

The Ekklesia  
Celebrating Community

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*Curriculum and notes by Pastor Frank Bailey, unless otherwise noted.*

## Lesson 1: The Calling

Memory Verse of the Week:

### **1 Corinthians 1:9**

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son,  
Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **1. Read 1 Corinthians 1:2 below. According to this verse, what is the church?**

#### **1 Corinthians 1:2**

To the \_\_\_\_\_ of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

The greek word for church in 1 Corinthians 1:2 is Ekklesia. It means the \_\_\_\_\_. The church is a group of people who have been called out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love. He has set us apart in Christ Jesus.

### **2. Read 1 Corinthians 1:9 below. According to this verse, what have we been called into?**

#### **1 Corinthians 1:9**

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

We have been called into \_\_\_\_\_ with God. Paul loved to talk about his calling. The power and center of this calling was fellowship or intimacy with God. This is the common bond we Christians share, we have fellowship with Christ that leads us to a place of community with all other Christians. We are bound together by our mutual calling. Actually that is the root meaning of the greek word for church, ekklesia, it means the called out ones.

We are called to enjoy God, we are called to enjoy God together. From the first moments of Paul's conversion The Lord brought new people into Paul's life. He spoke a powerful prophetic word to a reluctant Ananias; "Lord, do you know what this guy has done?" in order to bring Paul into the "fellowship" of the young church. Our calling is powerful. It is the very focus of our Christianity. So get over it, you are called to be part of His church.

### **3. Read the following verses and discuss how the bible refers to the church or the called out ones.**

#### **Acts 20:28**

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

The Bible refers to the Church as the Lord's possession and His flock. We were redeemed. We have been purchased by the blood of Jesus. That brings several thoughts to my mind. First, who or what were we purchased from? The Bible clearly teaches that all mankind is born into a state of slavery. We are spiritual slaves, held by the power of sin by the prince of the power of the air. When Christ represented us on the cross, the shackles that held us as a captive were broken. The prison door literally swung open. We could walk out of the prison of sin into the glorious liberty as children of God. Secondly, who purchased us? Of course we were purchased by Jesus by the price of His blood. We are no longer our own. We have been bought with a price. We are now the purchased possession, the inheritance of Christ Himself. Finally, how does that affect our life? We are not our own, our life is now His. Our reason for existence and the source of all our joy is to glorify God with our life. What a deal!!! He gets the glory and we get the joy. Glorify God with your body because you are His purchased possession.

#### **4. Read the following verses and discuss why the church is important.**

##### **1 Corinthians 3:16-17**

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

##### **Matthew 16:18**

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Jesus came to build His \_\_\_\_\_. Why is it important? Why is it valuable to the Christian? Why is the church valuable to the secular world? Why is the church valuable to the Lord? First of all the church is God's temple or dwelling place on earth. In the Old Testament the Lord dwelt in the tabernacle of Moses and the temple in Jerusalem. This was the place where the manifest presence of God was amongst His people. This is what made Israel special. Without the Lord in their midst they would be just like all of the other nations. In the New Testament the church is His dwelling place. He has chosen to make His presence known in the midst of His church. This is one of the blessings of being part of a New Testament Church. The Lord's presence is available to us when we gather together.

The secular world needs God. They are searching for Him in all the wrong ways, looking for peace and satisfaction but never finding it. The Bible clearly teaches that the rest our soul longs for is found only in the Presence of the Lord. This presence is found in the local church. The church of Jesus Christ is where God tabernacles on earth and this is the place we find rest.

#### **5. Read the following verse and commentary, then discuss how we experience the life of the Lord in our daily life.**

**John 15:5**

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in Him, bears much fruit; for without Me, you can do nothing.”

In John 15:5, Jesus refers to us as the vine. This relationship describes just how dependent on the Lord we are. As we stay connected to Him, His Life flows into us. This life flow is directly related to our relationship with Christ and our relationship with His church. The life of God flows between us and through us through our relationships with God and His people. The church is vital to this organic and spiritual union. As we cultivate an intimate life with the Lord, and join together with others walking in this intimate lifestyle, we will experience the life flow of the vine. If we abide in Him and He in us we will bear much fruit.

**6. Read the following verse and commentary, then discuss the importance of being connected to the body of Christ in both corporate gatherings and the small group environment.**

**1 Corinthians 12:12**

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

The Lord also refers to His church as the body of Christ. This is another beautiful picture of His church and the life that flows amongst us. Each one of us is a dynamic part of the body of Christ. Each one of us share a special role, placed exactly in His church as He desires. As we fulfill that role and relate to others who are functioning members of His body, there is a powerful result. First, our needs are met. When we flow with other members of His church enjoying this relationship, the gifts and ministries of the Spirit begin to function. The dynamics of the body of Christ are not seen only in large corporate gatherings, but in small groups or casual relationships that we nurture and value. Out of these relationships the body ministers to itself. We are then placed in a position of giving and receiving ministry as Jesus ministers to us and through us in His body.

**7. Read the following verses and commentary, then discuss how the church is the light of the world and the city on a hill.**

**Matthew 5:14**

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Jesus also referred to His people as the City on a Hill. As we function as a healthy church, the world will begin to recognize the life of God working through His people. We live in a dark world. The non-Christian population is longing for something real. They have heard it all and seen it all. Our world is waiting to see real Christianity in action. Jesus told us the world would know the reality of God when they see Christians loving one another. This picture of a city on a hill is a portrayal of His Church, walking in revival, loving God, and loving one another. When that day comes, harvest is at hand.

**8. Read the following verses and commentary, then discuss the blessing of being a part of the church which is the Bride of Christ. What are some of the blessings of being His Bride?**

**Revelation 21:1-5**

Now I saw a new heaven and new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

Finally, the Lord describes His church as the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ. This is the greatest portrayal of the Glory of God of all. The Lord made a plan to save fallen man and glorify His name. He determined to become one of us and redeem fallen man from his sins. He said that all who would believe on Him and accept His sacrifice would become a son or a daughter of God. When this happens we are clothed in the righteous garments, the wedding garments of Christ. Our sins are forgiven, and we become a part of the *Bride of Christ*. A great celebration is about to begin. The singing and celebration has already started in heaven and is spilling over into the streets on earth. All who hear this sound of rejoicing and join in become part of the great wedding celebration. Christ is returning for His church.

 <b>ANSWER KEY</b>
Church
Called out ones
Fellowship
Church
Bride

## Lesson 2: The House of Glory

Memory Verse of the Week:

**Ephesians 2:22**

In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

**1. Read the verse and commentary below. Discuss the supernatural nature of the church and what that looks like for the church corporately as well as on an individual basis.**

### **Ephesians 2:22**

In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Jesus intended for His church to be \_\_\_\_\_. If you look at the way it started it was entirely that way, God was unmistakably in their midst. There was tongues of fire on their heads, healings beyond number, deliverances, supernatural offerings, people raised from the dead, even ordinary men and women being used powerfully in the gifts of the Spirit. The supernatural was not uncommon, it was constant. The supernatural characteristic of the church continued on for several centuries. Today, the supernatural in church has fallen out of favor. Ministers and churches that flow in the power are rare and precious. The supernatural has somehow fallen into the 'irrelevant' category. Instead, we have the 'natural' man or the 'worldly man' trying to do church. Here is how Andrew Murray describes it.

"What else do we really need? What else is He trying to make us understand? The religion of the Bible is wholly supernatural. The one resource of faith has always been the living God, and Him alone. The children of Israel were utterly dependent upon Jehovah as they marched through the wilderness. The one reason their foes feared them and hastened to submit themselves was that they recognized among them the shout of a King and the presence of One compared with whom all their strength was vain. Wherein, asked Moses, shall it be known here that thy people have found grace in thy sight? Is it not in that thou goest with us? (Exodus 33:16). A church relying on human wisdom, wealth or resources ceases to be the body of Christ and becomes an earthly society. When we dare to depend entirely upon God and do not doubt, the humblest and feeblest agencies will become mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4)."

"An earthly society", that's a scary thought. That's just another way of saying a country club. Church without the glory is not even church. We often have sets of saturation meetings at our church with special guests. The focus of the services is the manifest presence. For some people, that is just too weird. If you think about it that sentiment is quite revealing. If emphasizing the Glory is perceived as fanatical we have really drifted far from our moorings. The purpose of the church is His glory. That is the place that brings freedom. What kind of freedom? Not a freedom to sin but a freedom from the bondage of sin. It is the anointing that breaks the yoke of sin off of our lives. So if you are under condemnation because of compromise creeping back into your life, find a real church. Find a place where His presence flows like a river and you will find yourself stepping into His incredible freedom.

## 2. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss David's passion for the church.

### Psalm 84:1-4

How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young— even Your altars, O Lord of hosts, My King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; They will still be praising You.

Spurgeon in *The Treasury of David* states regarding verse 2, "'My soul longeth,' - it pines, and faints to meet with the saints in the Lord's house. The desire was deep and insatiable - the very soul of the man was yearning for his God. 'Yea, even fainteth;' as though it could not long hold out, but was exhausted with delay. He had a holy lovesickness upon him, and was wasted with an inward consumption because he was debarred the worship of the Lord in the appointed place. 'For the courts of the Lord.' To stand once again in those areas which were dedicated to holy adoration was the soul-longing of the Psalmist. True subjects love the courts of their king. 'My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.' It was God Himself that he pined for, the only living and true God. His whole nature entered into his longing. Even the clay-cold flesh grew warm through the intense action of his fervent spirit. Seldom, indeed, does the flesh incline in the right direction, but in the matter of Sabbath services our weary body sometimes comes to the assistance of our longing heart, for it desires the physical rest as much as the soul desires the spiritual repose. The Psalmist declared that he could not remain silent in his desires, but began to cry out for God and his house; he wept, he sighed, he pleaded for the privilege. Some need to be whipped to church, while here is David crying for it. He needed no clatter of bells from the belfry to ring him in, he carried his bell in his own bosom: holy appetite is a better call to worship than a full chime."

Spurgeon in *The Treasury of David* states regarding verse 4, "'Blessed are they that dwell in thy house.'" Those he esteems to be highly favoured who are constantly engaged in divine worship - the canons residentiary, yea, the pew-openers, the menials who sweep and dust. To come and go is refreshing, but to abide in the place of prayer must be heaven below. To be the guests of God, enjoying the hospitalities of hearer, set apart for holy work, screened from a noisy world, and familiar with sacred things - why this is surely the choicest heritage a son of man can possess. "They will be still praising thee." So near to God, their very life must be adoration. Surely their hearts and tongues never cease from magnifying the Lord. We fear David here drew rather a picture of what should be than of what is; for those occupied daily with the offices needful for public worship are not always among the most devout; on the contrary, "the nearer the church the further from God." Yet in a spiritual sense this is most true, for those children of God who in spirit abide ever in His house, are also ever full of the praises of God. Communion is the mother of adoration. They fail to praise the Lord who wander far from Him, but those who dwell in Him are always magnifying Him."

David had tasted and experienced the supernatural, manifest presence of the Lord. He found Him in the tabernacle. Spurgeon stated that "communion is the mother of adoration." As we step into communion with Christ through our personal devotional life and relationships in the local church, we can say like David that we are blessed and praise will be our portion.

### **3. Read the following verses and discuss how God feels about His church.**

#### **1 Kings 9:3**

And the Lord said to him: "I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.

God \_\_\_\_\_ His church, His house. In the Old Testament it was the tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple in Jerusalem. Now don't misunderstand what I'm saying, The Lord is not impressed with buildings no matter how spectacular they may be. After all, He created everything that is; from the rings of Saturn to the brilliance of the sun. He formed the breath taking Grand Canyon and the stark beauty of Antarctica. Nothing we create can impress this Sovereign God, but His eyes and His heart have always been on His house. What is it about His house that causes The Lord to not be able to take His eyes off of it? His house is the dwelling place of His glory. The Lord loves His glory and loves to display His glory amongst mankind. His shekinah glory abides in the tabernacle and also in the temple.

But what about now? The temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Where is His house today? Today The Lord lives in buildings not made with hands. In the same way He revealed Himself in the Old Testament He reveals Himself in the New Testament. Today He reveals Himself to the world through His local church. He loves His church, even with all its problems, this is the place He has chosen to dwell. If that is true, the local church should be a major part of our lives. This is where God meets with us, this is His plan to reach the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. More than a sermon or a one-time experience but a life we are called into to enjoy and share with others of like and precious faith.

This love for His church has been part of Parris' and my life for almost forty years. You could say we have been "raised" in His house. That's why we have planted seeds to build its buildings and given our tithes and offerings to support and run it. We have raised our children in it, we have given our talents and giftings to it, and we have defended it when attacked by its enemies. I love the house of God and love to see it prosper and go forward for His Glory. Why do I love His house? Why, it's the place where He reveals Himself, it's the place where His shekinah glory is put on display, it's the place where broken lives are healed and put back together again. While others self-righteously criticize the so called "organized church," I embrace it because that is where I find life itself. Every time we gather together, with our problems and all our hypocrisies, He still comes and meets with us. His eyes and His heart are still on His house.

### **4. Read the following verses and discuss what gifts Jesus gave the church. Why did He give this gift to the church?**

#### **Ephesians 4:11-16**

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be

children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Jesus gave the gift of the five-fold ministry to the church. He gave the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. He loves the church and gave these gifts to the church in order to build it up. It is not the Lord's will for his church to be tossed to and fro and easily deceived. The Lord wants his church strong and becoming Christ-like. As we put ourselves in a position to receive from these gifts, we are strengthened and prepared for the work of the ministry that the Lord has for each of us to do.

