

A Journey with Jesus
Book 1

Fishers of Men

“Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.” Matthew 4:19

Michael Gibson

A Journey with Jesus

Book 1 – Fishers of Men

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Follow Me **“A Message from God”**

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The Story

The most incredible story in the universe is God’s dealings with men. The story is told using seven types of literature woven together in one account called the Bible. These seven types of literature are divided into three groups commonly called the Old Testament, New Testament, and the Gospels. The Old Testament consists of three types of writing called: *The Law*, *The Prophets*, and *The Writings*. This group’s primary function is to point forward to the Messiah (or Savior). The New Testament also consists of three types of writing known as *The Acts of the Apostles*, *the Epistles (or Letters)*, and *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. This group’s primary function is to unfold the benefits that come from the Messiah. The final group, the Gospels, form the central and pivotal part of the story, which concerns the Messiah and the purposes for which He was sent to earth. The Gospels primary function is to blend both the Old and New Testaments into one account through the Messiah, Jesus the Christ, the Son of God.

The Law	
The Prophets	The Old Testament
The Writings	
The Gospels	The Messiah
The Acts of the Apostles	
The Epistles	The New Testament
The Revelation of Jesus Christ	

The focus of my book is the central part of that story, the Gospels. This portion of the story is told by four men, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, who each wrote an account of Messiah. Matthew's gospel is the most detailed and views things from a Hebraic mindset. Luke's gospel is written in chronological order and John's gospel reveals significant spiritual truths. Mark wrote the first gospel and it serves as the glue that binds all the others together. It is through their eyes, ears, and hearts that each one of us is able to see the works that God performed through Messiah, to hear the "good news" that He is proclaiming, and to understand the depth of His love for mankind.

The Purpose

The purpose of my writing this book is to forge the four gospels into one seamless story so that the reader may more fully understand the events that surround the Messiah and His coming to earth. It is my intent to make you feel like you are walking with Jesus and being taught by Him on His journey through life.

Besides combining the four gospels into one story other significant features have been included to increase the reader's awareness and understanding:

Two Unique Features

Just prior to His being raised up into heaven Jesus gave his followers a commission to accomplish before He returned again. That commission was to, "**Go** therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, **baptizing them in the name** of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." In response to the commission to teach others to observe all that Jesus commanded. I have highlighted in bold type all the instructions that He gave His group of disciples.

All of the instructions Jesus gave His disciples are contained in lessons which He was teaching them. The fifty-six lessons that Jesus taught them can be found in the companion teaching series entitled: "A Journey with Jesus." The teaching series consists of three books: "Fishers of Men," "Into the Harvest" and "Building the Temple."

Other Features

Chronology: All the events in this book are in the order in which they occurred and were derived from side by side comparisons of the four gospel accounts and various harmonies of the gospels.

Dating: The dates of events in this book assist the reader in discovering the time frames in which Jesus' story unfolds.

Divisions: The book has been divided into 18 parts in order to help the reader see the “big picture” of Jesus’ life and mission.

Headings: Each part of the book is further subdivided into specific events occurring within the life of Jesus.

Heading references (in parenthesis): Indicate the actual Scriptural passages used in the text under that heading.

Footnoting: Footnote references occur at the end of each part. Those referencing words or phrases are in regular type. Those referencing passages of scripture are in italicized type.

Glossary: The glossary contains comments on or definitions of commonly used words or terms used throughout the text.

Scripture: The text is taken directly from the New American Standard Bible.

To the Reader

Not everyone will agree with every position taken in this work, however, many knowledgeable sources were consulted in its preparation. This book is not meant to replace the individual accounts of the gospel writers, but merely to serve as a supplement to them. Date setting of various events is based on historical documents, astronomical evidence, the Jewish calendar with its 19 year repeating cycles, the Feasts of the Lord and the customs of the Jewish people. To those who have labored long in the study of God’s Word and prepared helps for each of us to learn by, I extend thanksgiving and gratitude for their labor of love in Christ.

My Hope

My heart's desire is that my Father in heaven be glorified by the exaltation of His Son in this book and that each of you, the readers, be transformed into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Testimonials

Thanks for sharing the work of God in Odisha (*eastern India*) ... it was a real life transforming moment for me. In your teaching and training I could see and feel the fullest power and the presence of God. I take special delight in studying your designed notes and explain them to my disciples and many others ... I am using your discipleship material very well in my effort ... I have committed and dedicated my life to making disciples of Jesus Christ here in Odisha, India.

Rev. Kartik P.

Disciple Maker and Pastor in Eastern India

I was a Youth & Young Adult Pastor for 10 years, attended some of the best training & courses, steeped in the best ministry the world had to offer. Then I began to walk through this discipleship material, learning the teachings of Jesus ... I was undone. No church, seminar, book, curriculum, speaker, class, or convention has EVER taught me what I have learned through this material – what our Messiah was REALLY saying to us ... and WHY. I am forever changed – I have come awake, come alive, & I want more!

Brandon S.

Financial Advisor & Former Youth/Young Adults Pastor

The discipleship series *A Journey with Jesus* changed my life. If you really want to learn how to live and walk as Jesus did and learn how to become a disciple maker, this study is it. It can truly change your life.

Michelle M.

Homemaker, Mom & Disciple Maker

A Journey with Jesus curriculum is entirely Christ centered and God honoring. I highly recommend to people that are making the decision to follow Jesus Christ as a believer to commit to reading and studying the Word of God using this tool.

Noah G.

Entrepreneur & Former Missionary

Now I am discipling others and I find the teaching component to be even more of a blessing than when I was on the learning end. It is a straightforward practical guide to discipleship that is needed in today's church. This is a great way to jump start the calling on every Christians life to carry out the Great Commission.

Brandon B.

Realtor & Disciple Maker

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Author's Intent

My purpose in preparing the teaching series entitled *A Journey with Jesus* is to help you become a more effective disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that by continually pointing you to what Jesus said and your willingness to do what He said, your life will be completely transformed. Then you will truly become as He is.

The goal of my teaching is to let the Scriptures speak for themselves while providing you with a 1st Century Christian mindset. The mindset is developed by drawing upon the Old Testament themes, traditions, rituals, concepts and insights that Jesus' original disciples would have understood.

At times, my teaching might appear as if I were indicating a return to Mosaic Law. Let me assure you, that is not the case! I believe that Christians are saved by the grace of God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, not by obeying the Law of Moses. However, I am also keenly aware that to many people the term "saved by grace" has come to mean that they can live their lives in a manner they so choose. This also is not the case! Christians are called to be a holy people, not to live lawless lives, thus perverting the grace of God. Instead, they are to live by the Law of the Spirit, which is to love God and man. Jesus said, "*If you love Me, you will keep **My** commandments.*"

A Journey with Jesus was not intended to be a scholarly work or a commentary on Scripture but rather designed to be thought provoking and life changing. It was prepared for the joy and benefit of the average Christian who trusts the Holy Spirit to lead and guide him into all truth.

My prayer is that this series will be a useful tool in helping you live a fruitful life in Christ.

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to my wife Janice for her steadfast love, encouragement and support of me throughout the years. Without it this work would not have been completed. And I wish to further acknowledge her artistic abilities to paint the artwork that so inspiringly graces the covers of *A Journey with Jesus*.

Introduction

Expressions of Love

*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach ...*

So read the opening lines of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's love sonnet to her husband.

People respond to love. The words of love are music to our ears. Receiving love brings joy to our lives. Human beings thrive on love because we are created in the image of God, who is love. And each of us was created to be an expression of love.

***“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”*¹**

Jesus Christ, the Son of God spoke these words to His disciples on the night before He died. A few hours later Jesus would express His love for every man by becoming the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. On that night however, Jesus explained to His disciples that the way to express love towards Him; was the same way He expressed love to His Father in heaven during His lifetime. *If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love.*²

***“Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.”*³**

These were the final words that Jesus spoke to His followers before ascending into heaven. Jesus chose His words carefully. They were important words, memorable and intended for lasting impact. Study them for just a moment!

Two questions come to mind immediately. What did Jesus command His disciples to do? Why is it so important to teach others to do as He commanded? The answers to these questions are the heart of the disciple making process used by Jesus.

During the three-year period of His ministry on earth, Jesus took ordinary men and women who followed Him and transformed them into powerful disciples. Within twenty years of His ascension into heaven they had become known throughout the Roman Empire as “those who have turned the world upside down.” They had truly become expressions of God's love on earth.

What happened to them to cause such a great impact on the world? It's simple. Jesus gave His disciples only one task; make more disciples. He told them exactly how to do it. They did what Jesus told them to do and He sent the Holy Spirit to help them do it! The rest is history.

Jesus' five-step disciple making process was simple. Go, preach, baptize, and teach.

1. **Stay** until you are clothed with power from on high.
2. **Go** into the entire world.
3. **Preach** the gospel to all creation.
4. **Baptize** those who have believed, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
5. **Teach** all those who have believed and are baptized, to do everything that I have told you to do.

¹ 1 John 14:15

² 1 John 15:10

³ Matthew 28:20

Answers to Commonly Asked Questions

What is a disciple?

By definition, a disciple is a **learner**; one who puts into practice what he or she has been taught. Jesus said it this way. *“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher and the slave as his master.”*⁴ Therefore, the goal of a disciple of Jesus Christ is to become as He is . . . having the same values, character, goals, desires and mission.

What is discipleship?

From a Christian perspective, discipleship is the process of becoming like Jesus. It is the transformation from “learner” to “teacher.” Some churches refer to discipleship as spiritual growth or spiritual maturity or spiritual transformation. It involves changing the way the learner thinks and acts, so that he becomes conformed to the image of the teacher. The Apostle Paul said. *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”*⁵

How is the mind renewed?

The key word in having a renewed mind is **repentance**.⁶ Most Christians associate this word with either their salvation (Repent and believe the gospel) or giving up their sins (Repent of your sins). However, it simply means to change the way you think or believe.

In our everyday lives this is happening all the time. For example, we get more facts or information on a particular subject, which allows us to change the way we think about the subject. Sometimes we hear an exclamation like, “Wow, I never really thought about it like that before” but in most cases we just assimilate the information daily, which in turn affects our general belief system.

All of us are affected to some extent by what we hear. Jesus even cautioned His disciples to be careful what they listened to⁷ because he knew that it would affect their hearts and minds. As Christians we need to remember that both the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world are being ruled by words. Satan is able to usurp rulership over the kingdoms of this world because people believe his words, which are lies and then are passed on. God’s kingdom advances when His words are believed, acted upon and then passed on.

