with Christ in the Heavens (v. 6)

Saved by grace, without works (vv. 8-9)  
Created unto good works (v. 10)  
Peace with God and with other believers (vv. 11-17)  
Access to the Father (v. 18)  
Made part of God's holy temple (v. 20-22)  
Recipients of the riches of Christ (3:8)  
Recipients of Christ's presence, love, fullness, and power (vv. 16-21)

If you ever read through the first three chapters of Ephesians, you will be struck with the numerous times the phrase 'in Christ' is used. Truly, it is only because of our Lord Jesus Christ that we can experience these spiritual and eternal blessings. It is only because of Jesus that we can live changed lives for the glory of God. In Colossians, Paul teaches us that Christ in us is the hope of great glory to come: 'To whom [the saints] God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).' The New Testament makes it very clear that our purpose is to live a life devoted to knowing, imitating, and serving our friend and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

O that we might discover more and more of the riches of Christ's own wonderful character, as we study His Word, so that we might become like Him! It might surprise and humble us, though, to discover the mind of Christ...

### **What is Jesus Like?**

We know that Jesus is the second Person of the Trinity, and that He shows us exactly what the Father is like. Perhaps the foremost characteristic of Christ, however, is His humble servant-hood, which we read about in Philippians 2:5-8 (read it now). He displayed this in a vivid way when He washed the disciples' feet, and then when He laid down His life for them. This is interesting, because in Ephesians 4:1-2, Paul tells us that the first requirement for a worthy walk is lowliness (humility). Jesus Himself said: (Mat 11:29) 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart...'

Let's go back to Ephesians. After listing all the spiritual blessings of the believer in Ephesians 1 to 3, Paul then pauses at the beginning of chapter 4, and says this:

'I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness...'

Don't miss what Paul is saying here! All the spiritual blessings described in the first three chapters ought to humble us, and to motivate us to live differently, to live a life of discipleship. The first change in us ought to be *a humble attitude*. And as we know, humility is the foremost character quality of our Lord Jesus.

Someone has said that humility is the root of all other graces. I like to think of pride and humility as the two positions of an outlet tap. When the tap is turned to the 'humility' position, Christ's goodness can then flow through us, making us a blessing to others. Only by following Jesus' example of humble servant-hood will be able to fulfil our wonderful calling, and make full use of all the riches that are ours in Christ. Do you actively seek ways in which to serve others, or are you mostly looking out for yourself? Are you teachable, or do you often insist that you know best? If we learn to submit cheerfully to God's ordained circumstances and human authorities in our lives, then we have learned to submit to the Father's authority, just as Jesus submitted to His Father's will.



The Father wants to use your life to point others to His Son. He has blessed you with all spiritual blessings in order that you might be able to share them with others also. 'Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples (John 15:8).' See also Christ's Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. Remember, however, that you can only follow Christ in discipleship if you are willing to share His yoke of humility and servant-hood.

### Homework:

1. What plan/s are you 'itching' for God to bless, even though you cannot be sure that they are His will for your life? Write them down. You cannot be a true disciple while insisting on your own way instead of His. Will you surrender your plans to God, and say, 'Not my will, but thine, be done'?
2. Look at the spiritual blessings listed in the lesson notes. Choose the one that stands out to you the most, and meditate on one of the Scriptures in Ephesians dealing with it, using the following questions (record your thoughts):
  - a. *What does this show me about God?*
  - b. *What does this show me about myself?*
  - c. *What should I do about it?*
3. The first appropriate response to the spiritual blessings in Ephesians is humble servant-hood. Is your 'tap' in the humility position, or in the pride position? If you need to change, confess your sin to God, as you answer the following questions (write your answers):
  - a. How have you looked out for yourself instead of seeking ways to serve others? What can you do **specifically** to change?
  - b. How have you resisted God's instruction, insisting that you know best? What can you do **specifically** to change?
  - c. What circumstance or authority have I been despising? What should I do **specifically** to change.
4. Pray for an opportunity to share the Gospel with someone this week. Be ready!



## Lesson 4

# God's Provision for Christ-Likeness

The Apostle Paul wrote to some confused believers in the Galatian region of Asia Minor, and challenged them with these words: 'Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?' (Galatians 3:3). Just like these Galatian believers, many Christians today have the faulty understanding that in order to be a better Christian, you must just throw more force into living a better life. While it is true that we must serve the Lord with all the strength that He provides, we must realise something here: True change towards Christ-likeness begins and continues only by humble surrender to God. We came to God in humility and faith for salvation. Likewise, we can only be continually changed into His image as we humbly surrender to His will and way in our lives.

There are so many Christians that are trying so hard to please God, but they are a real burden to be with, because they are still filled with pride and anxiety, trying to become like Christ in their own strength, and even trying to pressure others to do the same. Listen to Jesus words:

Matthew 11:28-30: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.'

God Himself has made provision for us to become holy, like His Son. It is not a do-it-yourself job. It is a humbly-cooperate-with-Him job! In our previous lesson we were learning about the importance of having the mind of Christ. We must switch the tap of our souls from the 'pride' position to the 'humility' position, if we are to see Christ's goodness flowing through us, and making us a blessing to others. Without this humility, we will become as poisonous as the Dead Sea, which takes in much, but can give out nothing. Humility begins with the understanding that I am created to be dependent on God, and that without Him I can do absolutely nothing.

### Our inability

In John 12:24, Jesus taught us about the corn of wheat. 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.' When I plant corn in my vegetable garden, the kernels look pinched and thoroughly lifeless. And unless they get buried under the soil, they will produce no life at all. Sitting in the seed bucket, they will not sprout. They need to be buried—a kind of humbling. Jesus submitted to His Father's will, and His death on the cross brought life to many. To make us useful, God has to humble our pride through many circumstances, while using the truth of His Word to show us that we are weak and sinful. When we submit to this process, Christ is then able to live His life through us. When we allow Him to deal with our pride, it is just like the seed-casing falling off and being discarded. We can then be useful to Him. This is what had to happen to Peter (Luke 5:8; John 21:17).

In Galatians 4:3, 9, Paul pointed out that the believers were trying to simply be good and religious in the same way that the world does: simply by keeping the rules better and performing better. In other words, they were looking at how well they were doing, instead of looking to Christ for the strength to live life the way He intended them to live it. The result of this way of thinking was increased pride, carnality, and strife among themselves (Gal 5:15).

It is useful to observe that James 4:1-6 deals with the issue of strife between us and people, or between us and God. It all arises from our inward lusts. We are utterly unable to be at peace with God or others while we are proudly insisting on doing or having things our own way. We must surrender to God's will.

Romans 7 also points out our inability to please God without Christ and His Spirit.

### **God's Provision**

Thankfully, God has made provision for us to become Christlike. In Matthew 11:28-30 (already quoted), we see that God's provision is to yoke us up with His own Son, just like a farmer in Bible times used to join two oxen together, so that together they could plough the field. To walk with Christ, therefore, we must submit to His own kind of humility!

Romans 6 is the key passage in the Bible that teaches the believers union with Christ. Understanding Romans 6 is crucial, for it teaches the great provision God has laid for us in Christ's redemptive work, which enables us to see true change in our lives (*Teacher to turn there, and explain*).