**5. Read the following verses and commentary, then discuss how you love the church? How does this love manifest itself in the life of a believer? How does someone give themselves to the Lord and to the church?**

#### **Hebrews 10:24-25**

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

#### **2 Corinthians 8:5**

And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

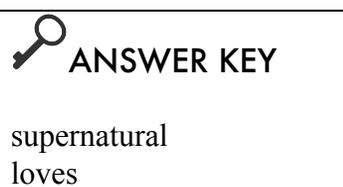
With regards to 2 Corinthians 8:5, Charles Spurgeon states, "You should follow the example of these Macedonian Believers and give yourself both to the Lord and to His Church. Put the two together and thus begin to place yourself wholly in the line of God's will. Joining the Church without being the Lord's, no matter from whatever motive it is done, is a course of action fraught with great danger to the soul, for none are more dead than those who only have a name to live. On the other hand, much blessing is missed if those who are the Lord's do not unite themselves with His people. If you have given yourself to the Lord, give yourself, next, to His people, that you may, with them, bear witness for Christ. Here is a certain number of people who, with all their faults, are the true followers of Christ. Join them and say, "I, too, am a follower of Christ." That is what membership with the Church means. It is as if you should say, "If the world is divided into two camps, I am on the side of King Jesus, and under His banner I will fight as one of those who bear witness to the Truths of God that He has revealed."

Do it, next, to spread the Gospel. Everybody is needed in this service, today, for the clear light of the Gospel is sadly obscured in many places. We cannot all be preachers, for if all were preachers, where would be the hearers? But we need everybody to be talking about Christ, by lips and life, by the printed and the spoken word—telling about salvation by the precious blood for all who believe, forgiveness through the Grace of God for the guilty, renovation by the Holy

Spirit for the depraved. Come, then, and give yourselves to the Lord, and then to His Church in order that you may spread the Gospel!

Do this, again, to maintain the Church. Nothing in the world is dearer to God's heart than His Church. Therefore, being His, let us also belong to it that by our prayers, our gifts and our labors, we may support and strengthen it. If those who are Christ's refrained, even for a generation, from numbering themselves with His people, there would be no visible Church, no ordinances maintained and, I fear, very little preaching of the Gospel. Therefore follow the Macedonian example for the sake of the Church. And finally, do it that you may grow in love and continue to prove your love to your Lord and His Church. And also that you may continue to live unto the Lord and increase your life by mingling with others who are alive unto God.

Give yourself to the Church. You that are members of the Church have not found it perfect and I hope that you feel almost glad that you have not. If I had never joined a Church till I had found one that was perfect, I would never have joined one at all! And the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect Church after I had become a member of it. Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us... All who have first given themselves to the Lord, should, as speedily as possible, also give themselves to the Lord's people. How else is there to be a Church on the earth? If it is right for anyone to refrain from membership in the Church, it is right for everyone, and then the testimony for God would be lost to the world! As I have already said, the Church is faulty, but that is no excuse for your not joining it, if you are the Lord's. Nor need your own faults keep you back, for the Church is not an institution for perfect people, but a sanctuary for sinners saved by Grace, who, though they are saved, are still sinners and need all the help they can derive from the sympathy and guidance of their fellow Believers. The Church is the nursery for God's weak children where they are nourished and grow strong. It is the fold for Christ's sheep—the home for Christ's family.”



## Lesson 3: Ekklesia Worship

Memory Verse of the Week:

**Psalm 100:1**

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!

### **1. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss the blessing of worshiping in community.**

#### **Revelations 5:13-14**

And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

I will never forget the early days of my Christian walk, it was at God's Army Seminary of the Bible in Kerman, California. This was not an ordinary Bible School. Sure we had teachers and classes and grades and papers and all the normal school "stuff", but that is where the similarities ended. This was a Christian community. We lived in "extended households", we had a "common purse", we ate our meals together, we prayed together, we worked together, we were experiencing the life of Christ as a true Christian community. It was very tough but that is where I experienced some of the greatest times in my Christian walk.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke about Christian community, specifically about worship in his book "Life Together", here is an excerpt. "It is God who has prepared one great song of praise throughout eternity, and those who enter God's community join in this song. It is the song that "the morning stars sang together and all the children of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7). It is the victory song of the children of Israel after passing through the Red Sea, the Magnificat of Mary after the Annunciation, the song of Paul and Silas when they praised God in the darkness of prison, the song of the singers on the sea of glass after their deliverance, the "song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb" (Rev. 15:3). It is the new song of the heavenly community. Every day in the morning the community of faith on earth joins in this song and in the evening it closes the day with this hymn. The triune God and the works of God are being extolled here. This song has a different sound on earth than it does in heaven. On earth, it is the song of those who believe; in heaven, the song of those who see."

\_\_\_\_\_ is happening in heaven, what else can you do when you behold His glory? As we come together in community, in the true fellowship of Christians, we begin to experience corporate worship, a taste of the heavenly ecstasy that will be ours soon. You can tell a lot about your spiritual condition by your worship experience with others. Worshipping with your spiritual family is as close as we get to the kingdom here on earth. This is the place where Jesus prayer is fulfilled, "Let your kingdom come, let your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven".

**2. Read the verses and commentary below. Have the group discuss the last time they experienced the joyful sound in God.**

**Psalm 89:15**

Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O Lord, in the light of Your countenance.

I used to love Wednesday night church in those early days at our Kawanee Church. The building was small, no carpet, and we had wooden pews. When the church was full of happy people, the sound was indescribable. We would sing and rejoice, there is not a happier sound in all the earth, "How happy are the people whose God is the Lord!" After years went by, and we had moved several times, those happy services seemed like a distant memory, that is until 1994. That was the year I began to hear the "joyful sound" again. This time it was an even greater intensity than before, sometimes, we would be filled with such unspeakable joy, it seemed like we had actually stepped over into heaven itself. I guess in one sense we had, the Holy Spirit is a little taste of the reality of heaven, we were definitely experiencing the edges of those upper regions.

Jonathan Edwards preached a message about the "Chief Employment of Heaven". His opinion was that the chief work of heaven is that joyful praise. Check out his comments about heaven's joy. "Praise is the most joyful work in the world. And how joyful a society (Edwards' word for church or community) are they that join together, so many thousands and millions of them, with one heart and one soul, to sing a new song before the throne, that fill heaven with their glorious melody! How joyful they are in their work, appears in the text, by their fervency in it, so that their voices resounded as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder. What ineffable joy was there in those harpers whom John heard harping with their harps!"

The very heart of the church is the common joy that we share in Christ. When we are all drinking together of the goodness of God, our hearts are filled with joy expressed in the joyful sound. When we stop drinking together of that heavenly vintage, church can become a miserable place. Instead of songs of joy we hear whispering of complaints, innuendo, and disagreements. The sound of joy is replaced with a deathly silence, there is nothing worse than a church that has lost it's joy. How is it with your soul today? When you think of your church is your heart flooded with the essence of His presence that you experience in times of worship, or do you immediately gravitate to the "somebody done me wrong song"? The song that you sing is a reflection of your heart, the song is the overflow of what is going on inside of you. How can we change the music, how can we be filled with the joyful sound once again? Actually it is very simple. Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face. One glimpse of His presence is all you need. In His presence it is hard to remember our offenses, after all He has forgiven us, how can we not forgive those we perceive to have wronged us. One glimpse of His amazing beauty is all it takes, you too will be filled with the joyful sound.

**3. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss what role being actively connected to the church plays in stepping into the joy of His presence found in worship.**

**Psalm 100:1**

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!

What exactly is a joyful noise. As ‘they’ say, I may not be able to define it but I know what it is when I hear it. What kind of joyful noises come to your mind? Maybe the sounds of children laughing at the playground, or the joyful cry when you passed your test, or maybe the sound of celebration heard when the Saints won the Superbowl, or even the shouts of joy at your wedding. Joyful noises come in all different sizes, shapes, and flavors. The one thing they have in common; it is that distinctive, unmistakable feeling of unrestrained joy. I’ll never forget the revival services that began in our church in August of 1994. I had never seen such joy anywhere, especially in church. There were shouts of laughter, belly laughs, giggles, laughter which took people’s breath away, laughing with tears, and shouts of laughter. There was laughter accompanied by jumping, running, and falling into trance like states on the floor. There was laughing in their sleep (my favorite), laughing when trying to preach or testify, and even laughing in the midst of horrible trials of every stripe. It was hard if not impossible to understand but one thing everyone knew was that it was supernatural in nature. Some accused it of being the flesh (pretty hard to fake that kind of joy), and others said it was demonic. I guess the thing that sold me was that most everyone affected by this joy found a new intimacy with the Lord. They talked about Jesus, sang about Jesus, and wanted to read their Bibles more and going to church became quite addictive. The conclusion that I came to was that God was being glorified, it had to be Him.

Charles Spurgeon spoke about this joyful noise in his comments on this verse. “Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. The original word signifies a glad shout, such as loyal subjects give when their king appears among them. Our happy God should be worshipped by a happy people; a cheerful spirit is in keeping with his nature, his acts, and the gratitude which we should cherish for his mercies.”

I am so glad the Lord visited our church with the joy of heaven. I know there is more of God available to us in this life. How can I be sure? The Lord who pours out His presence, which is literally chock full of joy, is putting a hunger in our hearts for more. I think the hunger itself is proof that more joy is on the way.

**4. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss practical ways we can place worship in its proper place of priority in our life.**

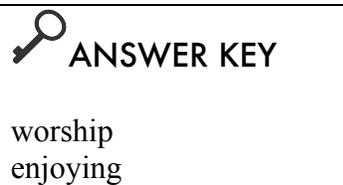
**Matthew 6:9,13**

In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

I define worship as the act of \_\_\_\_\_ God. Worship is spontaneous; it is our response to His greatness. Worship is not something we can do out of obligation but it is the pleasure of an individual that is aware of God's greatness. This explains the scene in heaven we see in the book of Revelation. In heaven, the angels, the seraphim, the elders, and the redeemed are all seen caught up in an ecstatic state of worship. In this world, we see through a glass darkly. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon our lives gives us a foretaste of the atmosphere of heaven. In this atmosphere our vision is clarified. When we see Him we have no other course that can be taken, worship becomes the only response. It is our response to His greatness.

Check out Matthew Henry's comments on Matthew 6:13. "The best pleading with God is praising of Him; it is the way to obtain further mercy, as it qualifies us to receive it. In all our addresses to God, it is fit that praise should have a considerable share, for praise becomes the saints; they are to be our God for a name and for a praise. It is just and equal; we praise God, and give Him glory, not because He needs it- - He is praised by a world of angels, but because He deserves it; and it is our duty to give Him glory, in compliance with his design in revealing himself to us. Praise is the work and happiness of heaven; and all that would go to heaven hereafter, must begin their heaven now. Observe, how full this doxology is, the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, it is all thine. Note, it becomes us to be copious in praising God. A true saint never thinks he can speak honorably enough of God: here there should be a gracious fluency, and this forever. Ascribing glory to God for ever, intimates an acknowledgement, that it is eternally due, and an earnest desire to be eternally doing it, with angels and saints above."

Once you taste the glory of God in the experience of worship you become hopelessly addicted. You actually become addicted to His love. Before we were aware of God's majesty, we could sing songs about the Lord. Our musicians could be the best professionals, the choir could have the most talented singers, the worship leader could be unparalleled; and still the songs ring hollow without the sense of God's presence. This "excellence of ministry" characterized by hollowness can never satisfy our hungry hearts. As Henry said, "praise is the work and happiness of heaven". Once we become a worshipper, worship becomes our very food. As a glutton delights in his pursuit of pleasure in his feasting, a worshiper also has an insatiable desire for pleasure found only in the worship of our God.



## Lesson 4: The Ekklesia Economy

Memory Verse of the Week:

**Philippians 4:19**

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

**1. Read the following verse and excerpt from a book by Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr. Discuss what it means to be part of the family of God and how we should relate to others in the body. Also discuss how this fact impacts our view on giving tithes and offerings to the local church.**

### **Ephesians 2:19**

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

A man approached me and asked, “Will you pray for me so that my business will prosper? I am at the edge of bankruptcy and I need God to bless me.”

I responded, “Let me ask you a question. Have you been faithful to honor God with the profits you made in the past? God said in Malachi that if we are faithful to Him and do not rob Him of his tithe, He will open the windows of heaven!”

He admitted, “Well, I must say I have not supported the Lord’s work for many years.”

“I have a dilemma,” I said, thinking aloud. “How do I ask God to bless a thief who has been stealing from God?”

Of course, that was not the end of our conversation. I went on to ask him if he thought a man should support his family as his first priority, and he agreed. I then asked him if he felt he belonged to a family of Christian people and that God wanted him to feel a responsibility to care for their needs? Just as most contemporary Christians would say, he stated: “I have never thought of my church as a family. As far as I can see, it’s an organization.”

The concept of life lived in community with fellow believers had never dawned on him. He went on to explain that an invisible God who owned heaven and earth surely didn’t need his few dollars. The Sunday program he attended twice a month was certainly not worth 10 percent of his earnings. According to this man, even a good movie - which was as long as an average church service - only costs eight bucks!

This man’s core problem was that he considered tithing a legalistic demand to support a public institution. Nothing in his years of attending church meetings caused him to think he was part of a family that required financial support.