In the information age we live in today, we are constantly bombarded with words all day long. If Christians are to advance the Kingdom of God it is imperative that they repent or replace the lies they have believed in with the truth of God’s Word. The replacement occurs by acting in faith towards God’s words. True Biblical faith has three parts to it before it is complete:

⁴ Matthew 10:24-25

⁵ Romans 12:2

⁶ **Repentance**. Simply defined as, *stop doing it your way and start doing it God’s way.*

⁷ Mark 4:24 and Luke 8:18

1. Believing the word of God as truth in the heart,
2. Confessing the word of God to others, and
3. Acting upon what the word of God says to do.

By using a combination of the three learning styles: audio, visual and kinetic, the rate at which the mind can be renewed can be increased. First you tell the person how to do it, then you show the person how to do it and then you let them do it. One example of renewing a mind is when we teach a child how to tie his shoelaces. First we tell them how to do it, we demonstrate how to do it and finally we have them do it . . . over and over and over again until it comes second nature to them. When the child grows to the point where he teaches others how to tie their shoes he has become like his teacher or in other words, he has been disciple. Jesus used this process with His disciples all the time.

Is the discipleship process systematic?

I believe the answer to this question is yes. People raise their children systematically. For example, people teach their children to walk before they teach them to run. Then they teach them to play baseball before they teach them to manage a baseball team. The entire human learning process is systematic and even the Bible concurs with that . . . *“For God says, ‘Order on order, order on order, line on line, line on line, a little here, a little there.’”*⁸

Jesus never took a haphazard approach in making disciples. He was intentional in everything He did; from those he called to be the twelve apostles, to the methods and order of their training, to the time that it took to train them and to their final empowering by the Holy Spirit. The teaching series, *A Journey with Jesus* seeks to follow that pattern.

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the discipleship process?

Let’s start by saying that in order to be a disciple of Jesus Christ you must be taught by Him. This is one of the primary reasons that Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to reside within Christians, to teach them what He, the Word of God says.

Concerning the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, *“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”*⁹

Christians sometimes have strange ideas when it comes to the work of the Holy Spirit in their own lives. Let’s look at a few examples of erroneous belief. Some say they don’t need to know what the Scriptures say since the Holy Spirit will lead them. This cannot be true because 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, *“All Scripture¹⁰ is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*

Some Christians say that they don’t need anyone to teach them because the Holy Spirit will do it. In some respects this is true, however the Scripture also says *that Jesus Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service,*

⁸ Isaiah 28:10

⁹ John 16:13

¹⁰ Scripture means, “that which is written”.

to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.¹¹ So, until we **all** attain to the **unity** of the faith and **knowledge** of the Son of God then these God ordained ministries will remain.

Many Christians expect the Holy Spirit to get them to where they need to be without any effort on their own part. Jesus said, “*When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth.*” Notice that Jesus didn’t say that the Holy Spirit would drive His people into all truth but rather to guide them. It is a **joint** effort; the Holy Spirit leads, God’s people follow. This implies that it takes faith and obedience to follow the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:14 says, “*For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.*”

How many disciples did Jesus have?

Jesus had many disciples, both men and women. Of His disciples, He called twelve men to be His apostles (sent ones). Ten days after Jesus’ ascension into heaven, the Bible records that 120 of His disciples gathered together on the Feast of Shavuot, which is known as Pentecost in the Church. On that day the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to speak in the languages of the people who had come to the feast from other lands. Then Peter preached the gospel to these people. Three thousand believed his message and were baptized. Then, the apostles started going from house to house, where believers were gathering in small groups, teaching them what Jesus had commanded them to do.

What is required to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

1. **Believe** the gospel message concerning Jesus, that He is both Lord and Savior. By believing, a person is “born again” into the family of God. This requires an act of repentance – a change from what was formerly believed.
2. Be **baptized**. By this act a person declares that he has been “born again by the Spirit of God” and is now “saved”. Jesus said, “*He who has believed and is baptized shall be saved.*”¹²
3. Be **willing** to receive Jesus’ instructions.
4. **Sacrifice** time to be trained.
5. **Learn** the commands of Jesus.
6. **Apply** what He says to do.
7. Be **led** by the Spirit of God. According to the Apostle Paul, those who are being led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God.

What format is best used to make disciples?

Small groups of 5 to 15 individuals make ideal places to learn and grow. They provide the best opportunities for people to practice the one another’s, be accountable, learn and accomplish tasks.

Can a person terminate or interrupt the process of becoming a disciple?

The answer to this question is yes. One example of this is in John 6:53-66. Many of Jesus’ disciples withdrew from Him. They simply could not believe that Jesus required them, to “eat His body and drink His blood.” In the Church today, this requirement is known as communion or the Lord’s Supper.

¹¹ Ephesians 4:11-13

¹² Mark 16:16

How long does it take to become a disciple?

Let's begin answering this question by saying, that being a disciple of Jesus Christ is a life-long process. However, some significant degree of spiritual maturity seems to have been achieved within the first three-year period after an individual's conversion. Consider the following:

1. Jesus spent three years training His disciples before they were considered spiritually mature enough to "make disciples."
2. In Acts 1:8; we discover that Jesus told His disciples that they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the remotest part of the earth. According to most historians, there was a ten-year period between Peter's preaching the gospel on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem until he preached to Cornelius, a gentile, in Caesarea. When Cornelius, a representative of Rome, was baptized it marked the beginning of the spread of the gospel to the remotest ends of the earth. From this historical notation, it can be deduced that some significant spiritual maturity had been achieved within a three-year period in each of the three areas of Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria.
3. In Galatians 1:15-18, the Apostle Paul states that he spent three years in Arabia and Damascus after his conversion before meeting with Peter in Jerusalem.
4. In Acts 20:28; the Apostle Paul reminds the elders of the church at Ephesus that he spent three years teaching them.

What is the history of discipleship in the Church?

In the years immediately following the resurrection of Jesus, discipleship was the **primary** focus of the church. The gospel was preached, people repented and were baptized, and those who had been taught the Lord's commands instructed others in the way of righteousness. Small groups of people were trained in homes and were then sent out to make more disciples.

These small groups of people were autonomous. They were linked to other groups through their common faith. The leadership of a group was invested in its elders. These were usually men who were at least thirty years of age and lived by Biblical standards of holy living. Some time later these elders became known as pastors - those who watched over and cared for the flock.

During the 2nd and 3rd centuries, when the number of groups multiplied in a specific area one elder would be chosen to coordinate activities between the groups. He was given the title of bishop and also served as a representative and spokesman for that area's groups. Discipleship methods changed little during this period of time even in the midst of extreme persecution.

However, in the beginning of the 4th century the Church began to bind itself to secular world power, thinking that this was the way the kingdom of God would be established in the earth. The focus of the Church began to **shift** from making disciples to developing an orthodox belief system. What a person believed overshadowed the One in whom he believed. Christianity became the official religion of the empire and individuals were forced to convert. Church buildings began to be constructed. The New Testament portion of Scripture was developed from various writings and then combined with the Old Testament. These writings became our Bible.

The struggle for political authority and **orthodoxy** (correct belief) continued to increase in scope. Bishops decided the issues of orthodoxy after much dispute among themselves. The bishops from the five major centers of Christianity (Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem) were viewed as having greater authority than other bishops because of their great number of followers. These powerful men coerced other bishops to join them in voting on issues

of orthodoxy. The wrangling continued until there were only two main bishops who had their own followings. These two were the Bishop of Rome (who had political ties to the western portion of the Roman Empire) and the Bishop of Constantinople (who had political ties to the eastern portion of the Roman Empire). The infighting between these two groups lasted until 1054 AD when the Church suffered its first split into Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox branches.

In order to maintain orthodoxy and control of people's beliefs, the Church trained men to lead the individual churches. Eventually this group of educated men would become an elite class. They were known as the clergy. Latin and Greek had become the languages of the Bible and could only be understood by a properly trained member of the **clergy**. With the rise of the professional clergy, ordinary men and women in the Church no longer made disciples on their own. That job was left to the trained staff. Christians tended to be adherents to an orthodox system of beliefs rather than ardent followers of Jesus Christ.

The simple group gatherings of the early Church involving fellowship, communion, prayer and the apostles' teachings on the commands of Jesus gave way to elaborate ritual. The celebration of the Eucharist, also known as the Mass, became the focal point of these gatherings. During the "Middle Ages" the Church plunged into moral decay and its leadership became corrupt. Despite this turn of events, hope was on the horizon.

In the latter part of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century three major events occurred that would shape the Church's future. In 1454, John Guttenberg used the first movable-type printing press in Europe to print the Bible. This eventually led to widespread ownership of Bibles by individuals, printed in their own languages. In 1492, Columbus' discovery of America became a safe haven of migration for those who sought freedom from religious persecution. And in 1517, a German Catholic priest named Martin Luther ignited the fire of reformation that spread throughout all of Christendom.

Because of the reformation Christians began protesting many Church practices, wanting to return to a purer faith. These protesters were divided into two camps: those who remained in the Catholic Church and those who left. Those who remained tried to reform the Church from within but were killed or silenced. The other camp felt it was impossible to reconcile with the "Roman Catholic Church" and separated from it. The latter group has become known as **Protestants**.

Reformation took time. The transformation from man made tradition and ritual, back to the Bible and a simple faith in Jesus Christ, began to evolve slowly. However, orthodoxy still remained the focus of these new Protestant Churches, so much so that we now have hundreds of denominations and thousands of independent churches. "What a person believes" is still in ascendancy over "the One in whom a person believes." Most of the Reformers believed it was necessary to exert control over the people in order to maintain orthodox belief, considering the laity to be ignorant. Therefore, the professional clergy remained and with it the expectation that they would do the work of ministry.

Today, it appears that many within the Church are attempting to return to the fundamental roots of Christianity. People want to know Jesus! And discipleship has become the buzzword in many congregations. There is a hunger in Christians for fellowship with one another and a desire to serve their Lord. They want to be a holy people clothed with power from on high. They want to be Jesus' disciples. And they want to participate in the transformation of the lives of others.

There is hope, but Christians must act. We need to be involved in small groups, loving one another and working together to effect transformation in the lives of people. We should celebrate

the Lord's Supper when we meet. Prayers need to be offered up to God as a sweet smelling aroma. And Christians must learn the things that Jesus commanded them to do, and then do them.

What are the purposes of this book series?

1. To answer commonly asked questions about becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ.
2. To establish the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church.
3. To give insights into the disciple making process.
4. Provide a teaching outline for everything Jesus asked His disciples to do.

How is the disciple making process accomplished?