Another provision God has made for us to learn more of His will and ways is through Word-filled teachers. That is why it is important to receive as much of the teaching you can from a single Bible-preaching church. See Ephesians 4:11-13.

In Hebrews 10:24-25, we learn of another provision that God has made for us to grow spiritually, and be kept safe: It is fellowship with other believers in the local church.

Finally, but not the least of all, is God's wonderful Word! It contains the very words and mind of God, and is His precious light to us in this dark world. Wisdom is the most important thing we need in order to guide our decision-making (Proverbs 4:7) and God provides it in His Word (Proverbs 2:7), just as His Word shows us all things that are needed to understand and cooperate with God's purpose for our lives.

2 Peter 1:3-4: 'According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.'

### **Homework:**

1. What humbling things have happened to you lately? These are going to be used of Him to teach you to go His way, and not to trust in yourself and your own ways. Write down your answers.
2. What provisions do you need to make use of, in order to cooperate with the humbling lessons God has been teaching you? Write down specific answers.

## Lesson 5

# Cooperating With God

### The Agent of change: the Holy Spirit

It is the Holy Spirit Who empowers us to change toward Christlikeness. Chapter 7 in Romans speaks of man's utter inability to become righteous and holy without God's help. Romans 7:15: 'For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.' Chapter 8, however, speaks of the great and wonderful change that happens in a person's life when the Holy Spirit is in control. Romans 8:2: 'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin...' Commentators Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown describe the meaning of the word law as being: "an inward principle of action, operating with the fixedness and regularity of a law". Freedom from sin ought to be the normal experience of every Christian, but sadly, many Christians experience very little victory over sin or growth toward Christ-likeness. This is because they are not walking in the Spirit, but are rather walking in the flesh, and consequently living 'under the law'. Living under the law is a position of powerlessness experienced by the unrepentant rebel who is still proud, and who insists that he doesn't need God's rulership or help. Paul teaches us that the only way to avoid defaulting in this direction is to walk in the Spirit. Read Galatians 5:16-18.

This was one of the main problems Paul was addressing when he wrote the book of Galatians. Galatians 3:3: 'Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?' We can illustrate the problem in the following way:

When you got saved, the Holy Spirit came into your life, and sat down behind the steering wheel of your car. You moved over, and said that you would allow Him to take control, and drive the car to the destination of His choice. Soon, however, you reached for the steering wheel and tried to take control of the gear stick and pedals. 'I know where you want to take us. I know how to get there. Let me drive,' you said. Worse still, maybe you didn't like the route he was taking you. 'I know a more exciting and comfortable route,' you said, trying to twist the steering wheel in the opposite direction. You heard the Holy Spirit say, 'You don't have the necessary skills to do this.' You quickly replied, 'Yes I do.' Conflict arose. The Holy Spirit was grieved, and began resisting all your efforts. Turmoil reigned in your heart. The peaceable fruit of the Spirit seemed to be little more than an elusive dream. Your car was reeling out of control, causing anxiety for the passengers (maybe your close friends and family members more directly affected by your life choices). Other drivers became endangered by your reckless driving...

Can you relate to this picture? It is a picture of a Christian who knows that God's help is available, but is unwilling to submit to that help. If you are in this case, as many Christians are, what should you do about it? Let's look at God's solution.

### Surrender

'Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God.' (Romans 6:13). If a believer understands that he has died with Christ, then he knows it is entirely possible to surrender – to say 'no' to sin, and 'yes' to God. There are sins that must be confessed and repented of. There are passions and lusts that must be denied. There are ambitions and strong desires that must be laid at the foot of the cross. We must die to self and sin daily. We must refuse to give in to our own selfish, self-centred, and self-willed ways. We must allow God to get right to the bottom of our hearts, and to do spiritual surgery there, cutting away the cancerous tentacles of selfishness and pride. Luke 9:23: '...If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself,

and take up his cross daily, and follow me.' We are reminded that if any one truly wants to be like Christ, then he must learn Christ's humility, and he must learn Christ's submission. Little wonder that Christ said in Matthew 11:29: 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'

### **Continual Change in the Heart**

Repentance and confession of sin is non-negotiable. But if a believer is to grow in Christ-likeness, much transformation must take place in the heart and mind on a continual basis. We have already noted in a previous lesson that the process of change takes place through exposure to His Word. Two of the key passages in Scripture that speak about this transformation are Romans 12:1-2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18.

### **Faith in seeking, faith in doing**

Hebrews 11:6: 'But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' We must remember that change toward Christ-likeness is God's idea. God is therefore eager to give us all the help that we need to reach that goal. From start to finish, however, we must trust in the wisdom and power of Another (remember the illustration of the car and the driver). It is ultimately Christ's own wisdom and holiness which becomes ours by faith. 1 Corinthians 1:30: 'But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.'

Paul's life was a demonstration of this truth. He wrote in Galatians 2:20: 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' Since Christ loves us in this way, we can trust that He will give us both the wisdom and the power needed for change.

#### **1. Seeking for wisdom – James 1:2-4**

To reach the goal of Christ-likeness, we need much wisdom. Proverbs 4:7: 'Wisdom *is* the principal [*first or chief*] thing; *therefore* get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.' See also verses 5 through 9. God promises to give us wisdom if we ask for it. James 1:5: 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.' God takes us through many different circumstances, and puts before us many different decisions and tests. Therefore, in order to steer a straight course toward Christ-likeness, we need to know *the next right response* in every situation. Wisdom from God is exactly what is needed, and He provides it through the written and preached Word. He only provides it, however, to the person who is *diligently seeking* it (Proverbs 2:3-6; 8:34). This involves asking God to give you wisdom, regularly studying God's Word to find wisdom, faithfully sitting under the sound of Biblical preaching, and intentionally seeking wisdom through Godly counsel, reading, etc. Are you searching for wisdom as for hid treasures, and not leaning to your own natural wisdom? Trust God's promise that He will grant it to you if you ask in faith.

#### **2. Putting wisdom into action – James 1:6-8; 21-25**

We must be truly committed to going Christ's way, not our own, if we are asking God for wisdom in a particular matter. God will often not reveal His wisdom, because he sees that the believer has not yet surrendered their own ideas to Him, and is double-minded. Often, when God does reveal His wisdom, Christians are still not willing to trust Him with what might happen should they obey that wisdom. The reason for this is pride (see verse 21). That is why repentance and surrender (discussed earlier) are so important.

Proverbs 3:5-7: 'Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.'

Without surrendering to God, a person is still trusting in His own heart and way, and at best He will end up deceiving Himself. If you need wisdom, don't expect to receive it if you are not trusting God's wisdom or power! If God is revealing wisdom to you, be a doer! And continue to obey, believing that Christ will help you to do right every day! Remember the promise: James 1:25: 'But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.'

### Conclusion:

The Spirit of Christ is powerful to change our lives, but we must be willing to say 'no' to ourselves and commit to God's way instead of ours. We must forsake our own wisdom, and seek God's wisdom from His Word, surrendering entirely to it, if we want to see any lasting change.