We must view life from God’s perspective. That means rejecting the error that living the Christian life can be a self-centered activity. While Christ personally indwells “called-out ones”

(ekklesia) among men, a fundamental act of the Holy Spirit is to sever us from our self-governing spirits and connect us to other members. This forms a body incarnated by Christ. Living in community means you “look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr.)

**2. Read the following verse and commentary. Discuss how love for God’s house affects how you spend your money and your time.**

### **1 Chronicles 29:3**

3 Moreover, because I have set my affection on the house of my God, I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, my own special treasure of gold and silver:

David loved and valued the Church. David gave to the building of the church. In those days, the building was what housed the presence of God. Today the church is made from the living stones called believers. When we bring tithes and offerings into the house of God, we are demonstrating by our actions that we value God and His family. We demonstrate a love for others.

Many times our work can be a source of frustration and can be something we do because we have to work, just to pay the bills. I had one of those jobs. I worked for one year at B & C Egg Ranch in the San Joaquin Valley in the early seventies. I hated to go to work. My job consisted of pushing chicken manure. It was hot, it was stinky and I was miserable. On one of those miserable days I had a great spiritual breakthrough. I felt like I could not do that job anymore and began to cry out to the Lord. Thousands of chickens went silent as I began to shout out to God. He met me in an amazing way. In a moment of time He changed everything. He reminded me of my tithes and my offerings that I had given at church the night before. Then the Lord reminded me of the missions team we were sending out. In a moment of time I saw it. My work was connected to my giving. My giving was connected to the advancing of God’s kingdom. My work was not in vain. A portion of my earnings was going into the work of God. Joy began to flood my soul. Instead of crying out in misery I began shouting for joy. Everything changes when you see your work as valuable. Just pushing chicken mess seems like a waste of time and energy. Maybe your job seems like just pushing chicken mess. If you give the first fruits of your harvest, your tithe, into the work of God, your work is not in vain. Your work is connected to the Lord's work.

**3. Read the verse and commentary below. Discuss what overflowing joy looks like in your life as you live in community.**

### **2 Corinthians 8:1-2**

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

What do you do with excessive joy? What am I talking about? When your cup is so full, it has to be poured out. When the sweetness of heaven is so good, and the presence of Jesus is

overwhelming, what do you do? Paul described this overflowing joy in his letter to Corinth. He was describing the joy of the Philippian church. He said their joy overflowed in an incredibly, generous offering and a lifestyle of giving. They were insisting to be included in the relief offering being taken for the church in Jerusalem. Many Christians have never experienced this kind of overflow. Paul described it as the work of God's grace in our hearts. This amazing grace opens our hearts up to the unlimited spiritual resources of heaven. When we began to taste of these incredible riches we have to respond. This response comes in so many ways. It could be ministering to the hungry, or visiting the prisons. For you it could be witnessing on the streets, telling your lost friends about His love, or ministering to the sick. Many times the overflow of joy comes in simply giving offerings to the work of God. When we are tasting the incredible riches of His Grace in our own lives and see people who are hurting, our joy demands a response.

John Piper speaks often of the overflow of grace. Here is how he explains it. "Love is the overflow of joy in God that meets the needs of others. The overflow is experienced consciously as the pursuit of our joy in the joy of another. We double our delight in God as we expand it in the lives of others. If our ultimate goal was anything less than joy in God, we would be idolaters and would be no eternal help to anyone. Therefore, the pursuit of pleasure is an essential motive for every good deed. And if you abandon the pursuit of full and lasting pleasure, you cannot love people or please God."

This is exactly what Jesus meant when He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive". So, if you are full, let your joy overflow, let it overflow in an act of love.

**4. Read the verse and commentary below. Ask if there are testimonies of how the Lord showed Himself faithful in regards to providing. Discuss what "It is more blessed to give than to receive" means.**

#### **Matthew 14:15-16**

When it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat."

There is more going on in this story than you can see at first glance. Jesus is ministering to the crowds, they have been thronging Him for three days. If that was not enough, the Lord just wanted to be alone. He had just heard that his cousin, John the Baptist had been killed by Herod, this was disturbing on two levels. First, Jesus had loved and respected the courage and preaching of John, now John was gone. But even more troubling, the Lord knew that if the authorities had killed John, in time they were coming for Him too. He needed to be alone, but that was a luxury that had to wait for another day. Jesus continued to minister to the crowds for three days when all He really wanted was to be alone.

Back in 1990, the Lord really used this miracle to speak into my life. We were going through horrible, ministry threatening, financial problems. It is hard to be effective in anything, especially in ministry, when you are in trauma yourself, especially money trouble. During our

worst of times, the Lord began to challenge us to reach out to people who were in worse trouble than we were. He led us to begin a free food festival, "Feed the Multitudes". No matter how much we whined or complained, the message was clear, "You give them something to eat." I was surprised at what happened at that first FTM event. Of course the poor and the homeless came, they came by the thousands. In those pre- Katrina days, the projects in New Orleans were full, full of desperate people looking for some kind of relief. We had food, music, water games for the kids, it was an awesome day of ministry and fun. What happened next is what caught me by surprise.

The great miracle that happened that day was not the feeding or ministry to the poor. The real miracle happened in the heart of our church. The Lord was telling us, like He had told His disciples years ago, "You give them something to eat." As we followed His directions, we began to get it. It really was more blessed to give than to receive. We were the ones that received a miracle that day. For all these years, Feed the Multitudes has been part of what we do at Victory Fellowship, it is a living parable to us about giving. If you are in trouble, it is time to start giving. You can eat your lunch and it will be gone or, like the little boy, you can put your lunch in the hands of Jesus and your life of miracles will begin.

**5. Read the verse and commentary below. Discuss where a believer needs to be in order to experience God's infinite supply.**

**Matthew 14:20**

And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.

\_\_\_\_\_ supply, infinite is the one word that is incomprehensible. How can there be an infinite supply? I can't understand it but His eternal attributes were glimpsed in the ministry of Jesus. There was the unprecedented water into wine, the mind numbing walking on water, the strange stilling of the storm. Who could ever forget the net-ripping, boat sinking catch of fish. Just when the disciples calmed down from one demonstration of God's glory, there He was again, defying the odds and shocking everyone who happened to be there. The feeding of the multitudes grabbed all of the disciples attention. He was now bringing them into this arena called infinite. "You give them something to eat." As they struggled to find food, they came across the little boy with the lunch. This was all they had, they were about to discover the infinite displayed in a little boy's lunch. I have to say it again, infinite supply, how can there be a supply of anything that is limitless?

Charles Spurgeon spoke about this infinite God who loves to display His glory. "But this is the point that I want to show you: the power that multiplied the bread and the fish, and fed the thousands, had not come to an end. Their power to eat was exhausted, but not Christ's power to feed; for when they had received to their utmost capacity, there was yet more to follow. The people were sharp set that day, the mountain air made their appetites keen, and their long fasting put a razor edge upon them; yet when they had all eaten to the full, great baskets were brought, and these were filled; in the one case twelve, and in the other seven of them. There is enough for each, enough for all, and still remaining for future needs. The infinite Worker reveals His infinity by His unstinted bounty, His unmeasured liberality."

That is the amazing truth about God's supply; enough for each, enough for all, and still ample supply for future needs. I am trying to let this soak into my head, He is and has more than enough for each of us in every circumstance. He is and has more than enough for all of us in every circumstance. He is and has more than enough for all of our future needs. Now I get it, that's why the children of Israel in the wilderness were only allowed to gather enough manna for that day. God is a continual flowing fountain of provision. We are being taught to depend on Him every day. There is sufficient grace available, there is infinite grace available, we are to drink it in each day. So what kind of challenge are you facing today? Is it bigger than infinite? Take whatever you have, put it in the hand of the Lord, stand back and watch the Infinite One display His glory. We too can experience God's infinite supply as we follow Jesus amidst the crowd listening to His word and serving others.

In the feeding of the five thousand I often think of the little boy who gave his lunch. If he was like every other little boy, I'm sure he wondered where he would get his belly full, he had no idea what was about to happen. When the food started to be handed out, he was filled with amazement. Wide eyed with a mouth full of fish he just stared at Jesus. Who was this man who had food for everyone with plenty left over?

Charles Spurgeon called him a "Filling Benefactor". Check this out. "No one was neglected, no one refused, no one was too faint, no one left till he was satisfied, no one needed anything else, no one found that the food did not suit him; for indeed they were all hungry, 'and they did all eat.' No one stinted himself, or was stinted, all 'were filled'. Ours is a filling Benefactor, and he provides filling food. After the feast, twelve great baskets were needed to hold the fragments. It was impossible to exhaust the store. The baskets were full as well as the people. There was far more provision after the feeding than before it. By feeding others our stock increases. That which was left had been blessed as well as that which was eaten, and therefore it was fine food for the disciples. They gave plain bread and fish, and they receive more in quantity, and a blessing to improve the quality. Those who wait upon others at Christ's bidding shall have a fair portion for themselves. Those who fill others' mouths shall have their own baskets filled. Everybody is satisfied when Jesus makes the feast."

What an incredible story, it's not from hoarding that we have plenty for tomorrow, it's by giving away what we have. This little boy left with more than a full belly that day. He left with a full heart. That is how it is for everyone who comes into contact with the love of God. His love not only fills our bellies and meets our needs, He expands our hearts and fills our souls with His abundance. The Lord has more than enough to supply all of our need and His heart is open and generous toward the hurting and needy of this world. Maybe it's time for you to give your lunch to the Lord. When you do, you might just find yourself laying in the grass wide-eyed and with full belly looking into the face of Christ.

**6. Read the verse and commentary below. Discuss how the Lord's supernatural supply that meets our needs is connected to our relationship to the church.**

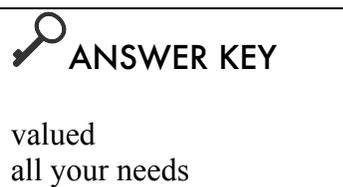
**Philippians 4:19**

And my God shall supply \_\_\_\_\_ according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Philippi from his imprisonment in Rome. The church in Philippi was a very special church to the Apostle Paul. It had been started in very unusual circumstances and had been the first church to stand behind the apostle in a significant financial way. Paul had been ministering in the region near Galatia and wanted to go over into Asia when he was stopped by the Holy Spirit. That was followed by a dream where someone from Macedonia was calling Paul to come help him. Paul received that as direction from The Lord and crossed the sea to go into Macedonia. The city in Macedonia Paul ended up in was Philippi. That's when all the fun started. He had gathered together a small group of new converts and was ministering to those disciples when he encountered a fortune teller bound by demons. One thing led to another and Paul was arrested, beaten with rods, and put into stocks and bonds in prison (I am not talking about financial instruments). That night, Paul and Silas began to worship the Lord in the midst of their miserable circumstances. As they worshipped, the Glory of The Lord fell down followed by an earthquake. Needless to say, the jailer became part of the growing congregation. Paul left town shortly after this incident leaving Luke as their pastor. The church in Philippi began to support Paul immediately, their support apparently continued throughout Paul's ministry. That brings us back to Paul's letter and today's verse. Part of the reason Paul wrote this letter was to thank this church and encourage them about God's supernatural supply for their own lives.

Here is a quote from Wuest, describing the supernatural nature of God's provision. "Paul hastens to assure them that they have not impoverished themselves in giving so liberally to the cause of the gospel. The word "supply" is the translation of the same Greek word translated "I am full." That is, God's treatment of the Philippian saints will correspond to their treatment of Paul. They filled full Paul's every need to overflowing. God will do the same for them. The measure of the supply which God the Father has is determined by His wealth in glory, which wealth in glory is in Christ Jesus, an infinite supply. Translation: But my God shall satisfy to the full all your need in accordance with His wealth in glory in Christ Jesus. Now to God even our Father, be the glory forever and ever."

I love what Wuest said about The Lord's infinite measure of supply. Are you a supporter of the work of God? If so, this promise is also for you. My God shall supply all of your need according to His riches in Glory. If you are not a tither why not start today? Unlimited resources will support you all of the days of your life.



## Lesson 5: The Ekklesia Meal

Memory Verse of the Week:

**Psalm 23:5**

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.

**1. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss how you can partake of the Ekklesia meal each day.**

**Psalm 23:5**

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.

David's Psalm 23 is one of the best loved passages in the entire Bible. In it, we see the tender love of Our Savior as He gently leads His sheep. One of the pictures David paints in this Psalm is The Lord graciously preparing a table for us in the presence of our enemies. David never sugar coated the message. How could he? His faith was forged in the fires of affliction. His God was the God who met him in the pit of despair. His songs were often written as prophetic words from The Lord to himself to comfort himself in the worst of times. That brings us back to the table of The Lord. This table is not in king's palaces, this is a table found in the presence of enemies. David had learned to encourage himself in The Lord in the evil day. How did he do it? He comforted himself by coming to the table of The Lord.

Here is what Charles Spurgeon says about this table. "Behold the superlative liberality of the Lord Jesus, for he hath given us his all. Although a tithe of his possessions would have made a universe of angels rich beyond all thought, yet was he not content until he had given us all that he had. It would have been surprising grace if he had allowed us to eat the crumbs of his bounty beneath the table of his mercy; but he will do nothing by halves, he makes us sit with him and share the feast. Had he given us some small pension from his royal coffers, we should have had cause to love him eternally; but no, he will have his bride as rich as himself, and he will not have a glory or a grace in which she shall not share. He has not been content with less than making us joint- heirs with himself, so that we might have equal possessions."