1. The disciple making process is divided into fifty-eight teaching lessons.
2. In each lesson, one or more of the action commands that Jesus gave His disciples, will be featured. There are a total of 263 individual commands.
3. A short teaching will provide insight into understanding the command.
4. Group discussion questions are used for reflection on the lesson.
5. An activity is suggested to implement what has been learned in the lesson.

Lesson 1

Follow Me

Group Icebreaker:

What picture comes to mind when you hear the words “Follow Me”?

Introduction:

Becoming a disciple of Jesus is essential the same process that a child goes through in learning to follow his parents. The first three words that a child usually learns are: mommy, daddy and no. The words mommy and daddy identify the people to whom the child has bonded. The use of the word “no” by the parents establishes their authority and issues a command to the child that requires his obedience. It is by the use of this word that a child’s training commences. The first lesson he must learn is obedience.

After a person is “born again” the first two words he learns are usually, Church and God. They assist him in identifying those with whom he has bonded. The next words he should be taught are “Follow Me”. Jesus issues this command to His disciples at the start of their training. Those words establish His authority and issue a command that requires their obedience. And like a child it also provides the first opportunity for a disciple to use the word “no”!

Reading the Scripture:

John 1:35-51, Luke 5:1-11, 27-28, Matthew 4:18-22, 9:9, Mark 1:16-20, 2:14

The First Disciples

John 1:35-51

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see." They came therefore and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He found first his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter). The next day He purposed to go forth into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow Me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." And Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

“Follow Me”

Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20, Luke 5:1-11

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Now it came about that while the multitude were pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; and He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the multitudes from the boat. And when He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but at Your bidding I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish; and their nets began to break; and they signaled to their partners in the other boat, for them to come and help them. And they came, and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, He said to them, "Follow Me," and I will make you fishers of men." And going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. And immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.

Matthew Becomes a Disciple

Matthew 9:9, Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27-28

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And after that He went out, and noticed a tax-gatherer named Levi,¹³ sitting in the tax office, and He said to him, "Follow Me." And he left everything behind, and rose and began to follow Him.

The Command:

- ❖ Follow Me.

The Lesson:

The lesson of obedience is a difficult one to learn. It requires that a person recognize authority over him and then submit his will to that authority. This isn't always easy, especially when the authority is telling you to do something you don't want to do. Jesus wants your obedience. Without it, you cannot be His disciple.

When Jesus called the original disciples to follow Him, they could see, touch, taste, smell and hear the Messiah. He was physically present among them and they followed His physical presence everywhere. But that wasn't the lesson He was teaching them.

¹³ **Levi** – is a Hebrew name meaning, “Joined.” He is commonly known as Matthew . . . the English form of the Hebrew name, Matityahu, meaning “Gift from God.” Matthew was the chief tax collector in Capernaum. He undoubtedly collected the taxes from the fishermen, including James, John, Peter and Andrew, when they brought in their catches to be sold at market. He may also have been the royal official from Capernaum, whose son Jesus healed. He is also the author of the Gospel of Matthew.

Jesus taught His disciples to follow by issuing voice commands that they were expected to obey. He also led them by example, demonstrating His obedience to His Father's commands that were written in the Old Testament portion of the Bible. He practiced what He preached.

Parents teach their children to follow voice commands as well. Children perceive the authority in their parent's voice and follow the example set by their parents. However, when the parents don't practice what they preach, the child tends to emulate what the parents' do, not what they say.

The **first disciples**¹⁴ learned to obey Jesus. When He had finished teaching them, Jesus told them to go and make more disciples by teaching them what He had commanded them to do. They were to lead by example, by actually doing what He had told them to do. The results were astounding! The book of Acts clearly shows that miracles followed the obedience of these disciples and the growth of the Church exploded.

Jesus still holds these expectations for the Church today and His method has not changed. He still calls people to follow Him and miracles still follow obedience to the Word of God. In fact, the miracle of rebirth occurs in a person's life the same way. They hear the Word of God preached concerning Jesus, believe it, confess Him as Lord and are baptized. The way people follow Jesus is to hear and do His word. The Apostle Paul said, "*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*".¹⁵ Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God, and observe it". And God, Himself, spoke from heaven to the disciples declaring, "*This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, **listen to Him***".¹⁶

Group Discussion Worksheet:

A. There are three major components of a command:

1. Giving the command.
2. Hearing the command.
3. Obeying the command.

B. Four elements are required in hearing a command, before it can be obeyed.

1. You must physically hear it.
2. You must know what it means.
3. You must know that it is directed toward you.
4. You must know that it is from your leader.

C. Three elements are required in actually **obeying** a command.

1. You must be willing to obey.
2. You must stop what you are presently doing.
3. You must actually do it.

D. From the story of Jesus and Peter found in Luke 5:1-11; let's identify the various elements of hearing and obeying a command.

1. We know Peter heard the command because he responded to it.
2. Peter knew what the command meant because he was a fisherman.

¹⁴ **first disciples.** What was Jesus Relationship to His Disciples? The understanding of these unique relationships is a model for all future Disciple Makers, as Jesus' commissions His disciples in the Great Commission, "*Go . . . make disciples . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you,*" Matthew 28:19-20 – see article on page 86 ("Overview of Jesus' Relationship to His Disciples").

¹⁵ Luke 11:28

¹⁶ Matthew 17:5

3. Peter knew it was directed at him because it was his boat.
4. Peter knew it was from someone who had authority because he called Jesus, Master.
5. Though somewhat disgruntled at the command he willingly submitted.
6. Peter stopped what he was doing, talking.
7. He set out to deep water.

E. When did the miracle occur? (The miracle occurred after Peter obeyed.)

F. Reasons why Christians stumble in their walk of following Jesus Christ.

1. Ignorance – Not knowing what the Scriptures say.
2. Apathy – Not applying what the Scriptures say.
3. Confusion – More concerned about current events in their lives.
4. False information – Listening to others instead of their Lord.

The Point of the Lesson:

To hear and obey what Jesus, The Word of God says.

Application:

1. Memorize John 10:27 - “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”
2. Ask the Lord to give you a personal command to be obeyed, write down the results and share it with the group.

Lesson 2

What Do You See?

Group Icebreakers:

- What makes people different from you?
- How would you go about trying to change someone's mind?

Introduction:

The world outside a baby's home is strange and different to him. It is an uncomfortable place, lacking the security of home. Baby cries easily, everything is unfamiliar and foreign. But it is into this hostile environment that his parents bring him. He needs to become acquainted with the surroundings and people that his parents so easily mingle with. Jesus takes His new disciples there too.

Jesus' disciples are Jews from the Galilee, along the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee. They are a provincial people. Three times a year they make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to attend the feasts of the Lord. Their customary route takes them the easy way, through the Jordan River valley. The valley is wide, well watered and fertile. And the route takes them around the land of the Samaritans, which lies between their homes and Jerusalem. To them, the land of the Samaritans¹⁷ is the home of detestable people, who don't know the true God and with whom Jews have little dealings.

In early spring, the disciples go with Jesus to the feast of Passover in Jerusalem. There they remain for a while, in the friendly environs around Jerusalem. The area is Judea, the southern part of the land of Israel. They minister to the provincial people of the area and baptize some. This period probably lasts until the time of the second feast of the year that they attend in Jerusalem. The feast is called "Weeks" because it occurs seven weeks after Passover.

The time is late spring. It is getting hot. Jesus suddenly decides to return to the Galilee. This time he takes the disciples by the shorter route, through Samaria. The journey through the mountains is arduous and unfamiliar. Compared with the valley route, it is an arid region of rocky, wind swept hills with little shade and water. They stop at the village of Sychar. Gerizim, the Mount of Blessing and Ebal, the Mount of Cursing rise above it to the west. It is the place of the patriarch Jacob's well. It's noontime. It's time for a lunch break. It's time for Jesus to have an encounter with a woman who comes to the well. It's time to change the way His disciples view the world.

Reading the Scripture:

The Woman at the Well

John 4:1-42

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee. And He had to pass through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob

¹⁷ When the Kingdom of Israel, consisting of the northern ten tribes of Israel defeated by the Assyrians in 721 BC most of the people were taken into captivity and sent to different areas of the Assyrian Empire. About 677 BC, the Assyrians under Esarhaddon brought people of other nations into the land vacated by the northern ten tribes to keep it from turning back into a wilderness. Those non-Israelites became known as "Samaritans."

gave to his son Joseph; and Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the **sixth hour**.¹⁸ There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman therefore said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you **living water**¹⁹." She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty, nor come all the way here to draw." He said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly." The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this **mountain**²⁰ and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father. You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in **spirit and truth**,²¹ for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He." And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He had been speaking with a woman; yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?" So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city, and said to the men, "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" They went out of the city, and were coming to Him. In the meanwhile the disciples were requesting Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." The disciples therefore were saying to one another, "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal; that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. "For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows, and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." And from that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I have done." So when the Samaritans came to Him, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that

¹⁸ **Sixth hour.** About noon.

¹⁹ **Living water.** The term means running water from a spring or stream. It speaks more of a continuous supply rather than stored water.

²⁰ **Mountain.** Mount Gerizim.

²¹ **Spirit and truth.** "Glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh." Philippians 3:3

we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."

The Command:

- ❖ Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.

The Lesson:

The lesson Jesus teaches deals with the powers of observation. The disciples are used to seeing, understanding and applying physical laws in the natural world that surrounds them. Jesus challenges them to see differently. He wants their powers of observation to extend to the spiritual.

Jesus opens His teaching with the statement. *"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest.'"* The disciple's worldly thinking processes take over. It's May, the people have recently planted their cotton, it will take four more months for the crop to grow and they will harvest it in September. But then Jesus says, *"Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest."*

As the disciples turn to look at the fields they don't see a cotton crop ready to be harvested. But in the distance they see men, dressed in white robes running towards them, across the fields. Jesus is talking about men, not cotton, a harvest of men's souls. The harvest is beginning now, not at the end of the age during the final great harvest. The disciple's minds struggle to make spiritual connections.

Jesus continues. *"Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows, and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."*

The disciples begin thinking about sowing and reaping. Put a seed in the ground and a plant comes up in its place. A person plants and a person harvests. The plants always contain more seed. We save some of the seed to sow for the next crop and use the rest for food and other things. It's all very familiar to us.

Slowly the Scriptures come to their minds. They had seen men running across the fields to Jesus. Yes! It was in the scroll of Isaiah concerning Messiah. *"Behold, you will call a nation you do not know, and a nation which knows you not will run to you, because of the LORD your God, even the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified you."*²² And the part about sowing and reaping is in Isaiah too. Only it's about God's word. *"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."*²³

Now the disciples are beginning to understand what Jesus is talking about. Those who had come before Messiah, the patriarchs, Moses, David and the prophets, sowed the seed of the word of God concerning the Messiah. They **sowed** by speaking of the coming of Messiah, His kingdom and the salvation of men. Everyone who comes after the Messiah is to reap the harvest of souls.