### Homework:

1. Remember the scenario of the car and the driver. Like most Christians, you may feel you can run your life better than God can. However, you can be sure that God will not willingly leave you to your own devices. His purpose for you is Christ-likeness, and doubtless He has been faithful to bring difficult *people, circumstances, decisions, and tests*, in order to see if you will start moving toward Christ-likeness, or choose your own way. Write down at least one item that you can name for each of the categories (italicized above): i.e. one person (their name), one difficult circumstance, one difficult decision, and one test or temptation you have had to face.
2. Write beside each of these items what your response was: i.e. how you responded to that person, etc. Then silently ask yourself the following questions: Were your responses Spirit-filled? Did you demonstrate surrender and humility toward God? Are your responses bringing hurt and anxiety into other people's lives? Are you simply leaning to your own wisdom in these situations, or are you seeking God's wisdom in His Word to deal with these? If anything needs to change, repent, and purpose to obey God's wisdom instead.
3. Chocolate Challenge Memory Verse: Proverbs 3:5-6







## Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ

Romans 13:14 'But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts *thereof*.'

We have been learning about the Holy Spirit, Who is the Agent of change in the believer. While we know that we are utterly unable to bring about any change in our own wisdom and ability, we also know that it is possible to say 'no' to self, and 'yes' to God, because we have been brought into union with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. It is necessary that we seek wisdom from God in order to become more like Christ, however, there will always be a need to submit ourselves to that wisdom, and not to lean to our own natural understanding.

We turn again to that precious Scripture which reveals the life and strength of any true servant of God: Galatians 2:20: 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me...' Paul the apostle shows us, that from start to finish, the Christian life must be first and foremost one of surrender to God and self-denial. Many Christians get stuck right here.

### An all-too-common experience

Many believers feel that their main business in life is to get free from addictions and sins of the more troubling nature, to stay out of trouble, and to be a good person generally. They fail to experience the genuine victory over sin, or to experience the fruitfulness that God wants them to have, simply because they have not accepted the all-consuming call of discipleship. If they have tried to stop sinning in certain areas, they have still stubbornly refused to walk in the ways of God with their whole heart.

The essence of their problem is that self is still on the throne. We could call such people 'half-baked' Christians. Of course, even a carnal Christian is saved. So by saying that a Christian is 'half-baked', we simply mean that he has become stalled and stuck in the normal growth process. He has failed to grasp and accept the fact that Christ has chosen him to be a disciple – a humble follower of Jesus Christ.

For his (or her) own peace of mind, the carnal Christian may avoid doing certain things, such as drinking, dancing, going to the gym, wearing provocative clothing, and saying things that might offend people. Such a person may even restrain himself from looking at worldly movies and immoral posters. Maybe he has put forth great effort to control his thoughts. But when all is said and done, he is still a frustrated Christian, hankering after the things of the world in his heart. He is like a car driver with one foot firmly pressing the accelerator (inwardly longing for the things of the world) and the other foot firmly pressing the brake (trying to say 'no', because he knows it is wrong) at the same time! Sooner or later, spiritual burnout will ensue! He knows something is wrong, and that he doesn't truly experience the joy of fellowship with God.

To live the Christ-like life, one must be filled with all the fullness of God, and be emptied of self.

Christian author Andrew Murray writes:

'The highest glory of man is in being only a vessel, to receive and enjoy and show forth the glory of God. It can do this only as it is willing to be nothing in itself so that God may be all. Water always fills the lowest places first. The lower, the emptier a man lies before God, the speedier and the fuller the inflow of the divine glory will be.'

The problem with all carnal Christians is that they are still trying to assert their own identity – something about themselves, in which they pride themselves; something other than God. John calls this the pride of life. The Father wants us rather to find our God-given identity in union with Christ. Peter tells us that we are made to be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Peter 1:4). In his first epistle, he exhorted the believers to be ‘As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.’ (1 Peter 1:14-15).

In Romans 13:14, Paul writes: ‘But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.’ Here, the believer is commanded to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, as one would put on a garment, for that is what the Greek word conveys. What an wonderful way to express our willing identification and fellowship with Jesus!\* But how exactly may we identify more deeply with Jesus? And what will be the result in our lives? Let’s answer one question at a time.

### **Deeper Fellowship with Christ**

To identify more deeply with Christ, we have to go *deeper*. That’s right – we have to be willing to go lower and lower, as he did. We must willingly submit and surrender to all that the Father does or allows in our lives, and to cooperate with His humbling work in us. When we do, then we will begin to identify with our Servant-Saviour more fully, and we will be able to truly enjoy His fellowship. Like Christ, we must accept and embrace the Father’s will in all things, and cheerfully cooperate with it. Philippians 2:5-8 talks about this essential mindset that Christ had. If you truly want to identify with someone, you need to understand the way they think. If you truly want to fellowship with that person, then you need to begin to think the way they think, and do the things they do. That is how it is with Christ. In chapter 13 of John’s Gospel, we see that Peter wanted to have a part with Christ, but he didn’t truly understand or appreciate Christ’s humility and servant-hearted attitude in washing the disciples’ feet. In other words, he still didn’t know His Lord very well, because he didn’t have the same mindset that Jesus had. And just like us, he was slow to realise how sinful he was, and how he could not live without a Saviour to cleanse Him from sin. It took some more humbling to bring Peter to the place where he himself was willing to give his own life in service as a minister of Christ to his fellow brethren.

### **The Result**

If a Christian is still in bondage to some besetting sin, you can be sure that he/she is having a struggle with pride. This was the problem in the church at Galatia. Self – not God – was still on the throne in the believers’ lives. They were biting and devouring one another in their relationships. They were trying to prove how righteous they were. They were no longer rejoicing in Christ’s righteousness imputed to them. They began to think that they could somehow become holy by merely checking off a list of do’s and don’ts, and their religion became little more than a self-righteous shell. It seems that there were still others who were demonstrating outright fleshliness in their conduct and lifestyles.

Paul pointed these Galatians back to faith in Christ, and to the genuine fruit of a faith-filled life, which is love for the brethren: Galatians 5:6: ‘For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.’ In other words, faith demonstrates itself in love to others. A few verses later, he wrote: Galatians 5:13 ‘For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.’ The result of our union with Christ should be a life which more closely resembles His: a life of loving service to others. This is true liberty. This is true victory. When a believer has turned from pleasing and living for himself to pleasing God and living for others, he is now functioning as God intended. To begin looking on the things of others is to begin thinking the way Jesus thought.



## Conclusion

1 John 3:2-3: 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.'

The Lord is returning soon. If you want to be found walking in victory, and ready to stand unashamed before the Lord when He returns, then you need to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ'. It is not enough to simply confess your sin and to try to stay away from it. What you need is to seek deeper fellowship with the Servant-Saviour, and to walk in His Spirit. Galatians 5:16 '*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*' Fleshly living and thinking is not only a big hindrance to the Christian life. It is the fruit of pride and self-centredness, and is the natural default for any Christian who is not passionately pursuing the humility and servant-hearted attitude of Christ. Romans 13:14 'But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.'