What exactly is on the menu at this table in the wilderness? First, we are feasting on the word of God. This word is soul food, it feeds and nourishes our soul on His words of faith. As David said "How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!" As we delight ourselves in the goodness of God's word, not only is it sweet to our taste, it also nourishes and feeds our souls. "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." This bread that Jesus is speaking of is the word of God, the true bread that comes from heaven and gives life to the world. The second fare on the menu is the new wine of the Holy Spirit. This new wine fills us with joy unspeakable and power to live and work for God in this world. Push up to the table, ignore your enemies, and \_\_\_\_\_ yourself at the table of The Lord.

**2. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss the importance of God's word in your life.**

**Psalm 119:16-18**

I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word. Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word. Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

It never ceases to amaze me how people look everywhere other than God's written Word for guidance and instruction. From horoscopes to fortunetellers, from popes to so called prophets, everyone is looking for a word. One of the great teachings of the protestant reformation was the importance of the written word. Probably Luther's greatest accomplishment was his translation of the Bible into German. It had been hundreds of years since the Bible was available in the language of the people. Luther saw the importance of the written word and would not rest until he completed his translation. William Tyndale, inspired and influenced by Luther, translated the Bible into common English. Tyndale's translation of the Bible greatly influenced the English speaking world. His New Testament is clearly seen in all of the English translations up to the current day. Tyndale's grasp of the English language actually shaped the way English has been spoken since his time. William Tyndale paid a great price for his accomplishments. He was burned at the stake because of his work.

Here is a quote from John Piper speaking of Luther's emphasis on the written word. "One of the great rediscoveries of the Reformation—especially of Martin Luther—was that the Word of God comes to us in the form of a book. In other words, Luther grasped this powerful fact: God preserves the experience of salvation and holiness from generation to generation by means of a book of revelation, not a bishop in Rome, and not the ecstasies of Thomas Muenzer and the Zwickau prophets. The Word of God comes to us in a book. This rediscovery shaped Luther and the Reformation."

It's funny, as much as our world has changed, nothing has changed at all. We are still looking to "bishops" to hear from God for us and just as in Luther's day, we have our share of "modern day prophets". Just because someone has a title or has a television ministry or even pastors a church does not mean they are a spokesman for God. The only way we can really know if we hear from God or if a prophetic word given to us is accurate is if it has the backing of scripture. The final authority in all matters is God's written word. If you have an "impression in your spirit" or if "a word has been spoken over you", you must confirm that word with the scripture. The scripture is "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path". The world is a dark and confusing place. False prophets with improper motives only make it darker. Thankfully, as Peter said, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:"

**3. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit and armed with the word of God in walking a victorious life.**

**Matthew 4:1-11**

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" 11 Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

Jesus after being filled with the Holy Spirit was led out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for 40 days, He had but one weapon in which to combat Satan. It wasn't His good looks or His works, He too had to quote the word of God to defeat every emotion and power of the dark side. "It is written" should be a warning to us all, as we face the everyday temptations of this world and its jargon. It is our source of strength. The Scripture is more than a magic "jeanie" bottle that we rub to get our wishes for the day or cute little promises you pull from a blessing box. We don't read His word to just meet our need or fill an emotional void in our lives. It becomes our food, our bread and butter so to speak. His word alone guides us through culture, clichés, and the opinions of man. It's important to take his Word to cleanse our mind, will and emotions. It must be preached in pulpits, taught in Sunday school and read personally.

We also cannot ignore the work of the \_\_\_\_\_ when reading the word of God. The Holy Spirit also will not act independent of Scripture. It is His word that binds the conscience, divides the spirit from the soul and convicts us of our intentions and thoughts. Biblical truth must be taught to nurture and discipline the body of Christ on a daily basis. The ideas of this world are forever breaking upon us and we must counter it with the word of God. I cannot tell you how many times of crisis in my life, God has spoken to me through His Word. It is the anchor of my soul.

**4. Read the verses and commentary below. How can being connected to a community of believers help you be filled with the Holy Spirit and armed with the word of God?**

**Hebrews 4:12**

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

**Ephesians 6:17**

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

The Spirit gives you the power to overcome your flesh and the enemy. The Holy Spirit takes the word of God and uses it to discern between soulish thoughts, feelings, and actions and His Spirit or even the enemy. As you pick up the Word, you pick up a mighty and powerful sword that can cut through confusion and turmoil and tell the difference between flesh and spirit.

**Rom. 8:12- 13**

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Paul said we are debtors. Not that we could ever even think about paying back The Lord for all He has done, but he still said we are debtors. We can never go back to that other life in light of what God has done for us in Christ. We have been forgiven and been made sons of God. As a result, sometimes it feels like we have a big bullseye on us. I don't want to sound paranoid or devil conscience but it seems like since we became Christians we are open season for all sorts of mischief. That's what brings us to the next verse, because of the temptations that Christians face we are told to put to death the worldly lifestyle by the Holy Spirit. Now what could that mean?

Albert Barnes spoke powerfully about these verses in his commentary on the Bible. "Through the Spirit - By the aid of the Spirit; by cherishing and cultivating his influences. What is here required can be accomplished only by the aid of the Holy Spirit. Do mortify - Do put to death; do destroy. Sin is mortified when its power is destroyed, and it ceases to be active. The deeds of the body - The corrupt inclinations and passions; called deeds of the body, because they are supposed to have their origin in the fleshly appetites. Ye shall live - You shall be happy and saved. Either your sins must die, or you must. If they are suffered to live, you will die. If they are put to death, you will be saved. No man can be saved in his sins. This closes the argument of the apostle for the superiority of the gospel to the Law in promoting the purity of man. By this train of reasoning, he has shown that the gospel has accomplished what the Law could not do - the sanctification of the soul, the destruction of the corrupt passions of our nature, and the recovery of man to God."

Practically speaking, how would I do that? For me, it basically consists in two daily activities. First, it is consistent, systematic \_\_\_\_\_ of the Word of God. God's word is a weapon and is able to destroy the weapons that are aimed at us. Secondly, I \_\_\_\_\_ in the Spirit. This puts me in touch with the supernatural realm of God. When we pray in the Spirit we are filled with God's dynamic power which affects our tendencies to fall back into a worldly lifestyle. Paul talked about the Sword of the Spirit in Ephesians and used that as a term for God's word. When we pray, we can pray in our heavenly language and also pray the scriptures. When you do that, you will be well on your way to a life free from the snares of the old way of life.

**5. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss how you can incorporate mediating on the Word of God in your life in the days ahead.**

**Psalms 1:2-3**

But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

I'll never forget the one and only Jesus festival Parris and I went to. It was probably 1975 and it was called "The Festival of the Son". It took place somewhere near Carmel in California, the place was breathtaking. There were several thousand Jesus freaks camped out in this beautiful valley, listening to Jesus bands and preaching day and night. The one message that really hit me that weekend was actually preached by our Bible School director, Bob Forester. The word he brought was "Get Planted". The Lord used that word to confirm in my heart about my connection to The Lord through His word and my connection to the body of Christ. To avoid drifting through life, tossed to and fro by every doctrinal trend out by all of the various trial in life, being planted in God is essential.

Dick Mills brought out the importance of meditating on God's Word in relation to being planted in God. "meditates, hagah To reflect; to moan, to mutter; to ponder; to make a quiet sound such as sighing; to meditate or contemplate something as one repeats the words. Hagah represents something quite unlike the English "meditation," which may be a mental exercise only. In Hebrew thought, to meditate upon the Scriptures is to quietly repeat them in a soft, droning sound, while utterly abandoning outside distractions. From this tradition comes a specialized type of Jewish prayer called "davening," that is, reciting texts, praying intense prayers, or getting lost in communion with God while bowing or rocking back and forth. Evidently this dynamic form of meditation- prayer goes back to David's time." I love that, muttering God's word over and over is closely associated with getting planted. This is the place where our roots extend deep into the waters of life, this is the place where we begin to experience spiritual growth.

Martin Luther also spoke about the verbal nature of Hebrew meditation. Here are some of his thoughts. "To meditate, as it is generally understood, signifies to discuss, to dispute; and its meaning is always confined to a being employed in words, as in Psalms 37:30, "The mouth of the righteous shall meditate wisdom." Hence Augustine has, in his translation, "chatter;" and a beautiful metaphor it is - - as chattering is the employment of birds, so a continual conversing in the law of the Lord (for talking is peculiar to man), ought to be the employment of man." As chattering is an employment of birds rehearsing God's word verbally should be the employment of man. Next time you hear the birds chattering outside your window, you can be reminded to join right in, chattering God's words to yourself.



## ANSWER KEY

delight  
Holy Spirit  
Studying  
Pray

## Lesson 6: The Ekklesia Bath

Memory Verse of the Week:

**Psalm 92:13**

Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.

**1. Read the verse and commentary below. Discuss how the local church can be a winepress and the benefits of being in it. Can you say that His dwelling place is lovely despite it being a winepress? Why or Why not?**

### **Psalm 84:1**

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!

This Psalm is titled, Gittith, ‘For the Winepresses’. That is similar to the meaning of Gethsemane (oil press), the infamous garden that Jesus spent His last evening in with His followers. Like Jesus, David was familiar with God’s winepress. David had it right, how lovely is your dwelling place O Lord. You see what makes our life beautiful is not the comfort of our present situation. What makes our life beautiful is this, God is present with us. Jesus wrestled with God in Gethsemane. He was being squeezed in God’s winepress. What was the fruit of that night? The fruit was calvary, the empty tomb, and a great harvest of souls. David was also familiar with the uncomfortable wine press of God. David also bore fruit from being squeezed by God, he was transformed into the greatest of worshippers and song writers that has effected every generation since his time.

Here are some thoughts from Augustine on this verse. “This Psalm is entitled, ‘For the winepresses.’ The grape hangs on the vines, and the olive on its trees. For it is for these two fruits that presses are usually made ready; and as long as they hang on their boughs, they seem to enjoy free air; and neither is the grape wine, nor the olive oil, before they are pressed. Thus it is with men whom God predestined before the world to be conformed to the image of His only-begotten Son, who has been first and especially pressed in His Passion, as the great Cluster. Men of this kind, therefore, before they draw near to the service of God, enjoy in the world a kind of delicious liberty, like hanging grapes or olives:...He hath the coverings of carnal desires stripped off from him, like grape- skins: for this hath taken place in him in carnal desires, of which the Apostle speaks, ‘Put ye off the old man, and put on the new man.’ All this is not done but by pressure: therefore the Churches of God of this time are called winepresses.”

So have you been to God’s winepress lately? Augustine said it was God’s church. It is in church where we hear God’s word, struggle to yield, and then are pressed in our interaction with the body of Christ. His dwelling place is lovely, it just may take you a while to see it.

**2. Read the verse and commentary below. Discuss what atmosphere is needed for healing and restoration to take place in our lives.**

**2 Corinthians 13:9**

For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete.

Let's face it, we are all pretty goofed up. Why would I say that? First of all we are all born flawed. Our very nature is twisted and distorted as a result of our fallen nature. It just gets worse from there. All our lives have been spent either being victims or victimizing others, both positions have their consequences. What is the solution? Redemption. You see redemption starts with forgiveness but doesn't stop there. It goes much farther. The Lord is not content with just forgiveness, He wants restoration and wholeness.

Here is a brief word study from Dick Mills describing the healing power of God and how it effects our souls. "complete, katartisis: An improving, equipping, training, disciplining. It includes making the necessary adjustments and repairs. From the word katartizo: To arrange, set in order, equip, adjust, complete what is lacking, make fully ready, repair, prepare. The word is a combination of kata, "down," and artios, "complete," "fitted." It is used for the disciples' mending their nets and for restoring a fallen brother." So from the day we are saved the Lord begins adjusting and repairing. The work happens by the touch of God in our lives through the written word, the spoken word, and the anointing.

Adam Clarke describes this in his comments on this verse. "to fit or adapt, signifies the reducing of a dislocated limb to its proper place; and hence, as Beza says on this passage: "The apostle's meaning is, that whereas the members of the Church were all, as it were, dislocated and out of joint, they should be joined together in love; and they should endeavor to make perfect what was amiss among them, either in faith or morals. It is a metaphor, also, taken from a building; the several stones and timbers being all put in their proper places and situations, so that the whole building might be complete, and be a proper habitation for the owner."

The atmosphere for this healing and restoration to take place is the church \_\_\_\_\_. It is in loving one another and applying the word and the Spirit on a personal level to the hurting that this adjusting and repairing begins to take effect. So no matter how goofed up we may be there is recovery and healing in His word and His body.

**3. Read the verse and commentary below. Discuss what part we play in the conforming process.**

**Romans 8:29**

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Have you ever really noticed what this verse says? It says that we are predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son. What does conformed mean? It may not be a common word

in our modern vocabulary but maybe it should be. Conformed comes from the greek compound word summorphos. It means to be changed or shaped together into the same form. It is describing us as being changed into the image of God's Son.