²² Isaiah 55:5

²³ Isaiah 55:10-11

They **reap** by witnessing that Messiah, His kingdom and the salvation of men has come. And both groups of people will rejoice together in the kingdom of God.

Group Discussion:

1. What barriers might we have to overcome to see fields ready for harvest?
2. What are some ways that a person might initiate a spiritual conversation from observing people in their daily routines? (An example: A person looks at his watch to see what time a day it is. Asking any of the following questions would initiate a spiritual conversation. “Will a time come when God judges people? When will the world end? Can a person live forever? How many years do you have left in your life?)

The Point of the Lesson:

Be observant of people around you it may lead to a spiritual encounter.

Application:

1. Observe people in their daily routines. Think of some things that you might ask them in order to initiate a spiritual conversation. Write down your observations and the questions you could ask them. Share them at the next group meeting.
2. Take someone at the church you don't know well to lunch or dinner.

Lesson 3

A New Perspective

Group Icebreaker:

What is one family value that your parents stressed and why was it so important?

Introduction:

Children learn from watching and listening. The disciples have been watching and listening to Jesus. They have been with Him for more than a year.

Soon after their encounter with the woman at the well in Sychar, John the Baptist is thrown into prison. Jesus moves from his hometown of Nazareth to Capernaum where He goes public with His ministry. He preaches, heals the sick, and casts out demons. The message Jesus has been preaching is, “*the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel.*” And the multitudes have been following Him wherever He goes.

Jesus takes His disciples to the Feast of Weeks in Jerusalem. Opposition begins to arise against Him when He heals a lame man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. Jesus further infuriates the religious leaders when He claims that He is the Son of God. Then His disciples are accused of working on the Sabbath when they pick, husk and eat grain from the fields.

Returning to the Galilee, Jesus ascends Mount Eremos (eremos topos – “solitary place”) where He spends the night in prayer. A cave on the southern exposure of the hill provides shelter for Him. In the morning, the disciples come to Jesus and He names twelve of them to be His apostles (sent ones). Together, they descend to a level place where Jesus begins to speak what today is known as the Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount is the Law of Christ. It is Jesus’ teaching on God’s family values. It compares favorably with the Ten Commandments that Moses received and delivered to his people, the Israelites. The events surrounding the Sermon on the Mount and the giving of the Ten Commandments are very similar.

Both events immediately follow the Feast of Weeks. Both Moses and Jesus worked miracles before the events occurred. Both were being followed by a multitude of people. Both ascend a mountain where they spend time with God. Both descend the mountain to give the law of God to the multitudes below. Moses delivers the Ten Commandments that are written on two stone tablets by the finger of God. Jesus speaks His commandments and they are written on the hearts of people by the power of the Holy Spirit. Both the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount contain instructions for right living. Both contain blessings and curses. Moses finishes giving The Law (Torah) to the Israelites by having the people declare the blessings and curses of the covenant (Deuteronomy 28). Jesus begins the giving of His Law with nine blessings (beatitudes) and four curses (woes).

As Jesus descends the slope of Eremos to the waiting multitudes below He has time to reflect. Spread before Him to the south lay the Sea of Galilee. The azure blue of the harp-shaped lake dominates the scene. To His left the sun’s golden orb has risen above the eastern hills. Not two miles away is His home, Capernaum. To the west lay the plain of Gennesaret with its rich crop producing soil. On most days at this time of year the sun’s shimmering heat causes the whole scene to look hazy. The slope of Eremos itself is covered with grasses and wildflowers and the

chirping of sparrows' fills the air. The disciples, like children, are in need of the next stage of training, lessons on family values.

Reading the Scripture:

A New Perspective (The Beatitudes)

The Sermon on the Mount²⁴

Matthew 5:1-12, Luke 6:20-26

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

And turning His gaze on His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets.

The Command:

- ❖ Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great.

Group Discussion:

1. How do the values Jesus lists in the eight beatitudes compare to what people value in our culture?
2. How are people taught our cultural values?

The Lesson:

The beatitudes challenge the way people think. Jesus wants His disciples to learn three things. First, the values within the family of God are not the same as the world's values. Secondly, the reward for holding these values is in the future. And finally, that the underlying attitude of the family of God is joy, even in the face of persecution.

Joy means to be exceedingly glad. To rejoice means to get exceedingly glad all over again. People find many reasons to rejoice and they are all based in finding themselves in fortunate circumstances. Some causes for rejoicing might be at the birth of a child, getting a raise at work, winning a jackpot, or watching their football team win the Super Bowl. When people are glad they usually make joyful noises and are quite animated. This is the attitude that Jesus wants His disciples to have.

It is easy for people to rejoice when they find themselves in fortunate circumstances. But it takes special qualities to rejoice when a person finds himself in painful or difficult circumstances. He

²⁴ **The Sermon on the Mount** – Although these passages are referred to as being on the mount, they actually occurred after Jesus had descended with His disciples to a level place. Here Jesus expounds His "Law" or "Teaching" (Torah) to His followers just as Moses had done when he came down from Mount Sinai to the Israelites.

must look beyond the circumstances. It takes faith in God, trusting that He is allowing these circumstances for the person's own good. It also requires hope in God's future promises and love to endure the suffering. It requires a different perspective.

The prophet Habakkuk foresaw that God was going to make a new creation, a different kind people who walked by faith not by sight. The last three verses of the book of Habakkuk read this way. *“Though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord GOD is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet, and makes me walk on my high places.”*²⁵

The prophet contrasts the way men of this world see with the way the new creation sees things. Men are concerned with lack of things and the works of their hands. When these things fail they are discouraged. The new creation is made like a hind or deer. They have a better view because they live at a higher elevation. Deer are not concerned with empty stalls or failing crops. They don't worry about the circumstances of men because it's not how God created them. God clothes the deer and provides shelter in harsh elements. He supplies them with food and water and they rest in cool places throughout the heat of the day.

Some ask, “Why does God allow persecution of the righteous on account of Jesus Christ?” There are three reasons. The first reason is that it is a **sign** from God.²⁶ It is a sign of salvation to Christians and destruction for all those who oppose them. Christians are receiving assurance from God concerning their salvation when they are persecuted for their testimony of Jesus Christ.

The second reason ties in with the first, a **testing** of a person's faith. Is it genuine or not? The reference for this reason is found in 1 Peter 1:3-9. The third reason is also found in the first epistle of Peter. Chapter 4 verses 12-14 say that the **Spirit** of glory and God rest upon those who are persecuted for Christ's sake. In truth, those who oppose these individuals and persecute them hate God, His Christ and the way of salvation.

Jesus said, *“Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.”* Jesus wants His disciples to look forward to being persecuted for their faith. So much so that He wants them to rejoice in the persecution. Jesus considered persecution to be the norm. He even used the phrase **when** you are persecuted instead of **if** you are persecuted.

Since Jesus views persecution as a blessing, it behooves His followers to find the way persecution comes. It's quite simple; just start proclaiming your faith in Jesus Christ. The pattern is seen throughout the book of the Acts: proclaim faith in Jesus Christ, persecution comes, then start rejoicing.

Group Discussion:

3. How can you express joy?

²⁵ Habakkuk 3:17-19

²⁶ Philippians 1:27-30

The Point of the Lesson:

Live joyously, for it is God's will for you and you will be rewarded.

Application:

Read the following five accounts of the pattern of preaching, persecution, and rejoicing from the book of **Acts**. Write down how you felt about the five accounts and share your feelings with the group.

1. Peter and John
 - a. Preached (3:1-26)
 - b. Persecuted (4:1-22)
 - c. Rejoiced (4:23-31)
2. The Apostles
 - a. Preached (5:12-16)
 - b. Persecuted (5:17-39)
 - c. Rejoiced (5:40-42)
3. Stephen
 - a. Preached (6:8-10)
 - b. Persecuted (6:11-7:58)
 - c. Rejoice (7:59-60)
4. Paul and Barnabas
 - a. Preached (13:14-43)
 - b. Persecuted (13:44-50)
 - c. Rejoiced (13:51-52)
5. Paul and Silas
 - a. Preached (16:11-18)
 - b. Persecuted (16:19-24)
 - c. Rejoice (16:25-34)

Lesson 4

Shining Lights

Group Icebreaker:

Have the members of the group move around the room or rooms with their eyes closed. Ask the group the following question, “How did this exercise make you feel?”

Introduction:

The disciples are listening intently as Jesus continues with the Sermon on the Mount. He looks directly at them and declares that they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Then with a sweeping gesture of His right hand Jesus points westward. The disciple’s eyes follow until their gaze rests upon the hilltop city of Zefat not eight miles distant as Jesus tells them, “*A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.*”

Reading the Scripture:

Shining Lights The Sermon on the Mount Matthew 5:13-16

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure²⁷, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

The Command:

- ❖ Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Group Discussion:

1. Why do you think Jesus calls His disciples the salt of the earth?
 - a. Salt was used as the sign of a covenant. The disciples are to be the sign in the earth that God has made a covenant with men.
 - b. Salt is a preservative that keeps food from decomposition and corruption. The disciples are to preserve people lives and help them remain pure or free from the corruption of sin.
 - c. Salt is a seasoning that adds flavor to life. The disciples should add value to others lives by blessing them.
2. How does salt become tasteless?
 - a. Salt loses its taste through long exposure to air, but only the outer surface becomes tasteless.
 - b. Salt kept in the ground does not lose its taste. The source of the disciples salt should be hidden in the soil of the heart.
 - c. Salt in the heart is indicative of the wisdom of God that resides within an individual. The salt in the heart is sprinkled by the speaking of words. The Catholic Church still

²⁷ Peck-measure. A bowl or basket.

baptizes many children by placing salt on their lips or in their mouths as a sign that the wisdom of God is residing within.

3. How would you let a person know that he was blind?
4. What are some things that light does?
 - a. Light dispels darkness.
 - b. Light exposes things that are hidden.
 - c. Light enables people to see. They are able to coordinate activities to get what they need.
 - d. Light assists people in identifying what things are.

The Lesson:

As the disciples listen to Jesus speak these words about light, questions begin to form in their minds. Why is Jesus calling them the light of the world? What light do they have? How can they let this light shine so that people can glorify God in heaven? What is Jesus talking about? As the disciples grew to maturity the answers to their questions would come.