\*Note that Jesus took upon Himself the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). In John 13, we read that He girded Himself with a towel (servant's attire) before washing the disciples feet. Just as Jesus assumed the position of servant, so must we. Peter commands us to be 'clothed with humility' (1 Peter 5:5), which in essence is to put on Christ, and to allow Him to live through us.

## Homework:

1. Can you relate to the illustration of the driver in the section *An all-too-common experience*? Write a brief description of your experience.
2. Read James 4:1-7, then answer the following questions:
  - a. Proverbs 13:10 tells us: 'Only by pride cometh contention...' When we experience conflict with other people, it is often because deep down, we are insisting on having our own way (James 4:1-2). What strong desires are hindering your relationships with other people? (e.g. 'I must have..., I must be..., I must do..., I shouldn't have to...')
  - b. James 4:4-6 shows us that our strong desires can come between us and God (v. 4), making His Holy Spirit jealous toward us (v. 5). If we are God's children, God will resist our pride, and we will find that life becomes increasingly unbearable (v. 6). We will find little victory over sin, and little fruitfulness for God. Can you describe a time in your life when you were in this situation?
  - c. Verses 6 & 7 teach us that God gives grace (undeserved help or favour) to the person who willingly humbles himself and submits to God. What areas do you need to humble yourself before God (and others) in order to get God's divine help in your life?
  - d. Jesus humbled Himself by becoming an obedient servant to the Father, and a willing sacrifice for our sins (Philippians 2:7-8). The Father has greatly honoured Him for His selfless servant-hood and humility (Philippians 2:9-11). Likewise, God will exalt you (granting victory over sin and fruitfulness) if you will forget yourself in service to others (James 4:10).
    - i. Is there more you can be doing to give yourself as a servant for your brothers and sisters in Christ? If so, what?
    - ii. Is there more you can be doing to give yourself as a servant for those who are not yet saved? If so, what?
3. Chocolate Challenge Memory Verse: Romans 13:14

## Lesson 7

# How to Know God's Will

Romans 12:1-2: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.'

Every Christian ought to be keenly interested in knowing what the will of God is for his or her life. And the wonderful thing is that God's Word is absolutely packed full of promises that show God is willing to reveal His will to us! However, there is a condition attached. We must present ourselves a living sacrifice in order for this to happen. There are so many believers, it seems, who would like to peep around the corner of the future, and to find out what their life's vocation is going to be, who they're going to marry, where they're going to live, etc. But if they did find out, would it truly change their lives for good? God is interested in total surrender in the present – surrender, both in the seemingly big decisions of life, and in the seemingly mundane and routine, your day-to-day activities and your moment-by-moment responses. The more you become a person who DOES God's will, the more you will become a person who KNOWS God's will. It's that simple. I read on a church notice board once: 'Lord, come with me on the path that I shall choose.' Actually, that is not the attitude we ought to have. The Scripture says: (Psalm 25:12) 'What man *is* he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way *that* he [God] shall choose.'

### Faithfulness

God is looking for *faithful* people, with whom He can truly fellowship. Abraham was one such person (Genesis 18). When the LORD contemplated telling Abraham His plans to judge Sodom and Gommorrah, he considered Abraham's faithfulness to teach his family, and divulged his plans in communication with him. Abraham was able to intercede, sparing Lot and his two daughters. Are you faithful in little things? Are you faithful in reading your Bible, and in your prayer life, in household chores, in obeying, honouring, and respecting your parents, even when you disagree with them? Are you faithful in coming to church and prayer meeting, in participating in church activities, in tithing and giving to missions, in reaching out to the lost? Are you faithful in standards, such as not attending public swimming pools, gyms, cinemas, and other questionable places? Are you faithful in what you look at or listen to in private? Are you faithful in dress standards? Do you honour the Lord by the way you dress when you attend Sunday services and prayer meetings, or even out of church? Do you faithfully fulfil your duties in school, study, and work, or do you try to shirk duties and cut corners? Are you faithful in your relationships, to honour the members of your family, and to give yourself in loving service to them? Are you a backbiter or a gossip? Do you try to do what God shows you through your Bible reading and sermons? If you love the Lord, and are thankful for His saving grace, you will be aiming for faithfulness in these areas.

In the Scriptures, we see the principle that one must be faithful with the knowledge, wisdom, abilities, or even possessions that he has, if God is to entrust him with more. Here are some Scriptures that teach this principle in various ways:

Proverbs 22:29 'Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean *men*.' Those who are faithful in lesser tasks will be honoured by God with greater responsibilities.

The parable of the talents teaches us a number of things about faithfulness, stewardship, and rewards: see Matthew 25:14-30

Luke 16:10-11 'He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*? Those who do not use money for God's glory cannot expect to be blessed with great spiritual responsibilities or with great eternal rewards.

Luke 8:18 'Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.' Those who apply God's written or preached Word to their lives will reap greater rewards. Those who don't will become dull of hearing, spiritually blind, and as if they never learned anything in the first place.

John 7:17 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or *whether* I speak of myself.' Those that have a tender heart, and who actually put into practice the things that they learn from God's Word will be given spiritual discernment.

John 12:36 'While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them.' Spiritual light isn't always available, and we must be eager to grasp it when we see it.

1 Timothy 3:10 'And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless.' Those that seek to hold office or position for God's glory ought to demonstrate a capability generally before being thrust into that position.

Teacher to look again at Romans 12:1-2, and explain.

So we see that faithfulness is the prerequisite to knowing God's will. Let's look at some particular areas of faithfulness that are necessary in understanding God's will and for decision-making.

### **General Guidelines for Knowing the Will of God**

**First**, remember to commit all your decisions to God in prayer with thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6-7; Proverbs 3:5-6).

**Second**, ask yourself, 'Do I have God's peace about this decision?' (Romans 14:23)

The following points are taken from David Cloud's *One-Year Discipleship Course*:

1. Knowing God's will requires surrender and dedication (Romans 12:1).
2. Knowing God's will requires separation (Romans 12:2).
3. Knowing God's will requires transformation (Romans 12:2).
4. Knowing God's will requires service, ministry, activity (Romans 12:3-6).
5. Knowing God's will requires doing the will of God today (Romans 12:1-2).
6. Don't trust your own understanding; trust in the Lord.
7. Walk in the light (1 John 1:5-10).
8. Delight in the Lord (Psalm 37:4).

9. Do not make any decision that would cause you to disobey the Bible (John 8:31-32).
10. Seek good counsel (Proverbs 12:15; 19:20).
11. Do not fear man (Proverbs 29:25).
12. Honor authorities
13. Look to the future (Hebrews 11:24-27).
14. Don't make decisions when tired or discouraged (Job 3:1-2; 17:11).
15. Wait on God (Psalm 27:14).