Jonathan Edwards wrote a powerful commentary on this verse in his Bible. Here is part of that text. "to be conformed to the image of His Son, "to be made like His Son, and to have communion with Him in His holiness and in His happiness. They are predestinated to be conformed to His Son in His death, in dying to sin and the world, and in his resurrection, by being quickened from being dead in trespasses and sins, and also in their bodies being raised, Christ the first fruits, and afterwards those that are Christ's at his coming. They are conformed to Christ in His justification. When Christ rose, He was justified; and believers in their justification do but partake with Him in his justification. They are conformed to Christ in His relation to the Father, or in His sonship, and are made also the children of God, so that they are His brethren, only He is the firstborn among them, as the Apostle here observes. They are conformed to Christ in the Father's love to Him, and are partakers with Him in it as members. They are conformed to Christ in his being heir of the world, and they are joint heirs. They are conformed to Christ in His exaltation and glorification, for He and they shall be glorified together. They are conformed to Him in ascension into heaven; they shall also ascend. They are conformed to Him in the glorification of His body, for their bodies shall be made like unto His glorious body. They are conformed to Him in His enjoyment of the Father in heaven; they by being members of Him partake with Him in his enjoyment of the Father's infinite love, and in His joy in the Father. His joy is fulfilled in them, and the glory which the Father has given him, he has given them."

That is a mouthful. We are being conformed into the likeness of Christ by the resurrection power that lives within us. We are being transformed, metamorphosized, into the image of Jesus Christ. This is the work of God that began in us that day we were born again and will actually accelerate when we step into eternity. In this life it is our daily adventure, yielding to this supernatural work of conforming. Conforming to His death and conforming to His life. Actually our part is the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ part, He does all the rest.

**4. Read the verse and commentary below. Discuss how being connected relationally in the local church will create opportunities for sanctification.**

**Song of Solomon 2:15**

Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes.

I started seeing the little foxes sneaking into my vineyard way back in bible school. I was so young! In some way it was easy to spot them. You know the ones who gather people around them and have their "opinion". After the first year at our bible school our director decided to move into community. Instead of a two year bible school we would live in common indefinitely. Although the plan had its downfalls, some thought "we were getting ready to drink the cool-aid." Our campus was in a swirl, one particular guy who happened to be one of our mentors decided it was his time to leave and he went around wearing "duct tape" on his mouth! For us, we knew it wasn't time to part ways and to stay on was better for us.

But bigger foxes came when we were "sent" to tree plant in the mountains living in tents for months at a time. The food was bad, the pay was cheap (none!) and we froze to death. Whatever bad attitude one had down in the valley, it hit you in the head on tree- planting trips. The work would either break you or make you. It wasn't uncommon to have folks leave for good once they went tree- planting.

Luther said, "Foxes are crafty and subtle creatures, malignant and mischievous, hungry and voracious, full of deceit and dissimulation, are of an ill smell, and abominably filthy. They spoil the vine, as foxes do, by gnawing the branches, biting the bark, making bare the roots, devouring the ripe grapes, and infecting all with their noxious teeth and vicious breath."

If you didn't have issues of your own to deal with, believe me someone in that tent camp would bring things out of you, you never knew existed! But thanks be unto God that always causes us to triumph in Christ Jesus, and brings out the savor of Christ even in the midst of a bunch of grumbling hungry tree- planters!. I still see our night meetings, singing at the tops of our lungs in the tent with the stove stoked, "I will sing unto the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously, The Horse and rider He has thrown into the sea." We were dirty, hungry and probably endangering our lives but God did something so supernatural to Frank and I that only those mountains could teach us. We had to "catch those little foxes." Be it the cold, your leader, the rats, the lack of nourishing food, my two year old up there, each one of those things tried to haunt me, but His presence overruled each fox.

Simpson said, "He is indeed willing to come into our common life, and help us with our vines and little foxes, but not until we have first surrendered them to Him so fully that we are at leisure from them for His other calls, and are willing to turn aside from the most engrossing occupation to commune with Him or to follow Him wherever He may lead. Oh, that each of us might be able to say of every call of heavenly voice, "When thou saidst 'Seek ye my face,' then my heart replied, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'"

## **5. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss how we grow up in all things.**

### **Ephesians 4:15**

But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—

Paul says we are to grow up into Him in all things. Christianity is never meant to be stagnant. We are intended to be ever changing, always growing, being transformed into the image of God's beloved Son. We are like the rest of God's creation. We respond to spiritual nutrients just like the plants respond to the sun and the rain. I often think about the trips I used to take into Costa Rica several years ago. The locals used to say the ground was so fertile that even the fence posts would grow. I don't know about fence posts but most everything else would grow there. The climate was perfect. There was plenty of sun, lots of afternoon showers, and the ground was as fertile as anything I have ever seen. You throw something in the ground and it is going to grow.

In many ways that is how the kingdom of God is. There is plenty of Son shining down on His people, there is the rich nutrients found in the word of God, and His showers of blessing are

guaranteed. What could keep someone from progressing in The Lord? You would have to avoid His provision on purpose.

Here is how Spurgeon saw it. "Many Christians remain stunted and dwarfed in spiritual things, so as to present the same appearance year after year. No up- springing of advanced and refined feeling is manifest in them. They exist but do not grow up into him in all things. But should we rest content with being in the green blade, when we might advance to the ear, and eventually ripen into the full corn in the ear? Should we be satisfied to believe in Christ, and to say, I am safe, without wishing to know in our own experience more of the fulness which is to be found in him. It should not be so; we should, as good traders in heaven's market, covet to be enriched in the knowledge of Jesus."

David gave us some good insight about spiritual growth in Psalm 92:13.

**Psalm 92:13**

Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.

One of the great keys to putting yourself in a place where spiritual growth is sure is found in this verse. What is the key? Get planted! Get planted where? Get planted in the house of God. The local church is intended by God to provide the proper atmosphere and ingredients for spiritual growth to result. Here we find the good teaching from God's word that provides the food we need to grow strong in The Lord. Here we find the awesome presence of The Lord, this is like the showers of blessing that bring the rain upon the seeds causing them to grow. We also find the light of His presence as we walk in the light in fellowship with the body of Christ. Light, food, rain; we have all we need. The only way we cannot grow is by avoiding His church on purpose.

 <b>ANSWER KEY</b>
community
dying
yielding

## Lesson 7: Growing the Community

Memory Verse of the Week:

**Luke 19:10**

for the Son of Man has come to seek and to \_\_\_\_\_ that which was lost.

**1. Read the following verse and commentary. Discuss how you can impact your city? Discuss how “awake” you feel? Then pray together that the Lord would come and awaken you and the others in our community.**

### **Psalm 85:6**

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

About twenty years ago I became strangely enamored with the years just preceding the American Revolution. It was characterized by the birth of American evangelicalism by an outpouring of God’s Spirit on our land. Historians call this the Great Awakening. Thousands of colonial Americans experienced the new birth; some would say a national identity was birthed out of this common spiritual experience. As we are approaching the 250 year mark of the birthing of “One Nation Under God”, our country is drifting far away from her moorings. It is becoming more obvious every day that we are in need of another Great Awakening.

I was recently listening to the Christian recording artist Leeland. He has an album entitled the Great Awakening. The title song is actually a poem by Lawrence Tribble written at the end of the first Great Awakening that Leeland put to music. Here are the words of that poem.

AWAKE (a poem by Lawrence Tribble, written on the eve of the American Revolution)

One man awake, awakens another. The second awakens his next- door brother. The three awake can rouse a town, By turning the whole place upside down. The many awake can make such a fuss, It finally awakens the rest of us. One man up with dawn in his eyes, Surely then multiplies.

We have experienced several outpourings of the Spirit during my lifetime. None of these movements have had the profound impact that the one which birthed our nation had. In the beginning stages of the outpouring in our church in 1994, I became painfully aware of how revival starts in a very personal way. In order to pray for revival I had to be willing to let it start with me. What was the painful part? Revival starts with change. I had to be willing to let the Lord work a change in me before it could progress any further. That is what this poem, ‘Awaken’, is about. ‘One man awake, awakens another. The second awakens his next door brother.’ This is a description of spiritual awakening. It all starts with an individual. It starts when one man or woman becomes hungry for God.

In 1734, this hunger flowed out of Jonathan Edwards and ultimately spread throughout the thirteen colonies. In 1738, the one man to awaken was George Whitfield in his dorm in England. England and the western world were dramatically affected. Maybe you will be that one man today. Only when you are awake can you awaken your next door brother.

**2. Read the following verses and commentary. Discuss the blessing of doing life together. Then discuss ways to do it better and how to include others.**

**Acts 2:46-47**

Continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

After the day of Pentecost, there was an incredible newness about everything. The Word of God was new, worship was new, going to church was altogether new. There was a newness about everything, the Holy Spirit had come and the world was a new place. Gathering together with other believers was the ultimate joy, they were sharing this new life together and they were flowing together in the love of God.

Spiritual outpourings produce this atmosphere called koineneia in the local church. This word means sharing together. What were they sharing together in those early days in Jerusalem? They were sharing a common testimony. Each was experiencing a new intimacy with the Lord. This experience, our own personal testimony of Jesus is what we share. This is what makes church, church. This is the life that we share today in our churches, this is the life available to all of us.

The Comforter has come! Something this precious has to be shared with others. Just like things in the natural world, new cars, new experiences, vacations, etc. we love to share these things with others. Are you connected to a body of believers? If not, find a good church and a good small group. \_\_\_\_\_ this life with other Christians is where our joy is made full.

**3. Read the following verse and commentary. Discuss ways you as an individual can catch fish. Invite someone to your small group or to church. Have a small group party or pot-luck. Create an environment that is conducive for catching fish. Let's believe that each member will catch one fish this year. Imagine the possibility.**

**Matthew 4:19**

And He (Jesus) said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

The day after Parris and I came to Christ, of all things, we went fishing. We went out to the Rigolets (we didn't have a boat) and just fished off the bank. We had no idea what we were doing, it's not like we are fishermen, but we were about to have a strange, prophetic experience. Every time we threw the line into the water that day we caught another fish. There were people fishing in boats just off shore catching nothing. They would move a little closer, still no luck. We caught fish until we filled up our ice chest. What did we do? Of course, we cleaned the fish and took them to our new preacher friend, Rick Phillips. This was our first offering; we were beginning our great spiritual adventure.

Looking back at this scene over the years, it has given me a few laughs. It seems like Jesus loves to stand on the shore with His new disciples. I can almost hear Him say, "Throw your line over

here". That event was a prophetic picture of the calling on our lives. He has called us to be fishers of men.

Matthew Henry spoke of this calling, listen carefully to His words. "What Christ intended them for; I will make you fishers of men; this alludes to their former calling. Let them be not proud of the new honour designed them, they are still but fishers; let them not be afraid of the new work cut out for them, for they have been used to fishing, and fishers they are still. It was usual with Christ to speak of spiritual and heavenly things under such allusions, and in such expressions, as took rise from common things that offered themselves to his view. David was called from feeding sheep to feed God's Israel; and when he is a king, he is a shepherd. Ministers are fishers of men, not to destroy them, but to save them, by bringing them into another element. They must fish, not for wealth, honour, and preferment, to gain them to themselves, but for souls, to gain them to Christ. They watch for your souls, and seek not yours, but you. It is Jesus Christ that makes them so; I will make you fishers of men. It is he that qualifies men for this work, calls them to it, authorizes them in it, gives them commission to fish for souls, and wisdom to win them. Those ministers are likely to have comfort in their work, who are thus made by Jesus Christ."

Matthew Henry spoke of ministers as fishers of men. I believe He calls \_\_\_\_\_ of His followers to this joyful work. Don't get me wrong, fishing is tough work. Looking at all the guys that spend every free moment they can fishing, there must be some joy involved in it also. This is how it is in the soul- fishing business, plenty of hard work, but also, plenty of enjoyment and reward. I think we are entering into a new "fishing season" for the body of Christ. The fish may not be 'running' everywhere, but with some direction from the 'Great Fisher of Men', you will always catch some fish.

#### **4. Read the following verse and commentary. Discuss ways your group can win the lost this year.**

##### **Luke 19:10**

for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Have you ever been led by the Lord to pursue the unsaved aggressively? In our tolerant, seeker sensitive, relevant world; evangelism can be considered intolerant or narrow minded. How dare we impose our beliefs and values on anyone else? Don't you know that everyone's opinions and beliefs are valid and just as significant as yours? At least that is what the world believes. For those who know Christ and listen to His voice, you know the time is now to reach out to the hurting, confused, and disillusioned who are around us every day. How would one know that the Lord is calling you to reach out to the lost? It's really quite simple. It often starts with a growing compassion for an individual or a group of individuals. Every time you see this person (or persons) or even think about them there is a growing compassion for them. Sometimes it's as if you can even feel their pain. This is a sure indication that the Lord is calling, equipping, and anointing you for this opportunity for evangelism.

This reminds me of my wife Parris and her love for hurting young women. All throughout our Christian journey, Parris has talked about having a ministry for these hurting young girls. This compassion (some would call it a burden from the Lord) resulted in the forming of a restoration center called Mary's Song. The result of yielding to this affection and passion for hurting young women has been a steady stream of girls giving their lives to Christ, being nurtured and discipled 24 hours a day, and finally reentering their world with a new faith, a new confidence, and frankly, a brand new life. There is nothing that compares to the joy of seeing the lost found, to see them discovering a love for Christ and beginning a brand new life.

Have you ever felt a love for someone or a group of people that you do not know? If you have, be assured that that is the work of the Holy Spirit. All that is left for you to do is to yield. This compassion from the Lord is supernatural in nature and is a guarantee for success in the area that the Lord is calling you to. Rest assured, if you yield to this calling from the Lord, you will not be alone. You may be surprised at others who are feeling the same thing. Obviously, if the Lord is involved in this strange kind of love, He is speaking to others as well. Maybe He is calling you to work with young women. Mary's Song always needs help. Maybe, He is calling you to reach out to the homeless, there is a group of people that do that on a regular basis here at Victory. The opportunities are endless; from prisons to hospitals, from child evangelism to ministry to the retirement homes, there is a place for you to reach the lost.