When Jesus issued this command to His disciples He referred to “your light.” The disciples discovered that the only light they had was Jesus, Himself. The Apostle John wrote about this in the opening statement of his gospel. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the **light** of men. And the **light** shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness, **that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light. There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.**”* The Apostle John also recorded a statement Jesus made concerning Himself. It reads like this. *“Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, **I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.**”*²⁸

Jesus calls His disciples the light of the world. The reason for that is that they believed in Him and proclaimed the way of salvation. The Apostle Paul develops this point further in his epistle to the Philippians. *“Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as **lights** in the world, **holding fast the word of life**, so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.”*²⁹

Jesus told His disciples that they should let their light shine in such a way that people could see their good works. These good works would in turn then cause people to praise God. To understand what good works are requires insight, because if men do their own good works, they are praised for them not God.

The first clue to understanding what good works are, is found in Matthew 19:16-17. *“And behold, one came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”* Jesus equates goodness with God alone! Therefore, good works are those performed by God not men.

²⁸ John 8:12

²⁹ Philippians 2:4-16

Men are doing well when they are declaring God's works. That is righteousness! Two of the Psalms make this point abundantly clear. Psalm 73:28 says, *"But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all Thy works."* Psalm 78:4 declares, *"We will not conceal them from their children, but tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done."*

The final clue is found in John 6:28-29. The multitudes asked Jesus, *"What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"* Jesus answered and said to them, *"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."* Scriptures show that good works consists of believing in Jesus Christ and declaring what God has done.

The Apostle Paul summarized these points in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6. *"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. **For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.**"* The apostles did not declare their own works but only their servant-hood. They preached Christ Jesus as Lord and the light shone forth when they preached.

Group Discussion:

5. In His discourse to the disciples about the light, Jesus holds out the possibility that light can be hidden. Do Christians hide their light and if so, why? (Proverbs 24:11-12)
6. In John 3:18-20, Jesus declares that people do not come to the light but prefer darkness because their deeds are evil. In view of His statement what are your responsibilities as the light? (Ephesians 5:11-12)

The Point of the Lesson:

Your light shines when you bring the testimony of Jesus to others.

Application:

Be salt and light. Either initiate a testimony that Jesus Christ is Lord or help someone to understand that they are blind. Report what happened in the next group meeting.

Lesson 5

Jesus, the Fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets

Group Icebreakers:

Ask the group the following questions.

- Name some of the various types of law. (Laws of nature, principles, parental, governmental, and God’s laws)
- Who makes the laws? (Those who are in authority)
- Why do you think we have laws? (To establish boundaries, provide guidelines, social acceptance, safety of citizens, and promote godliness)
- Have you ever broken a law and if so what was the outcome?
- Why are there consequences to breaking laws? (To punish or to discipline inappropriate behavior)

Introduction:

Most people are not raised in the Jewish faith. To understand what Jesus is talking about and how the disciples heard Him requires some background information. Jesus introduces His next subject in the Sermon on Mount by talking about the Law and the Prophets. Let’s begin there.

The Bible as we know it today contains sixty-six books which are divided into two parts. The two parts are known as the Old and New Testaments. The New Testament consists of twenty-seven books. It was developed from a collection of various writings occurring within the seventy-year period after Jesus’ death. In 397 AD, the Council of Carthage approved the New Testament as Scripture.

The Old Testament consists of thirty-nine books. It was developed from a collection of various writings occurring within an eleven hundred-year period beginning with Moses. These thirty-nine books were the Scriptures at the time of Jesus. When any New Testament writer speaks of Scripture he is referring to only to the Old Testament.

Jews divide the Scriptures into three parts. The Scriptures are called the **TaNakh**, which is an acronym formed from the first letters of the three parts.

1. **T**orah is the first part and means “The Law” or “Teaching”. The Torah consists of the Five Books of Moses or Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).
2. **N’vi’im** is the second part and means “The Prophets”. This part contains the Historical Books (Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings), the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) and the Minor Prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi).
3. **K’**tuvim is the third division and means “The Writings”. Included in The Writings are the Five Scrolls (Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Esther, Song of Songs, and Lamentations) and the Other Writings (1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Daniel).

The Torah³⁰ (“The Law” or “Teaching”) contains six hundred thirteen laws. There are three hundred sixty-five negative ones. According to Jewish rabbis these supposedly correspond to the number of veins in the body or days in a year. There are two hundred forty-eight positive laws,

³⁰ **The Torah.** See article on page 87 (“Law is Hitting the Mark while Sin is Missing the Mark”) for a full explanation.

which correspond to the number of bones in the body. The purpose of bones is to provide structure for the body. The veins carry blood and “*life is in the blood.*” Together God’s laws provide life and structure for the body or the way a person should live daily or 365 days a year. These laws fall into two broad categories: ceremonial (laws towards God) and civil (laws towards one another). The Ten Commandments summarize all these laws and are found in Exodus 20:1-17.

When Moses descended from Mount Sinai he delivered The Ten Commandments written on two tablets of stone. Five commandments were written on each tablet. **(See two tablet layout at the end of this lesson)** The first five laws deal with man’s relationship to God and the second five with man’s relationship to one another. Each set of five is listed in descending order from the greatest to the least. The idea being that if a person broke the least of the commandments he was on a path that would lead to the breaking of the greatest commandment.

In the first set of five, the fifth commandment is “Honor your father and mother.” If a person breaks that commandment it leads to breaking the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” The thought goes like this. If a person will not honor his parents whom God has placed over him, then he will not honor God either because he is self-willed and consider himself to be god.

In the second set of five, the tenth commandment is “You shall not covet anything that belongs to another

If a person breaks that commandment it leads to breaking the sixth commandment, “You shall not murder”. The thought goes like this. When a person covets he will stop at nothing to get it. A current example of this concept would be a bank robber, who kills someone during a holdup. He starts by coveting something that is not his, and then steals what he wants and finally winds up murdering someone to get it.

The Ten Commandments can be further summarized by just two commandments. When Jesus was confronted with the question as to which was the great commandment in the Law, Jesus replied by quoting two Scriptures: Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. “*And He said to him, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.*”

Reading the Scripture:

Jesus, the Fulfillment of the Law and Prophets

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:17-20

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

Do not think that I came to abolish **the Law or the Prophets**³¹; I did not come to **abolish**,³²

³¹ **the Law or the Prophets** – Jesus was referring to everything that His Father had established (the Law) and everything that His Father wanted brought to pass (the Prophets). The Law simply defined is the *teaching and instruction* of G-d, but more than a divinely ordained behavior pattern for life on earth: it also describes G-d’s own “behavior pattern,” the manner in which He chooses to relate to His creation. When we order our lives after Torah’s directives, we are not only fulfilling G-d’s will – we are also emulating His “behavior,” translating the divine relationship with creation into human/physical terms. In the words of the *rabbis*, “G-d’s manner is not like the manner of flesh and blood. The manner of flesh and blood is that he instructs others to do, but does not do

but to **fulfill**.³³ For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then **annuls**³⁴ one of the least of these **commandments**,³⁵ and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever **keeps**³⁶ and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your **righteousness**³⁷ surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

himself; G-d, however, what He Himself does, that is what He tells *his people* to do and observe,” (chabad.org/media/pdf/17098.pdf); (ex. 1 John 1:3-6, “And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, ⁵but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”).

³² **Abolish** – (*I did not*) loosen thoroughly, (*I did not*) break up, (*I did not*) overthrow, (*I did not*) destroy (both literally and metaphorically), (*I did not*) unyoke, unharness a carriage horse or pack animal. Nor did I metaphorically **overthrow, render vain, deprive of success, bring to naught** God’s institutions, forms of government, laws. (*Synonyms: deprive of force, annul, abrogate, discard.*), (biblehub.com/lexicon/matthew/5-17).

³³ **Fulfill** – to be obeyed (*walked out*) as it should be (biblehub.com/lexicon/matthew/5-17); (ex. Matthew 3:13-15, “Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he consented.”) (ex. Ezekiel 36:25-27, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules,” and Galatians 5:25, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”).

³⁴ **Annul (abrogate, relaxes)** – declare invalid (an official agreement, decision, or result), to “loosen” (literally or figuratively). (*Synonyms: subvert (undermine the power and authority of (an established system or institution) – i.e. declare (a marriage) to have had no legal existence.*). (**Abrogate**) repeal or do away with (a law, right, or formal agreement) or evade (a responsibility or duty). (*Synonyms: repudiate, revoke, repeal, rescind, overturn, overrule, override, do away with, annul, break off, invalidate, nullify, void, negate, dissolve, veto, declare null and void, discontinue*), (biblehub.com/lexicon/matthew/5-19); (ex. Romans 3:31, “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law,” Romans 2:12, “. . . all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law,” Romans 2:13, “For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.”).

³⁵ **Parallel Biblical Law definitions** – ex. Matthew 28:20, “teaching them to **observe** all the **I have commanded** you,” **observe**: I keep, guard, observe, keep watch over, continue keeping guard over, preserve, (biblehub.com/lexicon/matthew/28-20.htm); and **I have commanded**: to order, command to be done, enjoin (to direct or impose by authoritative order or with urgent admonition (gentle or friendly reproof, counsel or warning against fault or oversight), (biblehub.com/lexicon/matthew/28-20.htm); ex. Deuteronomy 30:11-20, “If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his **statutes** and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you,” **statutes**: (*in the words of the rabbis*) Divine law was first given to us encapsulated in the Ten Commandments, which were etched by the hand of G-d in two tablets of stone . . . When something is written, the substance of the letters that express it – the ink – remains a separate entity from the substance upon which they have been set – the parchment. On the other hand, letters engraved in stone are forged in it: the words are stone and the stone is words . . . By the same token, there is an aspect of Torah that is “inked” on our soul; we understand it, our emotions are roused by it; it becomes our “lifestyle” or even our “personality”; but it remains something additional to ourselves. But there is a dimension of Torah that is **statutes**, engrave in our being. There is a dimension of Torah which expresses a bond with G-d that is the very essence of a believer’s soul, (chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2832/jewish/Reasoning-The-Stone.htm); (ex. Exodus 31:18, Exodus 32:16, Jeremiah 31:33, 2 Corinthians 3:3-9).

³⁶ **Keeps (does, to do)** – to make or do (I make, manufacture, construct; I do, act, cause.). (**To Do**) to follow some method in expressing by deeds the feelings and thoughts of the mind; universally, describing the mode of action: to act rightly, to do the law, meet its demands, (to do) the things which the law commands. (*Synonyms: abide, agree, appoint, be, bear, cause, commit without any delay, exercise, fulfil, gain, hold, keep, observe, perform, provide, purpose, secure, tarry, work, yield*), (biblehub.com/lexicon/matthew/5-19).