**Homework:**

1. This question relates to the material under the heading *Faithfulness*. What are the areas in your life where you know you should be more faithful? Make a note of these, and ask God to give you the wisdom to change.
2. Look at the material under General Guidelines for Knowing the Will of God, as well as the points from David Cloud's book. Indicate (by underline, or some other method) which areas you need to work on. Ask God to help you in those areas.
3. Chocolate Challenge Memory Verse: Romans 12:1-2



## Lesson 8

# Spiritual Warfare



### Ephesians 6:10-20

Why are we told to put on the whole armour of God? Wouldn't it be enough for the apostle to simply say, 'Trust the Lord, and you will be victorious'? No. More specific instructions are needed. If the Christian soldier is to be effective in spiritual warfare, he needs to know what the items of protection and weaponry are. These are the exact things that Satan wants to strip him of, for if he can succeed in this, he will succeed in defeating the Christian soldier. If the believer recognises that each part of spiritual armour is necessary, he will not be completely satisfied until he

knows that he is wearing every piece.

### The mission

It is important to understand your mission as a Christian soldier, otherwise you will not be likely to achieve it. Is it to hurt Satan? Is it to avoid falling into sin? Is it to keep ourselves from being deceived? What exactly is the mission? To answer the question, let's ask, 'What was Christ's mission?' To answer this, let's look at the following Scriptures:

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 'And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.'

Luke 19:10 'For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.'

So we see that Christ's mission was one of reconciling lost sinners to God. He did this by giving himself to be a sacrifice for sin. God is interested in sharing his love with mankind, and thus he seeks to establish a relationship with mankind – a relationship that has been previously destroyed by sin.

Our mission, therefore, is to display this same redeeming love to mankind. To display it to the lost; to display it to the saved. To show that God's redeeming love can triumph over all of man's sin and Satan's devices – in our own hearts, in our relationships, and to the saving of the lost.

### The enemies

Every Christian has three enemies, the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Our Scripture text mentions the last one in particular. Satan hates to see the triumph of God's redeeming love over the wreckage sin has caused. He utterly detests a Christian who displays God's love in this world. As the enemy of God's plan of reconciliation, he insists on getting us to walk in selfishness and pride, so as to destroy our walk and to sabotage our usefulness in others' lives. However, he can only achieve this by gaining the consent of our will. He must gain in-roads through our own sinful hearts. He needs our cooperation, if he is to successfully defeat us. He will also use this world's system of lust, discontent, and pride to appeal to our own sinful hearts, or even to persecute and pressure us to deny Christ and His righteous ways. Satan and his demons have great power, and are unfathomably evil in their intent (v. 12).

### The power

The believer will need no less than God's almighty power in order to stand against the formidable powers of darkness. He must not think that he can outwit Satan, or match his power and intelligence. The Christian has no ability to overcome sin in himself, let alone defeat the Devil. That is why we must understand where the power lies. It resides in God. And God's power is omnipotence.

Understand what the power of God is for. It is power to 'be strong' and to 'stand'. We are to stand in the imparted righteousness of Christ. We are to stand and see the deliverance of the Lord on our behalf. The power and might spoken about previously in the book of Ephesians is for strength in the inner man; power to be changed; power to love others.

'Your Christian life is to be a series of impossibilities made possible and actual by God's almighty power. That is what the Christian needs. He has an almighty God that he worships, and he must learn to understand that he does not need *a little* of God's power. But, he needs – with reverence be it said – *the whole of God's omnipotence* to keep him right, and to live like a Christian.' –Andrew Murray, *Absolute Surrender*, pp. 69-70

It is not power for my purposes (i.e. to get rich, to be pain-free, to feel happy, to change my circumstances, etc.), but for God's purposes. That is, it is power to help me cooperate with what *He* is doing in my life, and in the lives of those around me.

### **The Armour of God**

Notice that it is the armour 'of God'. It is not the armour of self-determination, self-assertion, self-confidence, experience, self-protectiveness, or thick-skinned pride. It is the pure armour of dependence upon God.

#### **1. The Belt of Truth (v. 14)**

The first essential for protection is to know, believe, think, and speak the truth. Without believing what is true, we live in bondage to lies, and this is exactly how Satan wants it to be. For instance, if a person doesn't believe that God is going to give him the grace to get victory over sin and temptation as promised in 1 Corinthians 10:13, then he may likely be in bondage to fear, wondering when he will next fall into sin again. Or if a person is unwilling to admit that he has sinned (lies to himself), then he will likely end up justifying himself (lying again to himself) and blaming others, even God (more lies). Bitterness will then ensue, and the person's attitude will become a source of contamination for those around him (Hebrews 12:15-16).

Proverbs 4:19: 'The way of the wicked *is* as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.' The believer exposes himself to countless unknown dangers when he begins to believe lies. He will disintegrate in his spiritual strength, and become easy prey for sin and Satan. One example of this was Jonah, who believed that God was wrong in calling him to Nineveh, and then assumed that he could somehow run away from God. He ended up bringing hurt to himself and others in the process, and after repenting the first time, he spoke these words: 'They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy' (Jonah 2:8). Believing a lie is usually the first step toward sin. That is why the Bible refers to 'deceitfulness of sin'.

If you are struggling spiritually, ask yourself what you think you need in order to be happy, and also why you think God is not doing enough for you. It is likely that this will reveal some lies that are bringing you into spiritual bondage. You need to have a high regard for truth if you are going to speak the truth in love to others (Ephesians 4:15).

#### **2. The Breastplate of Righteousness (v. 14)**

Because of the believer's union with Christ, righteousness has been *imputed* to him. That is the believer's justification. What is important from that time forward is to walk in Christ's righteousness



*imparted* to him on a moment-by-moment basis. That is sanctification, and it comes by continually depending on Christ's holiness, righteousness, and wisdom, imparted to us as we face each test (1 Corinthians 1:30). The moment we take our eyes off Christ as our all-sufficiency, and our source of life and joy, we cease to walk in Christ's imparted righteousness, and we expose ourselves to the fiery darts of temptation. The key here is to keep your eyes on Christ for deliverance and joy. Believers who take their eyes off the Lord can fall prey to sin, and then the wounds of guilt can leave deep and ugly scars in the heart and memory.

### **3. The Sandals of the Gospel of Peace (v. 15)**

Rom 10:15: 'How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!' The Roman soldiers sandals had hob-nails, and these provided traction on loose ground, making it possible to advance without losing one's footing. So it is with the Christian who is ready to share the Gospel. He must be ready to seize any opportunity to be a witness for Christ. If he just wants to mind his own business and not bother anybody, he is already on the back foot, and his attitude of slothfulness is not pleasing to the Lord. There must be a readiness, a determination to share the Gospel at all times. There have been times in my life when I was not focused on this, and the result was missed opportunities, and consequent defeat. We are here on a mission. We are not here just to slip through 'under the radar' and unobserved! An evangelistic Christian is a delight to the Lord's heart. His war-cry is 'peace' through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Daniel 12:3: 'And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.'

### **4. The Shield of Faith (v. 16)**

'Above all'; this shows us that complete dependence and trust is most essential for the soldier of Jesus Christ. It is the instrument of implicit confidence, and to use it effectively, the Christian must understand that priceless lesson: helpless reliance upon the goodness, strength, and wisdom of Almighty God. Notice that it shall 'quench all the fiery darts of the wicked'. This shows that God honours child-like trust. It also shows that the fiery darts of the Evil One are sent primarily to attack that child-like confidence in God. Satan would lodge doubts and unbelief in our mind, and these will burn like fiery darts, devastating our thinking, and throwing us into confusion, unless we determine to trust Him. We need to be like the Gentile woman who persisted in believing the goodness of our Lord, even when tested (see Matt 15:21-28).