## **5. Read the following verse and commentary and discuss the questions following.**

### **Luke 6:40**

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher

Discipleship was a major part of the life and ministry of Jesus. One of His first acts, when He began his ministry was to select twelve men to spend time with for the purpose of discipleship. Discipleship is not the same as teaching. Of course making disciples involves teaching. Discipleship is not just receiving instruction, but taking on the beliefs and lifestyle of your teacher. The disciples of Jesus learned from observation. They watched Jesus as he prayed, taught and preached the word of God, healed the sick, and cast out devils. They were with Jesus constantly for three years. They learned about life and ministry by observing and mimicking the life of Jesus. All of us learn about life from those we love and respect. The discipleship process begins shortly after birth as we learn about life from observing our parents and brothers and sisters. The first phase of our discipleship takes place in that first "small group" called family that we are a part of. As we grow older and begin to make decisions on our own, other people replace our parents and become our teachers.

Who is impacting your life? Whose teachings and lifestyle are you embracing? What are others learning as they observe you? Of course Jesus is the disciple maker. He has determined to use human vessels to accomplish this incredible task.



## ANSWER KEY

save  
sharing  
all  
discipleship

## Lesson 8: Ekklesia Speech

Memory Verse of the Week:

### **Romans 12:1**

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

**1. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss in what ways the Lord wants to change our speech.**

### **Romans 12:1-2**

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Paul urged us to be \_\_\_\_\_, changed into a heavenly man in Romans 12. He said in view of the mercies of God, offer your bodies to the Lord, this is our spiritual worship. As we give ourselves to the Lord, renewal begins to take place. Renewal is the supernatural work of God in us. He uses the word of God and visitations of His Presence to change each of us from the natural man to the spiritual man. Paul talked about one of the obvious changes we see in the heavenly man. The heavenly man uses a new heavenly language, not just the prayer language, but a spiritual language in our mother tongue (English). He describes this in 1 Cor. 2:12-16.

### **1 Corinthians 2:12-16**

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that He will instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

He says we have spiritual thoughts expressed in spiritual words. Actually our inner man is renewed, changed completely. The result of this change is the heavenly language that we begin to speak. The first example that I want to share with you about this heavenly language is found in Ephesians 5:1-4.

### **Ephesians 5:1-4**

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 3But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

Paul is showing the contrast between the natural and the \_\_\_\_\_. The natural man speaks of natural things, course joking and worthless things, things that have no value. The heavenly man has a language characterized by thanksgiving. The heavenly man has been impacted deeply by God's love. The perception of God's goodness, holiness, power and wisdom has impacted him to such a degree that his language has been affected. He is now speaking the heavenly language.

## **2. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss how the change of language takes place.**

Paul describes this change in Ephesians 5:18- 20. It is not by human effort or will power but only by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Ephesians 5:18-20**

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

This change of language happens by the impact of the Holy Spirit on our lives. As we sing, worship, and encourage ourselves and one another in the word, the Holy Spirit begins to express Himself through us. We are becoming the heavenly man. Sometimes our mother tongue (English) cannot truly express the powerful feelings our heart begins to experience. There is an infinite ocean of emotion, God's love and joy that begins to flood our souls. This heavenly affection needs to be expressed through the supernatural prayer language. Paul describes this in 1 Corinthians 14:1-2.

### **1 Corinthians 14:1-2**

1 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.

Paul said we utter mysteries or intimacies (The Message Bible). Actually what he is describing is a private, daily, intimate communication with our Lord. This is the place of total satisfaction. This is the place out hungry hearts are longing for. In this place of divine intimacy, transformation takes place, we are being changed from glory to glory into the heavenly man.

## **3. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss how the new language of the Ekklesia brings a blessing to you and to others.**

Another example of this heavenly language is seen in 1 Corinthians 14:15.

### **1 Corinthians 14:15**

What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.

Paul is describing singing in the spirit and singing in your natural tongue. This is one of the great benefits we can enjoy as spirit filled Christians. Many times singing in the spirit and singing in your natural language can turn into tongues and interpretation of tongues.

### **1 Corinthians 14:13**

For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says.

This can be a powerful tool that brings not only personal edification, but in public meetings can bring a great blessing to the body of Christ. As this heavenly language deepens in our lives, it not only builds us up, but begins to spill over into blessings for others. Many times this heavenly language will be expressed in prophesy.

### **1 Corinthians 14:3**

But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.

The Lord begins to give special words of encouragement in the form of prophecy to bring a blessing to the body of Christ. My life was impacted powerfully in 1977 as a result of a word of prophecy given to me by Dick Mills. He gave me two scriptures: Psalms 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. And Exodus 14:13- 14 Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." I was preparing to lead a team to Sacramento, California and the Lord used that word to cause me to reconsider. After prayer, fasting, and council from my pastors, I was led to return to my home in New Orleans and begin the church that I currently pastor. Thank the Lord for His spiritual gifts.

In Acts 13:1-4, Paul receives a prophetic word from the elders of the church in Antioch. This was a word of confirmation, confirming things Paul was feeling in His heart. The result of this prophetic word was the apostolic ministry of Paul.

### **Acts 13:1- 4**

1 In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2 While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.

#### **4. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss the power and resulting possibilities of the word of God in our mouth as we are under the influence of the Holy Spirit.**

Another example of the heavenly language is seen in Ephesians 6:16-18.

##### **Ephesians 6:16- 18**

In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Paul is describing putting on the armor of God or putting on Christ. In this he begins to talk about a powerful aspect of our heavenly language. He said to take up the sword of the spirit. The amplified Bible says, "The sword that the spirit wields." In the next verse Paul says that this is praying in our prayer language. When we pray in tongues, it is actually the Holy Spirit expressing Himself, His prayers in and through us. These are God's words. Paul says these words are like a sword. They are used to cut away the flesh, the natural. As the natural man is cut away, the spiritual man becomes more dominant. Allow the Holy Spirit to pray using your \_\_\_\_\_. Offer your body, your tongue, to the Lord; this is your spiritual worship. As you pray in other tongues you are being changed from glory to glory into that heavenly man.

Another example of the heavenly language is seen in the Act 2. As the spirit was poured out upon the 120 gathered in the upper room, the spirit began to give them "utterance" according to Acts 2:4. This word utterance is *apophtheggomai*. It describes elevated discourse or supernatural speech. This was of course being expressed through the 120 in tongues. Their joyful response to God's outpouring brought an interested amazed crowd together. Peter stood up to address the crowd. As he began to speak he began to speak in their natural language but it was supernatural in its nature. In Acts 2:14 the word "said" is the same Greek word as utterance in vs. 4. This is specifically speaking of supernatural speech. There is an anointing to preach the Word of God. Much of today's public preaching and teaching is sadly not characterized by the supernatural. The supernatural has been replaced with a "relevant" slick presentation void of power. These "relevant" presentations are just religious, natural talks, given in a contemporary way. That can never change us into the heavenly man.

Finally, in John 1:1,14, John describes Jesus as the Word of God.

##### **John 1:1, 14**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus is the Father's expression of Himself. If Jesus is the Word of God, He Himself is that heavenly language. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Set your affections upon Jesus. If you do, you will be flooded with His heavenly goodness. This goodness has to be expressed, has to be

expressed in our words. When it is, we will be speaking the heavenly language only spoken by heavenly men and women.



**ANSWER KEY**

transformed  
heavenly  
tongue

## Lesson 9: Spiritual Gifts and Serving

Memory Verse of the Week:

**1 Thessalonians 5:19**

Do not quench the Spirit.

**1. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss things you can do to see spiritual gifts activated in your life and the role your connectivity to the local church plays in them.**

### **1 Corinthians 12:4- 6**

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

The body of Christ is very diverse. Each \_\_\_\_\_ is important and each member has a different role to play. The common denominator in the whole mix is the supernatural nature of the body of Christ. The Lord distributes His gifts as He wills, to display His glory and to fulfill His purposes. Zodhiates' word book brings out some of the meaning of these "activities" of the Spirit. The gifts are not only different in each of us, they are also active. *energēma*; an effect: - operation, working. In the NT used only in 1 Corinthians 12:6; the results of the energy of God in the believer, but actually it is the results energized by God's grace.

The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Spirit are the manifestation of the life of God in us and through us. These gifts were displayed in the life of Jesus after His baptism in the Jordan River. He was said to move in the power of the Spirit from that day on. That is another way of saying that the gifts of the Spirit were being activated. In the same way the spiritual gifts can be activated in your life today. The gifts are part of the normal Christian experience and flow out of the intimate life the Lord is calling each of us to enjoy. How can these gifts be activated in our lives today? It is really quite simple. As we see in Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians, the gifts are associated with the life that flows through the local church.

Your \_\_\_\_\_ to the church is critical. Three things are important, first, we need to be connected to a church that welcomes and embraces the spiritual gifts. Secondly, we need to be constantly filled with the Holy Spirit. The gifts can be seen as the overflow of our relationship with the Lord. Only when our cup is full will the gifts begin to manifest in our lives. Finally, put yourself in a position for the gifts to be released. What do I mean by that? Reach out to hurting people, that is what Jesus did and that is the place you will find the gifts of the Spirit being activated.

**2. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss how prophecy has affected your life. How does the word of prophecy included below make you feel? Prophecy encourages, exhorts, and comforts. Discuss what you can do to put yourself in a position to be used by the Lord with the gift of prophecy.**

### **Revelation 19:10**

And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

\_\_\_\_\_ is a very powerful spiritual gift. John said that the actual testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy. It is actually the living word being spoken into a person or group of persons' lives by the power of the Spirit. Paul said it encourages, exhorts, and comforts. This supernatural gift has the ability to impart courage and spiritual strength into our lives. This gift seemed to be very common in the early church, it has been neglected and misunderstood over the years but makes an appearance every time the Spirit is poured out again.

The Lord gave me a word for the church a number of years ago that was recently brought to my attention. Here is that word of prophecy, let it produce strength in you today.

"Be strong and of a good courage. Be not afraid of what men shall say. Be not afraid of what men shall do. I am the Lord Who strengthens you. I am the Lord Who sustains you. I am the Lord Who empowers you. I am the Lord Who protects you. I am the Lord Who provides for you. I am the Lord Who guides you. I am the Lord Who empowers you. Be not afraid of what men shall say. Be not afraid of what men shall do. Be not afraid of the circumstances that surround you in your day to day life, but look unto Me, the Author and Finisher of your faith, and press into My presence, looking unto those who have gone before you as an example of faith. Looking unto those who have gone before you and gone in behind the veil and grabbed hold of My promise and lived in My Glory. Grab hold of the things I've placed before you. Grab hold of that substance that I've placed before your hand. Grab hold of Me, the Anchor that anchors your soul, that strengthens you. Unafraid and unashamed. Unafraid and unashamed. Unafraid and unashamed. Unafraid and unashamed. Filled with courage. Filled with boldness. Filled with strength. Filled with mercy. Filled with patience. Filled with love. Filled with peace. Filled with the joy of the Lord."

Unafraid and unashamed, that sounds like the testimony of Jesus to me. In our secular and godless society we need spiritual power to live a Christian life. Pressure is constantly put on Christians to tone it down, especially in the realm of spiritual gifts. I want to express a different way to live, tone it up. Stir up the gift of God that you received in your life, pursue spiritual gifts. Paul said especially to pursue the gift of prophecy. As you press in to the Lord, He will begin to express Himself in you. Don't be surprised when you begin to prophesy, after all, the testimony of \_\_\_\_\_ in you is the Spirit of prophecy.

**3. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss how you can stir up the gift of God which is in you. The small group environment is a great environment to learn to flow in the spiritual gifts.**

### **1 Thessalonians 5:16- 23**

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold

fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I am not sure what part of this verse many modern, trendy preachers don't understand. It seems to me that many churches are designed exactly for that purpose, to quench the Holy Spirit. First of all the amount of time in worship is limited. "We don't want to worship too long, people may get nervous and something may actually happen." The song selections are a dead give-away; "Never ever sing songs of an intimate nature, The Holy Spirit may actually fall." Then of course there can be no pauses in the flow of the service, someone may actually feel impressed to give a tongue or a prophetic word. If someone actually gets touched in one of the services and makes a noise, they have to be taken out quickly before too much damage is done. Yep, sounds to me like the decently and in order thing has actually backfired to the point where the services have become way too predictable. Another scripture that has been pretty much ignored recently is this,

### **Acts 2:17- 18**

And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.

It sounds to me that we should be living in the season of the Holy Spirit. Rather than putting obstacles in the way for people to move in the Spirit, maybe we should be teaching on these things and providing an atmosphere for the Holy Spirit to move. Extended times of worship, waiting (even in silence) in His presence, and praying corporately in the Spirit would provide the needed atmosphere to experience more of His power in our church services.

Then there is this other troubling scripture:

### **1 Corinthians 14:18**

I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all

Paul prayed in tongues, he prayed in \_\_\_\_\_ a lot. You see, the more you pray in the heavenly language, the more familiar you will become with the spiritual realm. The more familiar you are with the realm of the Spirit, the easier it will become for you to actually be used by the Holy Spirit in His spiritual gifts. So what are we to do? Rather than quenching the Spirit we should be stirring up the gift of God. This is Paul's word of encouragement to his young disciple Timothy.