³⁷ **Righteousness** – properly, *judicial approval* (the *verdict of approval*); in the NT, *the approval of God* (“divine approval”); refers to *what is deemed right by the Lord* (after His examination), i.e. what is *approved in His eyes*; **the state of him who is such as he ought to be, righteousness; the condition acceptable to God; walking in the way of righteousness equivalent to an upright, righteous, man**, (biblehub.com/lexicon/matthew/5-20); (ex.

The Command:

- ❖ Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.

Group Discussion:

1. Many in the Church today are saying that Christians are no longer under law but grace. What do you understand this statement to mean?

The Lesson:

Jesus doesn't want His disciples to think that He is doing away with everything they have been taught in order to establish His own religion. He isn't doing that! But like parents towards their children, He wants them to gain in wisdom and understanding.

When Jesus spoke concerning the Law and the Prophets He was talking about more than just a few laws and prophecies. He was talking about the sum-total of all that was written in Scripture. Jesus was referring to everything that His father had established (the Law) and everything that His father wanted brought to pass (the Prophets). And Jesus declared that He alone would fulfill them!

After His resurrection from the dead, Jesus appeared to two of His disciples while they were on the road to Emmaus. *“And beginning with Moses (“Torah” or “The Law” or “Teaching”) and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures”*.³⁸ No ordinary man could perfectly fulfill all that was written, only the one of whom the Scriptures testified, the Word of God, Himself, Jesus.

The gospel according to the Apostle John opens with this testimony of Jesus. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being”*.³⁹ John's words are pregnant with meaning, but difficult to comprehend. Let's try to get a grip on them.

Do you remember how the Bible starts? *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* Do you remember how they were created? God spoke them into existence. By His word everything came into existence. According to John, Jesus is God's Word. You might say that Jesus is the creative force behind every one of God's thoughts and plans. He brings things to pass! God created everything through His Son, the Word of God.

The Scriptures are the revealed ideas and plans of our Father in heaven; it is up to the Word of God to bring them to pass. For nothing was created apart from Him. We know the Word of God by the name He was given at birth, Jesus or Yashua or Joshua. The meaning of the name is “I Am Salvation” or “God's Salvation”. The people of God were also to refer to the Word of God as Immanuel or “God With Us”. However, the Word of God is more than just Jesus or Immanuel.

2 Timothy 3:16, *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”*); **to do righteousness, to live uprightly** (ex. 1 John 2:29, *“If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him,”* 1 John 3:7, *“Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous,”* 1 John 3:10, *“By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother,”* 1 Peter 2:24, *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.”*).

³⁸ Luke 24:27

³⁹ John 1:1-3

He is the Son of God, the creator of all things and one with God, His Father. He is the expression of all that God is.

Since the Word of God and the Father are one, how can they be divided? They can't. The Word of God is always in harmony with the Father and can do nothing except His will. In John 4:34 Jesus tells His disciples, *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work."*

This concept of oneness, unity and harmony was passed on to man as we were created in the image of God. And since we were created in His image, God does not want us to lie. A lie destroys harmony, unity and oneness. Jesus cautioned His disciples to do what they said they were going to do when He told them, *"Let your yes be yes, and your no be no".*⁴⁰ When a person does not do what he says he is going to do it tarnishes the image of God. There is no oneness, unity or harmony in that person because His words are not in line with his actions.

As Jesus continues speaking He assures His disciples that the Law will not pass away until everything in it is fulfilled. All the commandments in The Law are spiritual, holy and good. Think of it this way, "Which of the laws are not good for people?" If the laws are good, then God, who is good and gave them, will not remove them.

Jesus goes on to say, *"Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."* Did you notice something interesting in His statement? A person can be in the kingdom of heaven and not keep the commandments and even teach others to do the same thing. The keeping or not keeping of the commandments is not the requirement of remaining in the kingdom of heaven. The observance of them only determines a person's stature within the kingdom of heaven.⁴¹

Jesus' next statement is a blockbuster! *"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.* Entrance into the kingdom of heaven cannot be gained by keeping the laws and commandments. Jesus said righteousness greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees, who tried to keep, each law perfectly, was required. What is this righteousness?

The Apostle Paul in Romans 4:3 and 9 answers the question. *"For what does the Scripture say? 'AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.'" Abraham not only believed that God existed but in what God said. Abraham believed the Word of God. Jesus is the Word of God. Abraham trusted God and His Word, the Father and the Son. This trust, belief or confidence is called faith. "Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness."*

The Point of the Lesson:

Jesus Christ, fulfills all the requirements of the Law and the Prophets. An individual does not gain entrance into the kingdom of heaven by fulfilling those requirements, but by a belief in and dependence on Jesus Christ, the Word of God.

⁴⁰ Matthew 5:37

⁴¹ The term "kingdom of heaven" is used throughout Matthew's gospel and means the "kingdom of God." Many Jewish people as a pious observance will not use the name "God" so use an evasive synonym in its place. The kingdom of God simply means the rule of God or God ruling over His people.

Application:

At the next group meeting report any occasion when you were motivated by love to do something for God or another.

The Ten Commandments

Tablet 1 - Love of God

1

“You shall have no other gods before Me.”

2

“You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing loving kindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

3

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.”

4

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

5

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.”

Tablet 2 - Love of Neighbor

6

“You shall not murder.”

7

“You shall not commit adultery.”

8

“You shall not steal.”

9

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

10

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Lesson 6

Subduing Anger

Group Icebreaker:

How were disputes settled in your family when you were growing up?

Introduction:

The introduction to the previous lesson concerned the Law. The laws that were given to Moses can be summarized by the Ten Commandments, which in turn can further be reduced to two: love God and love your neighbor. In reality the whole Law can be reduced to just one word, love.

The Apostle Paul develops that idea in his discourse on law and grace in the epistle entitled Galatians. *“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but **through love serve one another**. For the whole Law is fulfilled in **one word**, in the statement, ‘**YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF**.’ But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.”⁴²*

Paul also directly links two words in that statement, the Spirit and love. They are one and the same. The Apostle John concurs with this thinking. The gospel of John 4:24 says, *“**God is spirit**, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”* In 1 John 4:8 he further states, *“The one who does not love does not know God, for **God is love**.”*

The disciples received the Holy Spirit after Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. They were filled with God! They were filled with love! The kingdom of God or the rule of God had come to indwell the hearts of men. They received the Spirit because they confessed that Jesus, the Word of God, was the Son of God. The Apostle John sums this up in 1 John 4:15-16. *“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”*

After a person receives the Holy Spirit he is expected to walk in love. *“Be led by the Spirit”* as the Apostle Paul puts it. Individual laws no longer govern him. He is not under the Law of Moses, but under God’s governance. He has received grace, the love of God coming to dwell in him. He is under the Law of the Spirit!

To say that Christians are not under law is an inaccurate and misleading statement. A person not governed by some form of law is lawless. In other words he is a law unto himself doing what is right in his own eyes. Jesus cautioned that in the last days lawlessness would increase and people’s love would grow cold. And the Apostle Paul warned that the man of lawlessness would be revealed, who is the son of destruction. Satan was lawless, he is the destroyer and those who practice lawlessness are his offspring. Christians are to be governed by the Law of the Spirit, therefore, are under obligation to conduct themselves in love.

⁴² Galatians 5:13-18

Throughout his discourse Jesus patiently teaches His disciples like young children. He takes what they know and causes them to examine it at a deeper level. Jesus wants them to understand what is behind the Law. What is the spirit of the Law or motive for it? He wants them to listen and learn that they might become expressions of love.

Reading the Scripture:

Subduing Anger
The Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 5:21-26

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, '**Raca**,⁴³ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You **fool**,⁴⁴ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you shall not come out of there, until you have paid up the last cent.

The Commands:

- ❖ Leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.
- ❖ Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way.”

Group Discussion:

1. What is one thing that causes you to become angry?
2. How long do you normally stay angry?
3. Who is your brother? Give some examples. (Brothers are those who have either the same father or mother whether by birth or adoption either physically or spiritually)

The Lesson:

Jesus opens this lesson by quoting the sixth commandment, “*You shall not commit murder.*” Some people believe this commandment reads, “Thou shall not kill” and interpret it to mean that no one is justified in taking the life of another. There is nothing wrong if an individual holds this position for himself. However, the Scripture both Old and New Testaments use different words to convey these two ideas. Murder is a wanton act. It is subject to a penalty executed by the government. The penalty may be death itself. Accidentally killing someone is not murder it’s manslaughter. Killing someone while defending oneself, family, or property when attacked is not murder, it’s self-defense. Warfare itself is not murder; however there can be individual acts of murder occurring within the framework of war depending on the circumstances.

In this lesson Jesus reinforces the concept of individual responsibility. He declares that an individual’s actions and motives will be judged and that evil actions have their own penalties.

⁴³ **Raca.** “Worthless” or “Good for nothing”.

⁴⁴ **Fool.** The Scriptures say a fool is one who says in his heart, “There is no God.” Psalms 14:1

Jesus exposes the pattern of steps in the commission of murder and their effect on an individual's body, soul and spirit. Then He closes with instructions for the prevention of murder.

Murder is always premeditated. The steps in the process of committing a murder are always the same. In some cases the process happens extremely fast. In the courts these are usually described as "crimes of passion". The murderer has very little time to consider the consequences of his actions. Therefore, the court is usually more lenient in its sentence. At other times the process develops slowly, giving the murderer time to consider his actions and repent of them. Because this individual continues, willfully and knowingly towards the course of action it is considered premeditated murder and is dealt with more harshly in the courts.

Even in the commission of a murder that is described as a "crime of passion" the individual has rehearsed the steps to committing the murder many times, but stopped short of actually committing it, as we shall see. In that sense it is premeditated. Let's look at the steps in the process that leads to murder. Jesus presents each of them in Matthew 5:22. Warning signs accompany each step in the process and are a result of the failure to overcome sin.

The first warning sign in the process is anger towards someone. According to James 4:1-3 it all starts in the body, a lust of the flesh. *"What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures."* The individual reasons that justify a person's anger are as varied as the hues of a rainbow. But it boils down to this, "I don't have what I want, therefore I have the right to be angry."