The shield of faith stands in opposition to fear and unbelief. There are times when Satan would throw us into confusion, and it seems like a mist of darkness settles down upon us, so that we wonder what will happen to us, and whether everything will be ok. There are also times when we don't know what decision to make. There can be times of depression, and even inexplicable anxiety. These are times when we need to hold tightly to the shield of faith.

### **5. The Helmet of Salvation (v. 17)**

Without the confidence of one's eternal salvation, it is very difficult to stand strong in the battle. It can cast a dark shadow over one's whole life. There is much that can be said about this, and if it is an area that you struggle with, it may be very helpful for you to talk to a mature Christian, who can use the Scriptures to guide you through some of the perplexities of that struggle. The good news is that God wants the Christian to know that he is saved. 1 John 5:13: 'These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life...'

The helmet of salvation (also referred to as 'the hope of salvation' in 1 Thessalonians 5:8) necessarily implies confidence in God's deliverance – deliverance from sin, from this evil world. This is why a Christian who is struggling with assurance of salvation will struggle to trust God generally in many

other areas of life. It is important to seek counsel if this is an area you struggle with. If it doesn't get sorted out, it will contribute to much discouragement and despair. It is not God's will for you to remain in that state of doubt.

### **The Sword of the Spirit (v. 17)**

Hebrews 4:12-13 shows us that God's Word searches our hearts and can cut deeply to discern what our true spiritual problems are. We need to expose ourselves to it through private reading and preaching, as well as spiritual conversation. The Sword of the Spirit breaks through the strongholds of unbelief, stubbornness, rebellion, and a thousand other kinds, as well as through the devices and lies of Satan. It will cut through these, setting the captive free, if he is willing to be freed. John 8:32 'And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'

Every Christian is responsible to study the Word of God, in order to be instructed, and in order to instruct others. If he doesn't, he will remain a babe in Christ, and will not be the warrior God intended for him to become (Hebrews 5:12-14).

### **Prayer (vv. 18-20)**

Prayer is the soldier's cry to God for aid. It is the Christian's life-breath. Where there is no prayer, there is no communication with God, and where there is no communication with God, there is no relationship. One of the first things to break down in relationship problems is communication. So it is with God. When things are not going right in your life spiritually, you will find it difficult to pray properly. It is a keen test of one's spiritual health.

Prayer can be done in the flesh, just because we feel it 'has to be done'. But God commands us to pray 'in the Spirit'. Prayer must not simply be for yourself, but for others also. Prayer can demonstrate whether we are trusting in our selves or in God. Thankless prayer will burn out. So will anxious prayer. Fastidious prayer (trying to say all the right things) will be tedious and joyless. God is looking for real communication with His children, and He promises to hear prayer. We can fast and pray, but we cannot manipulate God, or twist His arm to do anything. All our prayer must be an expression of complete surrender and humility before God.

### **Below are listed just a few common causes of defeat in the Christian life:**

- Laziness
- Drivenness
- Strong Desires
- Distraction & Preoccupation
- Pride
- Experiences and Feelings
- Discontent (i.e. unthankfulness)
- Tests we are not ready for
- Relatives and friends, even good friends

### **Homework:**

1. Look back through these notes. What piece (or pieces) of armour are you neglecting?
2. Write what you are going to do to rectify the situation.
3. Chocolate Challenge Memory Verse: Ephesians 6:10-11



## Lesson 9

# What Should I do When Life Hurts?

*Romans 8:28 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.'*

### Hebrews 12:1-16

In the twelfth chapter of Hebrews, we find an address to suffering Christians, tested and tempted in many of the same ways we are. The author shows them how to cooperate with God's general chastening in their lives. It is a mistake to assume that God only chastens because He is angry. Indeed, he hates sin, but the Bible teaches us that He is slow to anger with His children (Psalm 103:8). There were times in the Bible when God's servants were terribly careless, or knowingly rebellious, and God entered into serious controversy with them, chastening them severely for their disobedience.

The truth is, even when we are whole-hearted in our attempts to follow God, there is much work to be done in order to correct us, and to turn us away from our own natural and selfish bent. But the Heavenly Father's chastening is often accompanied with a sense of delight in His children, especially when they earnestly seek to do His will (Proverbs 3:12). While all suffering is a kind of chastening, it is not necessary for us to say, 'Lord, what have I done wrong?' every time we suffer. It is necessary, however, to remain under God's Lordship (Biblical patience) in the suffering – something we naturally tend to rebel against (thus, the need to learn it).

While the twelfth chapter of Hebrews mentions a great deal about chastening, we must see that it is actually showing the Christian how to respond when life hurts. Let's begin.

#### **1. Run the race with patience, keeping a right view of God (vv. 1-8).**

The author of Hebrews has just taken his readers for a walk through the 'Hall of Faith' in chapter 11. There he pointed to many personalities through Bible history who had trusted, demonstrated, and proven the faithfulness of God. Now the author turns to the readers and challenges them to run their own 'race' with patience (hopeful endurance), by laying aside every unnecessary burden, and the sins that beset them. Most importantly, they are to look to (to consider attentively) Jesus, the One Who has set the pattern and example in suffering. Our Lord doesn't ask us to experience what He hasn't experienced. He experienced emotional, verbal, and physical abuse for doing the will of the Father. We are simply following in His steps.

Far from attentively considering Jesus' example in sufferings, many Christians actually begin to despise the correction of God. If such an attitude continues without being rectified, it becomes a deep-rooted bitterness. Their attitude is, 'Why should I have to experience so many difficulties? Why should I have to be singled out by God for correction all the time?' This was the attitude that Job and Asaph had, before repenting (Job 9:29-31; Psalm 73:13-14). When passing through severe difficulties, many Christians will begin to despise God for allowing them to experience such things. They may also become frustrated, and temporarily give up on trying to serve God. The solution first begins with remembering God's *love* for them. (v. 6) 'For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.' In Revelation 3:19, Jesus told the Laodicean church: 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.' The believer must remember that sufferings are actually an evidence of his sonship, and of God's great love for him. Psalm 94:12: 'Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law.'

In 1 Peter 3:15, the suffering believer is instructed: 'But sanctify [or venerate] the Lord God in your hearts...' It is only possible to venerate or reverence God if we spend time meditating on His righteous character in the midst of the trial. The chart below displays four stabilising truths which are helpful for every Christian to remember and meditate on while passing through hurts of any kind.