### **2 Timothy 1:6**

Therefore I remind you to \_\_\_\_\_ up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

**4. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss areas of serving that the Lord has put in your heart and what is being done to allow the exceeding grace of God to be released through you as a member of the body of Christ.** The Lord wants to see the spiritual gifts activated in your life for the purpose serving others.

### **2 Corinthians 8:1- 2**

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

Paul was magnifying what he called "the exceeding grace of God" in the church. What every Christian has received at conversion is nothing less than supernatural. God's grace is overflowing and overflows in all of us in various ways. Paul seemed to be genuinely impressed at the supernatural nature of the generosity of the Macedonian church. Paul used their testimony of giving as an opportunity to magnify the grace of God as well as to challenge the church in Corinth to step up their giving toward the poor in the church in Jerusalem.

Adam Clarke explains this exceeding grace in his comments on this passage. "The exceeding grace of God in you - By the superabounding or transcending grace of God, which was in them, the apostle most evidently means the merciful and charitable disposition which they had towards the suffering saints. The whole connection, indeed the whole chapter, proves this; and the apostle attributes this to its right source, the grace or goodness of God. They had the means of charity, but God had given these means; they had a feeling, and charitable heart, but God was the author of it. Their charity was superabundant, and God had furnished both the disposition, the occasion, and the means by which that disposition was to be made manifest."

Clarke points out the involvement of God in the whole matter. He had provided the ability to give by His provision, He had provided the desire or heart to give by the changed nature they received at conversion, and He provided the opportunity to give through the Apostle Paul and his commitment to the poor in Jerusalem. The Lord was involved in every detail of this project. In our modern world the Lord operates in similar ways. He is the incredible provider, He gives us talents and jobs and harvest. He moves on our hearts for the hurting with His own love for the suffering in this world. Finally, He provides the vehicle or ministry which enables us to give. The end result is God is glorified and the hurting of this world are helped. Have you experienced this exceeding grace of God? How will you know for sure? One of the sure ways is when your heart begins to be moved with compassion for those who are in need. In your day to day activities oftentimes the Lord will begin to stir your heart. It may start with intercession but it will inevitably move you to action. What has stirred you lately? Respond to the Lord's nudging in prayer. If He keeps prompting you, it's time to take action, it's time to offer Him your time, your talents, and your resources.

**5. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss the importance of being filled with God's love as you serve others.**

**Hebrews 6:10**

For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

Humans have a short memory, "what have you done for me lately?" The Lord is not like us, He remembers everything. His record keeping is perfect. The only things He ever forgets are the sins that were held against us until Calvary. If you are a Christian, your entire past is nonexistent, nailed with Jesus Christ to the cross. When we stand before the Lord as a Christian, only our works since conversion will be reviewed, the rest is forgotten. This is where it gets interesting. He remembers everything. He remembers every tear (they are stored in a bottle in heaven), He remembers every prayer (they are in His incense bowl before the throne), He remembers every offering (they are being accumulated for our eternal reward). Yep, He remembers everything. He remembers every soul we witnessed to, every act of kindness we performed, every time we preferred others in countless opportunities. I wonder if our lives would change much if we realized He was taking notice of everything that happens.

One amazing example of how observant He is, is the story of the widow's mite. It says in the scripture that He was standing in the temple treasury watching how people gave their offerings (by the way, He still does that today). He said that this woman, who's offering was less than a penny, had given more than the rich because she had given everything. His judgement system is quite different from what we are used to. He has a huge advantage. He looks at the heart and judges our thoughts and intentions, and nothing escapes His notice.

Matthew Henry had some interesting comments about this verse. "Good works and labour proceeding from love to God are commendable; and what is done to any in the name of God shall not go unrewarded. What is done to the saints, as such, God takes as done to Himself. Those who expect a gracious reward for the labour of love must continue in it as long as they have ability and opportunity."

Recently the Lord gave me a word for someone in one of our services. Many years ago this sister had been very involved in ministry. Ministry was her life. She lived it and breathed it every day, until tragedy struck in her home. For years she has not been in the position to serve in the active ministry, she has been taking care of her family. The Lord gave me today's scripture verse for her. "He said he would never be unjust to forget her labor of love that she has shown to the saints." Yep, He remembers everything. You never know how life is going to change. If you have the privilege and the opportunity to serve the Lord in some ministry capacity, do it. Do it with all of your might. You don't know how much time you have. When you stand before Him, you won't regret your work of love. After all, you will be glad He never forgets.



## ANSWER KEY

members  
gifts  
relationship  
prophecy  
tongues  
stir

## Lesson 10: What do you find in the community of the Ekklesia?

Memory Verse of the Week:

**Ecclesiastes 4:12**

Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him.  
And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

### 1. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss what you find in community?

#### **Isaiah 65:8**

Thus says the LORD: “As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, ‘Do not destroy it, for a blessing is in it,’ So will I do for My servants’ sake, That I may not destroy them all.

#### **Joel 3:18**

And it will come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; A fountain shall flow from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Acacias.

#### **Ezekiel 47:1-2**

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar. He brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gateway that faces east; and there was water, running out on the right side.

#### **2 Chronicles 7:1-3**

When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD’s house. When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the LORD, saying: “For He is good, For His mercy endures forever.”

In community, you find the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Holy Spirit and the fountain of God that flows from the house of the Lord. You discover the river that flows out of the temple and the glory that fills the Lord’s house.

### 2. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss the power of gathering in community.

#### **Ephesians 2:19-22**

19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building,

being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

### **Ephesians 4:15-16**

But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

### **Acts 7: 44-53**

“Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him a house. “However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

### **John 7:37-39**

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

According to Ephesians 2:19-22, we are his house. Our community is being built together for the purpose of housing His glory. John 7:37-39 describes this fountain of living water that is to flow out of each of us. How great of a river is that when we all come together with His \_\_\_\_\_ flowing out of us? There is a flood of biblical proportion possible when we assemble together.

**3. Read the following verses. Discuss why it’s so important for us to get together. What is possible when we assemble together? That is why the enemy of our soul does not want us to connect with other brothers and sisters.**

### **Hebrews 10:24-25**

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

### **Acts 10:24-48**

And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I myself am also a man.” And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. Then he said to them, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or

unclean. Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?” So Cornelius said, “Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.’ So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.” Then Peter opened his mouth and said: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

**4. Read the following verses and commentary. Discuss what else happens in community.**

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ happens in the community as it assembles and seeks God together.

**Acts 2:1-4**

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

- b. \_\_\_\_\_ is found in the community as we find our place with the other parts of the body.

**1 Corinthians 12:12-31**

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, but our representable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

c. Productivity, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ are found in the community. God is glorified as we abide in the vine and bear fruit.

### **Ephesians 4:15-16**

But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

### **John 15:1-8**

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

d. Power and \_\_\_\_\_ is found in the community.

### **Deuteronomy 32:30**

How could one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had surrendered them?

**Ecclesiastes 4:12**

Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

e. \_\_\_\_\_ is found in the community.

**2 Chronicles 7:14**

If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

**Revelation 8:2-4**

And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. 3 Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.

 **ANSWER KEY**

new wines  
fountain  
purpose  
growth  
fruitfulness  
strength  
prayer

## Lesson 11: The Ekklesia Oasis

Memory Verse of the Week:

**Jeremiah 33:3**

‘Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.’

**1. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss the connection between being together with other believers and being refreshed. What happens when two or more gather together in His name?**

### **Acts 2:1-2 (Amplified)**

When the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all assembled together in one place, when suddenly there came a sound from heaven like the rushing of a violent tempest blast, and it filled the whole house in which they were sitting.

There are many visual pictures of God in His creation. One of the most incredible glimpses of God is the wind. In the hebrew Bible the word for wind is ruwach which is used for breath and spirit also. In the greek New Testament, pnuma, is the word for spirit, wind, and breath. In the first verses of the Bible, we see the "wind of God", moving on the surface of the deep, He was intimately involved in creation. We see the "breath" of God in the creation of Adam. In today's scripture verse, we see the "rushing mighty wind" filling the believers in the upper room, God was breathing His creative life into His church. The wind of His presence has some dramatic effects on our lives as we experience His renewal. Peter preached about the influence of the wind in his message in Acts 3:19. Peter knew what stress and spiritual exhaustion were all about. He was facing the Sanhedrin, the men who had killed Christ, the very day he preached this message. He lived in the heat, he was in constant need of the winds of renewal.

### **Acts 3:19 (Amplified)**

So repent (change your mind and purpose); turn around and return [to God], that your sins may be erased (blotted out, wiped clean), that times of refreshing (of recovering from the effects of heat, of reviving with fresh air) may come from the presence of the Lord;

I love that translation, "recovery from the effects of \_\_\_\_\_". Have you ever experienced spiritual exhaustion? Sometimes, the circumstances of this life seem way beyond our ability to cope with them. Spiritual exhaustion sets in and we need the refreshing winds of renewal in order to carry on. Maybe you are in one of those places right now. Your own strength is not enough to face the incredible obstacles in this complicated world. You need the recovery that is only found in the "WIND OF GOD". How can you experience these winds of refreshing? Many times it happens when you gather together with His church. How good and pleasant it is for the brothers and sisters to dwell together in unity, it is like the oil poured out on Aaron's beard, it is the place of commanded blessing.

**2. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss the importance of drinking of the living water. Also discuss how your small group community can be an oasis for those who are in need of a drink of living water. Who can you invite to come and drink freely?**

**Revelation 22:17**

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

One of the amazing pictures Christ painted with His words was the one about \_\_\_\_\_. He said that anyone was welcome to drink this water and it would have an unexplainable effect upon their life. Jesus said they would never thirst again. I have been refreshed and satisfied by this drink since 1973 when I first heard the words "Whosoever will". I have been drinking ever since.

Charles Spurgeon spoke about the strange phenomenon that not everyone is willing to stop and drink from this life giving fountain. Check out Spurgeon's thoughts. "The drinking fountains at the corners of our streets are valuable institutions; and we can hardly imagine any one so foolish as to feel for his purse, when he stands before one of them, and to cry, I cannot drink because I have not five pounds in my pocket. However poor the man is, there is the fountain, and just as he is he may drink of it. Thirsty passengers, as they go by, whether they are dressed in fustian or in broadcloth, do not look for any warrant for drinking; it's being there is their warrant for taking its water freely. The liberality of some good friends has put the refreshing crystal there and we take it, and ask no questions. Perhaps the only persons who need go thirsty through the street where there is a drinking fountain, are the fine ladies and gentlemen who are in their carriages. They are very thirsty, but cannot think of being so vulgar as to get out to drink. It would demean them, they think, to drink at a common drinking fountain: so they ride by with parched lips."

As most of you know, we had an incredible supernatural outbreak at Victory Fellowship in 1994. It was dramatic, precious, and unstoppable. Drinking from this fountain became everything to me and our church. The thing that surprised me the most was those that wouldn't drink. Like Spurgeon pointed out, drinking, or needing spiritual refreshing just seems to be beneath some people. David pointed out that being joyful in the Lord was limited to the humble. "My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear of it and be glad." Ps.34:2

Many of my ministry friends were not very happy about the spiritual drinking at Victory Fellowship. Some thought it would soon end (so much for that, that was many, many years ago), others thought we had gotten off track. Actually we were getting back on track, the track of Evan Roberts, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield. As time has passed, drinking Living Water has become a way of life. My only regret, I wish all of my ministry friends would get off of their carriages, climb down off of their high horses, and join in with the needy, drinking from the fountain of Living Waters.

**3. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss how meeting together with other believers weekly creates a hunger for more of God.**

**2 Corinthians 12:3- 4**

And I know how such a man — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows — was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

There is always more. I can still hear the cries of prayer repeatedly cried out in our services in the mid- nineties. "MORE!" It was a simple, desperate, sincere, plea for God. We had tasted something profound that had awakened us to the awareness that there were new realms of God available to all of us. We had been shocked out of our complacent satisfaction of mediocrity by the sudden, unmistakable appearance of the Lord Himself in our church. Don't get me wrong, we were not ungrateful for what we had tasted, we were just aware of the infinite nature of God and wanted His visitation to deepen in our lives. We had seen that we had lived for years far below what we were now tasting and no one wanted to return to what others were calling the normal Christian life. That kind of normal would never do, we had seen that there was more, and "more" was our cry.

Charles Spurgeon also spoke of other places in the upper realms of God, check it out.

"There are the common frames and feelings of repentance, and faith, and joy, and hope, which are enjoyed by the entire family; but there is an upper realm of rapture, of communion, and conscious union with Christ, which is far from being the common dwelling- place of believers. We have not all the high privilege of John, to lean upon Jesus' bosom; nor of Paul, to be caught up into the third heaven. There are heights in experimental knowledge of the things of God which the eagle's eye of acumen and philosophic thought hath never seen: God alone can bear us there; but the chariot in which he takes us up, and the fiery steeds with which that chariot is dragged, are prevailing prayers."

Spurgeon said that we may never be caught up into heaven in this life like John or Paul but he also said there was a place that the "fiery steeds of prevailing prayer" would take us. Spurgeon had obviously been carried away by the Spirit into some of these ecstasies and was telling us that there are places in the Spirit available to us that can be opened to us when we call upon the name of the Lord. Those precious moments when we are caught up in the Spirit of the Lord are very significant in our lives. It is in these times that we are empowered, changed, and receive guidance and equipping for the challenges that lie before us. Our world is reeling under the birth- pangs of the coming Kingdom. Our spirits are trembling in joyful anticipation of the return of our Lord. As the problems of the world deepen, our need for divine power increases. Maybe today that desperate plea is forming in your heart, you know, that cry of hunger that we lift corporately before the Lord. Can you hear it deep down inside of your heart? If so let it out. More Lord, MORE!