The second warning sign comes when the angry person demeans the other. Jesus used the term "Raca" which means "I spit on you" or "I despise you". The temptation comes through the lust of the eyes. It deals with the mind or soul. The angry person views himself in an exalted position or in one of greater importance than the other. Therefore he has the right to despise the other. James 4:6 and 10 speak to that issue. *"Therefore it says, 'GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.'" "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you."*

The third and final warning that precedes murder is when the angry, despising person accuses the other of being a fool. According to Scripture a fool is not just a silly person, but also one who says in his heart there is no God.⁴⁵ The temptation to accuse or judge comes through the spirit and is called the pride of life. It is the sin of Satan, the accuser of the brethren. The angry, despising person takes on the role of God, being able to judge the hearts of men. Then as judge, he is able to execute a sentence. James 4:11-12 says, *"Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?"*

Jesus finishes His commentary by challenging His disciples. They are to take aggressive action in subduing anger in others when the cause for the anger is the disciple's fault. Jesus wants them to be peacemakers. And He wants them to make peace quickly and also to make the wrong right.

⁴⁵ Psalm 14:1

Jesus' first instruction is, *"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."* The thought is, "Make peace with the person who is angry with you before coming into the presence of God."

The second instruction is to, *"Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you shall not come out of there, until you have paid up the last cent."* Jesus makes three points. **First**, it is going to cost you either way. **Secondly**, by making the wrong right by your own volition causes anger to subside and provides opportunity to make friends. If the matter goes before court, the person's anger does not subside and you will not be his friend even when he wins the judgment. **Finally**, by removing the cause for anger the person will not go on to despise and judge you thus you have kept him from sinning.

Application:

The pattern to murder is clear. Lust produces anger, pride produces despising, and judging produces accusation, which leads to execution. Murder starts with being angry. The Scriptures offer simple practical advice in dealing with it.

1. *Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man, lest you learn his ways, and find a snare for yourself.* (Proverbs 22:24-25)
2. *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.* (Proverbs 15:1)
3. *A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.* (Proverbs 19:11)
4. *A gift in secret subdues anger, and a bribe in the bosom, strong wrath.* (Proverbs 21:14)
5. **BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.** (Ephesians 4:26-27)

At the next group meeting report any occasion you had to be angry and how you dealt with it.

Lesson 7

Being Faithful

Introduction:

Jesus continues His Sermon on the Mount teaching the family values in the Kingdom of God. He couples His next topic adultery . . . with divorce.

Reading the Scripture:

Being Faithful
The Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 5:27-32

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you;⁴⁶ for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you;⁴⁷ for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell. And it was said, ‘WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE’; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Context:

Many people today do not have a good biblical understanding of what adultery is. Most would simply say that adultery is, “when a married person engages in sexual relations with another who is not their spouse.” While this is true, it certainly doesn't express the full essence of what Jesus is talking about.

The Hebrew word for adultery is “na'aph” and it means to **break wedlock**. And we see that this is the focus of Jesus' teaching as He directly links the subject of adultery with **divorce**, which is also a breaking of wedlock. Adultery involves more than just improper sexual relations. It constitutes breaking a **covenant relationship**.

So before adultery can occur a “covenant relationship” must already be in place. Covenant relationships come in several types with marriage being one of them. The Bible also speaks of people being in covenant with God; the Jewish people in the Mosaic Covenant and Christians in the New Covenant.⁴⁸ Covenants are comprised of several elements, as we shall discover in the next lesson of this book.

⁴⁶ **If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you.** “Stop envying”. (Desiring what is not yours)

⁴⁷ **If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you.** “Stop stealing”. (Taking what is not yours)

⁴⁸ The Hebrew name for the “New Covenant” is “Brit Hadashah”. A more in depth look at the New Covenant and how Christians participate in it can be found in my books entitled “Christianity 101” and “Understanding Go Better”.

Marriage is common and generally understood by everyone. So Jesus uses adultery in marriage to illustrate how covenants are broken and that breaking **any** covenant is equivalent to adultery. He outlines the steps to committing adultery so they serve as warning signs to the disciples.

Just as adultery occurs in a marital relationship it can also occur in a spiritual relationship. When adultery occurs in a spiritual relationship it is called **apostasy**, falling away or idolatry. Three prophets, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea, declared that the Israelites were committing adultery concerning their covenant with God. And in the book of James, Christians are accused of the same thing. *You **adulteresses**, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* (James 4:4) Let's take a closer look at the covenant of marriage and how wedlock is broken.

Marriage is a **public** statement of **oneness**. It is the act of a man and a woman becoming one physically, emotionally and spiritually. It involves an agreement or covenant between the two. They pledge their lives to one another, living together in union and showing favor towards one another. Marriage requires vows, oaths or promises to be given and God is witness to them.

Divorce is also a public statement that there is a separation or **cutting** apart of the two lives that were joined in marriage. It is the **final** act of breaking of wedlock or a breaking of oneness. It indicates that the couple will not dwell together in union or show favor towards one another after the divorce occurs.

When a married person engages in sexual relations with another who is not their spouse that person is committing adultery. According to Webster's Dictionary the word adulterate means: to corrupt, debase or make **impure** by the addition of a foreign or inferior substance. So when one of the spouses engages in sexual intercourse with someone besides their marriage partner the marriage becomes mixed or impure. Since the marriage no longer exists in its original state there are **grounds** for divorce. However, the marriage does not have to end in divorce if the offended party **forgives** the other and the couple is **reconciled** to one another. Their marriage has been restored and there has been no breaking of wedlock by divorce.

According to Jesus, adultery also occurs upon **remarriage** after a divorce for a reason other than unchastity. In other words, the new marriage will be made corrupt, debased and impure by the **addition** of a foreign or inferior substance. Remember, if adultery was the grounds for the divorce the marriage had **already** been corrupted, debased and made impure. Jesus said, "And it was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE'; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."⁴⁹ "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery." (Luke 16:18, Mark 10:11)

The Pharisees were well aware of the role that divorce plays in the issue of adultery and questioned Jesus on it. They wanted to know whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife at all. A full account of Jesus' reply is found in Mark 10:3-12. "And He answered and said to them, 'What did Moses command you?' And they said, 'Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY.'

NOTE: Under the Law of Moses there are four grounds for divorce. The first three are neglecting to provide 1) **food**, 2) **clothing** and 3) conjugal **love** and the fourth is committing adultery. These

⁴⁹ Matthew 18:8-9

four obligations parallel the vows exchanged by couples in Jewish marriages. By the way, these four were common in most societies during Jesus' day.

But Jesus said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.' And in the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. And He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.'" The Apostle Paul reinforces this view in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16.

An interesting point arose when the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in the act of adultery⁵⁰ to Jesus. What was this act of adultery? Most believe that she was a married woman caught in the act of having sexual relations with a man. If this were the case why wasn't the man stoned as well, since it was the law in Israel?⁵¹ The most likely scenario is this. The woman probably divorced her first husband and was in the process of marrying her second husband, who was a single man. She was caught in the act of committing adultery at the wedding ceremony when she was being remarried.

The second part of this story is equally interesting. Let's look at what happened and how Jesus handled it.

"Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do you say?" They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. (John 8:5-6)

Perhaps Jesus wrote Jeremiah 9:2, which God spoke through the prophet concerning all of Israel. *For all of them are adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. (Jeremiah 9:2)*

But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. (John 8:7-8)

Then perhaps Jesus wrote Psalm 32:1, which was written by King David after committing adultery with Bathsheba. *How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!*

When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court. Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more." (John 8:9-11)

The transition that Jesus makes from the issue of murder to adultery is seamless. It appears that He completely changes topics but He doesn't. He has been dealing with the root issue of both anger and adultery, which is covetousness, desiring something that **doesn't** belong to you. Jesus connects covetousness to adultery because it is this desire towards another that leads to divorce, the breaking of wedlock or oneness.

⁵⁰ John 8:1-11

⁵¹ Deuteronomy 22:22 "If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel."

The Commands:

- ❖ If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you.
- ❖ If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you.

Group Discussion:

1. If you have been married what are some of the vows that you made?
2. What are some possible repercussions of breaking wedlock?

The Lesson:

The introduction to this lesson covered some of the legal issues involving adultery. But Jesus wants His disciples to see the root causes for it. The story of King David and Bathsheba shed light on these causes and contrast the moral and legal issues of adultery. Following is a summary of their story.

King David watched Bathsheba, a married woman bathe. The Law did not forbid this. Then David initiated physical contact with her. Then they had sexual intercourse and she became pregnant. Adulterous sexual relations were forbidden under the Law. David tried to hide the consequences of his sin, the unborn child. If he couldn't find a way out of the predicament Bathsheba would be shamed, more than likely divorced and possibly stoned to death.

David hatched a plan to have Bathsheba's husband' Uriah, who was a commander in the army and away at war, return to Jerusalem. David wanted Uriah to have sexual relations with Bathsheba while he was at home on leave from the army so that it would appear that the unborn child was theirs. However, Uriah didn't have sexual relations with Bathsheba. David realized that if Uriah divorced Bathsheba, everyone would know that he was committing adultery if he married her.

So David devised a second plan. He sent Uriah back to war and instructed another commander to allow Uriah to be killed in the fighting. This gave the appearance that David didn't really murder him. It also appeared that David had the right to marry Bathsheba since her husband died and she had not been divorced. However, God knew the intentions of David's heart and brought judgment against him.

As He did with the issue of murder, Jesus discloses the pattern of **steps** that lead to divorce, the final act of breaking wedlock. Each of the steps also serves as a warning. Then Jesus issues instructions for overcoming the temptation at each step. Committing adultery is about being unfaithful to one's vows. And it all starts with a look.

In Matthew 5:28, Jesus says that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. He places the responsibility for the sin of adultery squarely on the shoulders of the man. If a man is married or was married and divorced from his wife, then he should not be looking to take another woman as his wife in the first place. Secondly, it is the single man's duty to find out whether a woman is married or was married and divorced before he pursues her. He is free to choose from women who have never been married or those whose spouse's have died.

The temptation to commit the sin of adultery comes through the lust of the eyes. It is the sin of envy or covetousness, desiring something or someone an individual is not entitled to. It is the way that one person **looks** at another. In our society we have a term for that look. We say that, "his or her eyes are green with envy." Jesus gives His disciples the solution for preventing the lustful

look. He commands them to pluck out their right eye and throw it away if it offends them. This Aramaic idiom simply means, “**Stop envying or coveting.**”

Jesus goes on to say, “*If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell.*” The second step towards committing adultery involves taking possession of another person. Usually this happens through inappropriate **touching**. This is a lust of the flesh. Jesus commands His disciples to cut off their right hand if it offends them. The idiom means “**stop stealing.**” Most people on the path to adultery think they are having illicit sexual encounters with a person other than their spouse. They have never considered themselves envious people or thieves.