<b>STABILIZING TRUTHS FOR HANDLING TROUBLE</b>
Stabilizing truths by Ken Collier, from the WILDS Christian Association, found on p. 338 of Jim Berg's book <i>Changed Into His Image</i> .
<b>God's LOVE for me is unchanging.</b> Jeremiah 31:3; 1 John 4:10, 16; Romans 8:31-32, 35-39; John 15:12-13; Deuteronomy 7:7-8
<b>God's PURPOSE for me is Christlikeness.</b> Romans 8:28-29; Colossians 1:28; Ephesians 4:11-13; 2 Corinthians 3:18
<b>God's WORD to me is the final right answer.</b> 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; 1 John 5:3; 2 Peter 1:3-4; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 30:11-20; John 16:13-15
<b>God's GRACE for me is sufficient.</b> 2 Corinthians 12:9; 2 Timothy 2:1; Hebrews 4:15-16; Titus 2:11-12; Psalm 116:5; Romans 5:20-21

## 2. Understand God's purposes in suffering (vv. 9-11).

Surely there are many, many purposes God has in our sufferings. But a few are mentioned here. (v. 9) '...Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?' Firstly, we see that remaining in subjection to God during the trial makes the abundant Christian life possible – the life which Jesus spoke about (John 10:10).

Second, in verse 10, we find that suffering is 'for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' God is busy delivering us from our own sinful and miserably stubborn hearts, and He is using tribulation to achieve that. While we might be anxious for circumstances, people, or problems to change or go away, 'we forget that suffering isn't our greatest enemy: an evil heart is' (Jim Berg, *Changed Into His Image*, p. 335). If we truly understood how wonderful it is to be partakers of God's own holiness, we would give thanks for the difficulties that come our way, recognising the opportunity they present.

Third, in verse 11, we see that suffering yields the 'peaceable fruit of righteousness' in a Christian's life. It changes us into His image, bringing peace – peace with God, peace with others, and peace in our own souls. Why would we want to trade this for anything?

Some other purposes in suffering can be listed below, although not mentioned in our text:

- For us to increase in hope and love (Romans 5:3-5); 'Biblical hope is not a mere anticipation of relief from the problem but is a confident expectation that God is accomplishing good through the trial...People who respond to sorrow with depression have lost hope.' (Jim Berg,

*Changed Into His Image*, p. 336)

- For the believer not to trust in himself (2 Corinthians 1:8-9)
- For the believer to be humbled (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)
- For the life of Jesus to be seen in the believer (2 Corinthians 4:11)
- For the believer to be able to comfort others who are also suffering (2 Corinthians 1:4); 'Our stability in adversity becomes an opportunity for ministry.' (Jim Berg, *Changed Into His Image*, p. 338)

### **3. Diligently and carefully cooperate with God's purposes (vv. 12-16).**

Once we have acknowledged God's good character and understood some of His righteous purposes in our suffering then what can we do differently? 'A godly response is always necessary for us to grow as a result of the trial and for God to be able to use our testimony during our trial.' (Berg, 338)

Verses 12 to 13 explain the need for the suffering Christian to bring discipline to bear in his own life. It can be tempting during a trial to 'throw in the towel' and 'drop your bags'. Discouraged or depressed Christians often give up, and let decisions, responsibilities, and problems pile up around them without dealing with them. They stop fulfilling their duties, and sit down in resignation and defeat. Or they become sloppy in their relation to the world and temptation. Instead of resolutely resisting sin, they allow worldliness to wash into their lives and thinking unchecked (see verse 14). They feel discouraged, and so they don't want to put up a fight anymore.

We are not suggesting that the Christian must just 'try harder' for he may already have been doing just that, but in the power of fleshly self-effort. He must rather submit to God's disciplinary structure and ways of doing things. He must cooperate with what he can see God doing in His life. He must begin moving towards Christ-likeness and away from self-indulgence, laziness, or perfectionism. This is very similar to the advice Peter gave to suffering Christians. In effect, he told them 'Keep growing!' (1 Peter 2:1-2; 2 Peter 3:18).

Verse 15 shows us that the Christian who is passing through suffering must diligently seek and take advantage of all the help God wants to provide for him to become more Christ-like through that suffering. A big hindrance to getting grace from God can be bitterness, and so the suffering Christian must always guard against it. It will prove to be a stopper for any true spiritual progress. 'Whenever you seem to be at an impasse in your Christian life as you attempt to grow while you hurt, look for a "clenched fist" in your life' (Jim Berg, *Changed Into His Image*, p. 336).

Esau (v. 16) was an example of someone who became bitter through suffering (Genesis 27 & 28), and it led to more sin in his life. The suffering Christian can be tempted to look to sinful and fleshly indulgences as a means of comfort. He must resolutely reject searching for relief from the problem, but must rather determine to find God's grace to cooperate with God's purposes while facing the difficulties head-on.

Lastly, the suffering believer must keep his eyes on the eternal perspective. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18: 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.'

**Homework:**

1. What are the besetting sins that are hindering you from running the Christian race?
2. Have you despised God for His correction in your life? If so, how?
3. Read the four stabilising truths. Maybe you could even memorise them, or stick them up somewhere to review. Which truth stands out to you the most, and why?
4. In what ways have you been forgetting that *suffering isn't your greatest enemy, but an evil heart is*?
5. What is one of God's purposes that stands out to you in regard to some difficulty (suffering) you might be experiencing? (see section no. 2)
6. What can you do differently in response to your suffering (see section 3)?
7. Chocolate Challenge Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 4:18



## Lesson 10

# Separation from Evil

Psalm 119:128: 'Therefore I esteem all *thy* precepts *concerning* all *things to be* right; *and* I hate every false way.'

The apostle James wrote the following, showing how utterly opposed this world's system is to true Christianity: 'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world.' (James 1:27). True religion reflects God's love in that it gives of itself for another's highest good. Worldliness is a mindset of lust and getting for oneself. To be conformed to the image of Christ, it is necessary for us to separate from worldliness, which actually includes all false doctrine as well (1 John 4:5). To protect ourselves from the contaminating influence of sin and error around us, we must recognise it and avoid it. To be filled with the love of God, we must have nothing to do with the love of the world. This is called separation. 'Why is separation so unpopular? It is unpopular because we live in the time of apostasy prophesied in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, when professing Christians have created a new type of Christianity that allows them to live according to their own lusts.' (David Cloud, *One Year Discipleship Course*, p. 155)

### What is the world? (1 John 2:15-17)

'The world is very aggressive and evangelistic and enticing. It wants to shape our lives by its standards, its fashions, its entertainment, its principles, its philosophies, its music.' (David Cloud, *One Year Discipleship Course*, p. 149). This is true. John defines the world as a mindset: The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. These three worldly values are so intertwined together, and together they are what make this world so evil. Satan will seek to work in us through these three avenues, and so it is important for us to understand how it works:

1. The lust of the flesh. These are the inordinate and selfish desires to gratify one's bodily appetites unrighteously (such as food, sex, sleep, etc. – not that these things are wrong in themselves, but we are speaking of whatever is sought to pamper the body without regard to God's plan for our lives). Without being exhaustive, the lust of the flesh basically has to do with the desires of the body, and a preoccupation with one's own body. The result of this is that men, and particularly women commonly display the contours of their bodies by dressing in ways that would have shocked the average person 100 years ago. This is being used of Satan to pollute the Christian mind, and to get the Christian focused on earthly things and not heavenly things.
2. The lust of the eyes. There is so much advertising that appeals to human sight. The eyes are the primary way of perceiving what is outside of ourselves, and so Satan will often seek to conquer the Christian's mind through the 'eye-gate'. What do you find yourself looking at, and why?
3. The pride of life. This is simply a glorying in oneself – who I am, what I love, what I want others to think about me, what I hate, what crowd I follow with, what kind of self-image I want others to see in me. It is basically a preoccupation with how great I am, or how I want others to admire me in some way. It is important to note here that Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) imbibes the same philosophy as the sounds of secular pop. The sound of the music massages the pride of life in the listener, with all its consequent attitudes: narcissism, self-pity, pride, despair, hanging loose, rebelliousness, etc. CCM is a music style that is diametrically opposed to Biblical separatism.