**4. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss what role a small group environment can play in giving people a chance to encounter God in a tangible way.**

**Jeremiah 33:3**

I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not.

Many Christians have never really tasted the heavenly realm of the kingdom of God. As a matter of fact, many aren't aware that the heavenly experiences are even available to us today. We read about Paul being caught up into the third heaven, John rapt in the Spirit on the Isle of Patmos, or even Peter falling into a trance on Simon the tanner's roof: and think nothing of it. If anyone claims to have those kinds of experiences today he is shunned as some sort of fanatic. Is it possible that these encounters are possible today and maybe even more common than people realize? I used to be in that skeptical camp. What changed? I was caught up into the heavenly realms for myself. Everything changes when you experience the real power of His presence for yourself.

Here are some thoughts by Spurgeon on the power of this heavenly realm. "There are different translations of these words. One version renders it, "I will show thee great and fortified things." Another, "Great and reserved things." Now, there are reserved and special things in Christian experience: all the developments of spiritual life are not alike easy of attainment. There are the common frames and feelings of repentance, and faith, and joy, and hope, which are enjoyed by the entire family; but there is an upper realm of rapture, of communion, and conscious union with Christ, which is far from being the common dwelling- place of believers. We have not all the high privilege of John, to lean upon Jesus' bosom; nor of Paul, to be caught up into the third heaven. There are heights in experimental knowledge of the things of God which the eagle's eye of acumen and philosophic thought hath never seen: God alone can bear us there; but the chariot in which He takes us up, and the fiery steeds with which that chariot is dragged, are prevailing prayers."

Spurgeon said that one of the portals to these heavenly realms is the blessing of prevailing prayer. Prayer is actually a form of yielding. It is yielding to the power of His Spirit as He takes us into the heavenly places in Christ. So don't be quick to criticize the experiences of others. Just because something is out of your realm of experience doesn't mean that it is not real. Open up your heart to the Lord. Ask Him to fill you with another measure of His presence. You don't have to worry, as Jesus said, "if you ask for an egg He won't give you a scorpion".

**5. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss what happens as you truly come to know Christ and step into the awareness of His presence found in community.**

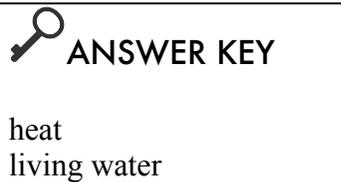
**Philippians 4:11- 13 (The Message)**

Actually, I don't have a sense of needing anything personally. I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I'm just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am.

The most amazing thing about Paul's statement about happiness is where he wrote these words. Paul was a prisoner in Rome and claimed to have found the secret of happiness, the kind of happiness that even works in prison. He seemed to be saying that his happiness did not come from his circumstances or his accomplishments. That sounds strange in our twenty first century world, we seem to place so much emphasis, even in our so called spiritual lives, in our accomplishments or circumstances which have been portrayed as the mark of God's favor thereby the source of our happiness. That is not even close to what Paul was saying. He said that he had discovered a happiness in Christ or as Jonathan Edwards would say, happiness in the other world.

Listen to what Edwards says about the happiness he had discovered in Christ. "When so great a God dwells among a people, He not only is able to supply them with all good, but He Himself is the sum of all good. God is theirs, and therefore they are happy, if they have nothing else. If all other things fail, the enjoyment of God is sufficient to make them completely happy."

That is exactly what Paul was talking about. He had discovered the recipe of \_\_\_\_\_ in life, God Himself was his portion, with that position, there are never any disappointments. I will never forget the question the Lord asked me after His visitation began in our church in NOLA in 1994. He clearly asked me "Am I enough for you? If you are never deemed successful or never have a large ministry can you be happy with only Me?" What a question. Before 1994, I could never have even considered such a thing, but after God had come down amongst us I think I began to understand what Paul found in prison and Edwards found in the Great Awakening. What was their common experience, God Himself had come down in their midst. His presence overwhelms our need for satisfaction in this world. He becomes our portion, and yes, I am content with "only" Him.



## Lesson 12: Celebrating Community

Memory Verse of the Week:

**Psalm 133:1**

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

**1. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss the blessing of being connected to the body of Christ. Have someone share how it has changed their life.**

### **1 Peter 2:4**

To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious

Staying connected to the body of Christ is huge to me. For me it started way back after I met the Lord on the lakefront of New Orleans, I suddenly found myself living with a community of Believers. For four years we were surrounded with a community 24/7 and yes at times I wanted to punch a wall. After four years we moved to New Orleans and continued to live with people helping us to start the church. When I walk into Victory, I feel it's a part of my DNA. We are indeed living stones. Once dead but made alive by Christ.

Maclaren says, "that if we draw near to Jesus Christ, life from Him will pass into our hearts and minds, which life will show itself in kindred fashion to what it wore in Jesus Christ, and will shape us into the likeness of Him from whom we draw our life, because to Him we have come. You draw life from Jesus Christ if you keep close to Him, and that life makes you, in derived and subordinate fashion, but in a very real and profound sense, what Jesus Christ was in the world. As 'living stones' they, too, share in the life which flows from Him. Touch Him, and His quick Spirit passes into our hearts. Rest upon that foundation stone and up from it, if I may so say, there is drawn, by strange capillary attraction, all the graces and powers of the Savior's own life. The building which is reared upon the Foundation is cemented to the Foundation by the communication of the life itself, and, coming to the living Rock, we, too, become alive. Let us keep ourselves near to Him, for, disconnected, the wire cannot carry the current, and is only a bit of copper, with no virtue in it, no power. Attach it once more to the battery and the mysterious energy flashes through it immediately. 'To Whom coming,' because He lives, 'ye shall live also.'"

I love being with the body of Christ in corporate fellowship! Such amazing things happen in that place of joy. Redemption does its work in us over and over again because Christ comes when we are in one accord. Staying at home alone and trying to survive on my own is not appealing to me and I know myself far too well that in time I would despair. When I'm with my brothers and sisters I sense \_\_\_\_\_ coming down and that's when I feel I've come home at last.

**2. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss what's possible as we connect to the body of Christ and become one.**

**Ephesians 4:4- 6**

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

This spiritual unity is central to revival in the last days. All of us say we want a move of God, but there are many different thoughts of what the last great revival will look like. This passage of scripture describes one of the necessary ingredients or descriptions of this last great move of the Spirit of God on the earth. Paul was describing a spiritual unity, a unity birthed by the Spirit that has been rarely seen since the day of Pentecost. Remember Luke's description of that great day, "they were all with one accord in one place". That spiritual unity was short lived but played a major role in the outpouring of the Spirit on that great day. It was what David called the "place of commanded blessing" in Psalm 133. In that atmosphere of oneness the Holy Spirit began to be poured out on all flesh.

We believe this year will be a critical in the Lord's prophetic plan, unity will play a key role in what happens in the days and months ahead of us. With that thought in mind, how is your relationship with the body of Christ? Are you vitally connected to His church? Are you connected to a local church? Are your gifts being used effectively for the advancement of His kingdom? If not, now is a good time to start. Offer your body to the Lord as a living sacrifice. Offer your gifting's to be used in a practical way in your local church, allow yourself to be connected to this spiritual oneness that Paul believed was critical to His advancing kingdom. As we celebrate community we should remember that incredible scene at the dedication of Solomon's temple. The priests were all together in one accord, offering themselves in worship to the Lord. As they worshipped, the Lord came down in His cloud of Glory. They could not stand to minister because of the heaviness of His Presence. Will He do it again? Will He do it here in our church? If so, will you be there drinking in His goodness? I believe we live in the times just before the last great move of God's Spirit on the earth. Determine in your heart to humble yourself and \_\_\_\_\_ together as we become "ONE" waiting in His Presence.

**3. Read the additional commentary on Ephesians 4:4- 6 below. Discuss the importance of your own intimacy with the Lord as it relates to your local church and the unity that follows.**

Everyone knows there is supposed to be unity in the church but, many times, that is far from true. Where does unity come from? How can we attain to that atmosphere that we all long for? Obviously, it takes more than just knowing that we need unity, there has to be a spiritual effect in us corporately, a common participation in order for us to experience this spiritual oneness.

Charles Hodge has some great insight on this passage, here is part of what he said. "There are many passages to which the doctrine of the Trinity gives a sacred rhythm, though the doctrine itself is not directly asserted. It is so here. There is one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father...It

is one because there is to us one God the Father, one Lord, one Spirit. It is a truly mystical union; not a mere union of opinion, of interest, or of feeling; but something supernatural arising from a common principle of life. This life is not the natural life which belongs to us as creatures; nor intellectual: which belongs to us as rational beings; but it is spiritual life, called elsewhere the life of God in the soul. And as this life is common, on the one hand, to Christ and all his members—and on the other, to Christ and God, this union of the church is not only with Christ, but with the Triune God. Therefore in Scripture it is said that the Spirit dwells in believers, that Christ dwells in them, and that God dwells in them. And, therefore, also our Lord prays for his people, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."

I love that, "the sacred rhythm" of the trinity. As we as individuals are filled with God, we are joined together with this spiritual rhythm with the Father and the Son. We find ourselves flowing not only with the Lord, but also with the body of Christ. He has made us drink together of His Spirit, and out of this drinking we are drawn into this heavenly dance. Can you feel the heavenly rhythm? Join into this heavenly dance today, as you do, you will find yourself being drawn out of the world and into a brand new way of life.

#### **4. Read the verses and commentary below. Discuss what each of us can do to step into the place of commanded blessing.**

##### **Acts 1:14a**

They all joined together constantly in prayer...

What a powerful beginning to the New Testament church, they were gathered together in one accord; that's when the Holy Spirit fell on them. There are two powerful truths in this short verse. First, they were joined together; Acts 2 says that they were in one accord. Spiritual outpourings are corporate events and happen to people who are moving together in God's kingdom. The second truth is this; they were in prayer. You join those two powerful ingredients together and an explosion is going to happen. Psalms says that this is the place of commanded blessing, when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity.

Here are some comments from Andrew Murray about unity, prayer, and the necessity of the power of the Spirit in our church. "Just before His ascension to heaven, Christ gave His final command with a promise attached to it. The command was that the disciples wait until the Holy Spirit was poured out. The promise was that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit to become His witnesses in all the furthest corners of the earth. For ten days the disciples pleaded for the promise to be fulfilled, then their prayers were answered. Likewise, wait upon the promise of the Holy Spirit until you receive it and then preach the gospel. Often churches today preach the gospel, but they forget about the promise of the Holy Spirit. Every believer should answer the call to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit daily, as though speaking from one mouth and one heart. Many Christians pray only for themselves and forget to pray for the church of Christ. The power of the first disciples lay in the fact that they forgot about themselves and prayed as one body for the Holy Spirit to descend upon humanity."

David compared this to the oil being poured upon the high priest Aaron. He said the oil went down his beard to the edge of his robes. The anointing was essential for the high priest to perform his spiritual duties. In the same way, we need the oil poured on our heads, listen to David's description of what brings this about:

**Psalms 133:1- 3**

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing—Life forevermore.

More Lord! Pour out your Spirit on us, pour out your Spirit on Your church.

**5. Read the verse and commentary below. Discuss the importance of the local church in accomplishing God's plans today and how you can be used to fill your neighborhood and the whole earth with the glory of God.**

**Psalm 110:2**

The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!

The church has always taken a lot of grief. How many times have I heard people say they are spiritual but don't believe in the 'organized church'? Well which church do you believe in, the one where you are in charge? Actually it is the weakness and imperfections in His church that make it so beautiful. He accepts us, covers us, cleanses us, changes us, and then uses us for His glory. In today's verse David is prophesying about the mystery of Pentecost. In this Psalm he describes the beauty of the exaltation of Christ, the blessing of His heavenly priesthood, and the incredible power He displays in and through His church. It started on the day of Pentecost, continues today, and promises to crescendo in preparation for the coming King. The church, with all of its goofed up people, is His chosen tool to display His glory in the earth.

Here are some thoughts from Spurgeon's Treasury of David on this verse. "It is in and through the church that for the present the power of the Messiah is known. Jehovah has given to Jesus all authority in the midst of his people, whom he rules with his royal scepter, and this power goes forth with divine energy from the church for the ingathering of the elect, and the subduing of all evil. We have need to pray for the sending out of the rod of divine strength. It was by his rod that Moses smote the Egyptians, and wrought wonders for Israel, and even so whenever the Lord Jesus sends forth the rod of his strength, our spiritual enemies are overcome. There may be an allusion here to Aaron's rod which budded and so proved his power; this was laid up in the ark, but our Lord's rod is sent forth to subdue his foes. This promise began to be fulfilled at Pentecost, and it continues even to this day, and shall yet have a grander fulfillment."

I love the gathering together of His congregation for worship; there is nothing in this world that even comes close. As we worship Him in the beauty of His manifest presence, His glory and power increase among us. As David also said, “This is the place of \_\_\_\_\_”. Get yourself in church, you will become a part of His mighty plan to display His glory to this generation.



## ANSWER KEY

heaven

join

commanded blessing