### **The importance of a testing mindset:**

Proverbs 14:15: 'The simple believeth every word: but the prudent *man* looketh well to his going.'

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22: 'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.'

Since we are absolutely surrounded by the wickedness of this world, it is so important that we be watchful against adopting the mindset of the unsaved. It can creep into our houses through television, radio, books, toys, pictures, advertising magazines, and even ways of speaking and relating to one another. We should not simply accept things. We need to look at what God says in His Word.

Most people who profess to be Christians have little or no concept of holy living as opposed to worldly living. This is largely due to ignorance, and lack of Biblical preaching, but the fact is that the boundaries between worldliness and godliness have faded to such a degree that people really don't know where they are. Most professing Christians have almost no idea about dress standards, music standards, what is appropriate for viewing on television, what reading materials are healthy for themselves and their kids, the danger of the world's three-fold lust system, and the need to be so vigilant and guarded against every wind of doctrine and the false teachers that abound today.

### **Separation is not:**

- Externalism. It must begin from the heart, and reach to the outward appearance and actions. If holiness does not begin in the heart, then it is Pharisaism (Matt 23:27).
- Arrogance. It must be done with humility, and to honour Christ (2 Timothy 2:24).
- Isolation. In most circumstances it is not needful to separate from mainstream society (as the Catholic monks and nuns have done). Christ did not pray for His disciples to be taken out of the world, but rather to be kept from the evil (John 17:15). Paul saw the impossibility of avoiding any kind of interaction with fornicators (1 Cor 5:10).

### **The reason for separation:**

The reason for separating from the world, and from false teachers and compromising Christians is for spiritual and moral protection (1 Peter 2:11; 2 Peter 2:8).

One man in town who is in the habit of organising ecumenical endeavours wanted to meet with me for a coffee. I knew that he was interested in 'building bridges', but I gratefully accepted the invitation, and saw it as an opportunity to explain my position of separation to him. I greatly respect the man, and I believe he probably has a close relationship with God. However, I was able to explain to him the incongruity of fellowshiping with error, and recommended that he read a particular write-up about the sad example of Billy Graham, a man that he greatly admired. Our disagreement was an amicable one, but I knew that if I agreed to his proposals for ecumenical involvement, that I would be countenancing the error and evil of other churches and denominations, and condoning them by my silence. Not only that, but I would begin to be influenced by the spirit of tolerance and the 'judge not' philosophy. I would open up the door for our people to be compromised with error and unhealthy spiritual relationships as well.



I met a man on the street who attends a Uniting Church (we'll call him Tim), and he happened to be talking to a Catholic priest at that moment. After he introduced me to his Catholic friend, I offered the priest a tract. Later, I met the Uniting Church man again, and he wanted to talk to me about how wonderful his Catholic priest friend was. I responded by saying that the priest probably wasn't saved if he believed what Catholics believe. Tim was quite taken aback at that, and I had an opportunity to explain about the distinctives of the Gospel. Even though Tim would have identified as a Christian, he had no idea about the differences between Catholics and Christians. This is the sad result of ecumenical involvement. Doctrine has to be set aside, and the Gospel has to be watered down in order for ecumenism to prosper. People begin to lose the knowledge and convictions of holiness, love for the truth, and hatred for sin, which our Anabaptist forefathers possessed.

I think of a lady I met, who was handing out tracts on the street. At first, I thought I might have found a sincere Christian, who was looking for the return of Christ. She was wearing a shirt that stated the truth of the rapture. However, she stood very close to me, and began to dominate the conversation, talking of visions, experiences, and Holy Spirit power. I realised that she was deceived, and tried to politely disagree without getting into an argument. She kept talking over the top of me, until I had to quietly excuse myself and begin walking away. We had been standing out the front of a cafe, and customers were sitting around tables there. As I turned to leave, her voice got louder, and she lifted her hand and began gabbling in tongues! I realised that it was an attack of the Devil to discourage me, and to discredit my message. I believe she was found some time later causing a similar commotion in a park. Christ doesn't want me to fellowship with those kinds of people. There is another spirit at work. It will discredit His message. It will sow confusion. It is impossible to work in unity with such people.

The evangelical mindset is summarized by the statement, "In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity." This statement might sound half-way plausible, but it shows a mistaken view that unity is obtained by ignoring differences. The unity that God gives requires oneness of mind (1 Cor 1:10; Ephesians 4:13; Amos 3:3). That is why a Christian can't just be a church-hopper, and an ecumenical Christian festival 'gate-crasher'. He must fellowship and minister with those who are like-minded, otherwise he will become weak, disobedient, and watered down.

### **A correct understanding of separation (2 Timothy 2:20-26)**

1. There must be a deep love for God's Word. (v. 15)

Psa 119:128 Therefore I esteem all *thy* precepts *concerning* all *things to be* right; *and* I hate every false way.

2. It is necessary that we separate from evil. (vv. 16-22)

How to separate from the world:

1. Don't love what it loves. Love God instead. (Matt 24:12; 1 John 2:15; Jude 21)
2. Don't be conformed to it (1 Peter 1:13-17; Romans 12:1-2); Pursue the will of God instead.
3. Don't make the ungodly your close friends; Pursue Godly friends instead. (Psalm 1:1; Eph 5:11; 2 Tim 2:21-22)

1 Cor 15:33 'Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.'

4. Plainly identify and avoid those who err and are teaching false doctrine. Don't be afraid to warn others about them. (2 Tim 2:16-17; Romans 16:17)

3. While we flee from error, we must also pursue godliness. (v. 22)

We must do so in connection with others who are like-minded.

4. We must be wise in contending for the truth (vv. 23-26)

1. Don't get entangled in foolish conversation.
2. Don't get in a fleshly argument, but be patient.
3. Be meek, and seek the restoration of those who are in error.

Separation is important, but we must remember that it is not an end in itself. It merely keeps us safe as we pursue Christ-likeness, and fulfil the great commission.

#### **Homework:**

1. Do your unsaved acquaintances or relatives know that you are saved? Does it show in your interactions with them, or do you just go along with their ungodly talk, and act as if everything is ok? Do you challenge them? Write your answers.
2. Are there some attitudes, teaching sources, music, books, friends, or winds of doctrine that have weakened your love for holiness and your hatred for the world? If so, list them here, and determine what you must do to separate from evil.
3. Does sin in your own life (or even the sin of a friend) greatly bother you? Ask yourself whether you agree with the words recorded in Psalm 119:128. Record your thoughts here.
4. Chocolate Challenge Memory Verse: Psalm 119:128







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BAPTIST CHURCH

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