The final step and warning is adulterous sexual **intercourse**. Jesus demands that His disciples not to divorce their spouses for any reason other than infidelity in the relationship. In that case the spouse has already violated the marriage covenant by becoming one with another person.

Reading the Scripture:

Jesus Teaches on Divorce

Matthew 19:1-12, Mark 10:1-12

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And it came about that when Jesus had finished these words, He went from there to the region of Judea, and beyond the Jordan; and great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there. Crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them. And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?” And He answered and said, “Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE⁵², and said, ‘FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’?⁵³ Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?”⁵⁴ He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” And in the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. And He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.” The disciples said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.” But He said to them, “Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.”

Spiritual adultery with God follows the same path. In the first step a person **looks** at or desires other gods. In the second he **serves** them. The third step he **prays** to them. This act is called

⁵² MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. *Genesis 1:27*

⁵³ 'FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH?'. *Genesis 2:24*

⁵⁴ GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY? *Deuteronomy 24:1-4*

apostasy meaning a falling away from or separating from. In the Scriptures we are told the Israel played the harlot. They went after foreign gods and served them.

God was displeased with Israel and even gave the northern kingdom a writ of divorce.⁵⁵ Yet He has remained a faithful husband to them by not taking another people . . . waiting patiently for the day when they would return to Him. God has shown Himself to be a faithful husband. In 2 Timothy 2:11-13, Paul writes about the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ. *“It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself.”* The way of love is faithfulness in relationships.

Group Discussion:

3. How does Jesus’ teaching on adultery contrast with our society’s views?

The Point of the Lesson:

Avoid the lustful look.

⁵⁵ Jeremiah 3:8 (The book of Hosea also deals extensively with this subject.)

Lesson 8

Keeping Promises

Group Icebreaker:

Tell one promise that someone made to you, that was not kept and how did it make you feel?

Introduction:

Jesus smoothly transitions topics from adultery to vows. He links the two subjects by dealing with unfaithfulness (breaking oneness) both in marriage and in keeping one's vows. To better grasp what Jesus is talking about in this lesson, a Biblical understanding of some inter-related terms would be helpful.

Definitions

1. To **swear** means to give one's word or testimony that something is true or the truth.
2. To **vow** means to **swear** to do or give something.
3. To **promise** is to **vow**.
4. A **pledge** is something **tangible** that is required by the person to whom the promise or vow is made. The pledge acts as surety or assurance that the vow will be fulfilled. **Collateral** on a loan conveys this concept.
5. An **oath** is the same as a vow or promise with something of value given with it. The Hebrew word for oath is also the same word for the number **seven**. Seven is considered God's number and connects Him with the concept of oath. It means something that has been multiplied by seven or made full and complete. It has the **idea** that it was not spoken in haste or carelessly but repeated **seven** times.
6. A **curse** or **curses** are added to swearing, promises, vows, oaths and covenants to strengthen the agreement. To curse is asking God to bring evil in some form on the individual who makes the promise if it is **not** fulfilled. The words "God damn" are an example of this. The individual to whom the promise is given may require a curse or the one who gives the promise offers it.
7. A **covenant** is a formal agreement between two or more people and may involve **all** of the above.

To see the actions associated with these words we'll turn to a story in Genesis 21:22-33. *"Now it came about at that time, that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, 'God is with you in all that you do; now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me, or with my offspring, or with my posterity; but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me, and to the land in which you have sojourned.' And Abraham said, 'I swear it.'*

*But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well of water, which the servants of Abimelech had seized. And Abimelech said, 'I do not know who has done this thing; neither did you tell me, nor did I hear of it until today.' And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them to Abimelech; and the two of them made a **covenant**. Then Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. And Abimelech said to Abraham, 'What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by themselves?' And he said, '**You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand in order that it may be a witness to me, that I dug this well.**' Therefore he called that place Beersheba (which means well of the **oath** or the well of seven); because there the two of them took an **oath**. So they made a **covenant** at Beersheba; and Abimelech and Phicol, the commander*

of his army, arose and returned to the land of the Philistines. And Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.

Group Discussion:

1. Four of the seven terms described earlier are used in this story, which ones are they?
(Swear, covenant, oath and pledge)

Reading the Scripture:

**Keeping Promises
The Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 5:33-37**

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; and anything beyond these is of evil.

The Commands:

- ❖ Make no oath at all.
- ❖ Let your statement be, Yes, yes or No, no.

The Lesson:

Swearing oaths, taking vows and making promises are sacred and not to be taken lightly. God is the witness to all that men say and by their words they will be judged. Jesus attests to this fact when He speaks with the Pharisees. In Matthew 12:36-37 He declares, "*And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.*"

Jesus tells the disciples that they should not swear oaths, vows or promises. All of these deal with giving or doing something at some future date. Oaths, vows and promises are presumptuous and based in pride. No one knows whether he will live long enough or have the resources to fulfill what he promises, except God alone. This point is best illustrated by wedding vows, most of which end with the words, "until death do us part."

Jesus tells the disciples that they should not swear an oath by heaven, the earth or Jerusalem because these things belong to God, not to the person who is offering them as a pledge. No one has the right to offer another person's property as a pledge. A person who swears an oath by God seeks to indebt Him. The one who swears in this manner is in effect saying that he has power over God and can demand that God accomplish his own personal will. Should the person making the oath fail to keep it, how will the other collect from God? Swearing in this manner only discredits a disciple's relationship to God and ruins his testimony of Jesus Christ if he fails to keep his oath.

In the next statement Jesus uses the term "your head" to indicate an oath in the individual's own name. The person who swears this type of oath offers himself as the pledge. He is declaring that he is God or at least equal in power and authority to Him. An example of this is given in Hebrews 6:13. "*For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself.*"

Should the one who swears in this fashion not keep his oath he will be indebted to the other, thus having to render service to him and not God. Swearing by one's self hides the truth, that men are not God, when in reality they are weak and in need of His help. If a disciple swears in this manner and does not keep his oath his testimony of Jesus Christ and His ability to save people will also be shrouded in doubt.

By saying, "let your yes be yes and your no be no", Jesus is declaring that He expects His disciples to keep their word! To do what they said they would do. If the disciples don't keep their word they will be known as liars and cannot be counted on to speak the truth or be trusted. How then will people believe, the message of the gospel that they preach? There is an old saying that goes like this: "A man is only as good as his word." God is good. He always does what He says he is going to do.

Group Discussion:

2. Why do people make promises?
3. What is the result of a broken promise?
4. How do you think broken promises affect children?
5. What was the last promise you can remember making? Did you keep it?
6. What was one promise you wished you had never made or was the hardest for you to keep.
7. Which of God's promises is your favorite and why?

The Point of the Lesson:

Don't put yourself in a position to lie.

Application:

At the next group meeting report any occasion you had to promise something and how you dealt with it.

Lesson 9

Giving Up Your Rights

Group Icebreaker:

List some rights you have as a citizen of your country?

Introduction:

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus continues to impart godly family values to His disciples. His next subject deals with personal injury rights. He introduces it with the phrase an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. The phrase is found in Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21.

In western society we tend to think this phrase indicates that a person can seek revenge for personal injury. However, when the phrase is read in the context of the entire passage in which it is found, it clearly shows that God is not commanding retribution. He merely sets limits on the amount of retribution that may be exacted. For example, if a person loses an eye through injury from another he does not have the right to kill the person who injured him and take his property. Under the Law, retribution was limited to the loss suffered.

In theory the injured person could cause the same injury to the person who injured him but what good is it that two people have lost an eye? Generally, the Jewish court awarded compensation for five different aspects of the injury: damage, pain, healing, loss of time from work, and insult. The point of the Law was to be fair, even-handed and just.

Reading the Scripture:

Giving Up Your Rights
The Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 5:38-42, Luke 6:29-30
Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

The Commands:

- ❖ Do not resist him who is evil.
- ❖ Turn to him the other cheek also.
- ❖ Let him have your coat also.
- ❖ Go with him two miles.
- ❖ Give to him who asks of you.
- ❖ Do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

Group Discussion:

1. What thoughts go through your mind after hearing what Jesus taught?

The Lesson:

Jesus opens the topic of just compensation for personal injury with a statement concerning physical injury, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Then He challenges His disciples to take a different view. By using four cases of personal injury Jesus demonstrates that He wants them to be **generous** people, those who do not demand their rights.

The first case involves mental and emotional injuries received by a disciple. Jesus said, *“But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.”* A slap and a clenched fist are two different things. A clenched fist indicates that a fight is occurring. A slap is done with an open hand. It conveys the idea of an insult. It is used to humiliate someone or provoke a fight.

Turning the cheek is an Aramaic idiom meaning **“don’t start a fight or quarrel.”** It takes two people to fight or have a quarrel. If the injured person does not retaliate then there is no fight or quarrel. Proverbs 17:14 says, *“The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.”* Another proverb states, *“Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel.”*⁵⁶ Jesus wants His disciples to give up their right to be right. God will vindicate the righteous.

The second case involves harm caused by a disciple. Jesus said, *“And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.”* In this case the injured party is seeking a stated compensation for injury but has not gone to court yet to collect it. Jesus tells the disciples to meet the demand and give even more. The reason for it is to produce friendship with the injured person. Jesus conveyed this same thought earlier in the Sermon on the Mount.⁵⁷ Jesus wants His disciples to give up the right to personal legal protection when they have wronged someone. God will see that justice is done.

The third case involves lack of compensation for services rendered by a disciple. Jesus said, *“And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two.”* Going the second mile is still a popular phrase and means doing more than what is required. Jesus wants His disciples to give up the right to compensation for use of their time and talents. God will reward.

Loaning something the disciple has, to someone who asks for it is the fourth case. On the surface this appears rather easy, but Matthew’s gospel doesn’t convey the whole thought. Luke 6:30 declares the truth of the matter. *“Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back.”* It involves the loss of the disciple’s property.

The original thought behind this teaching comes from the book of Deuteronomy.⁵⁸ *“For the LORD your God shall bless you as He has promised you, and you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; and you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you. If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks. Beware, lest there is a base thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,’ and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing; then he may cry to the LORD against you, and it will be a sin in you. You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him,*

⁵⁶ Proverbs 20:3

⁵⁷ Matthew 5:25-26

⁵⁸ Deuteronomy 15:6-11

because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings. For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.'” Jesus wants His disciples to give up the right of return of their property. God is the owner of all things.

In each case, Jesus asked His disciples to do more than was required. In other words, they were to give gifts or bless others. Jesus wants his disciples to be like their Father in heaven, generous, people of an open hand. They should not grasp the things of this world or hold onto their rights, for their Father in heaven shall reward them.

Group Discussion:

2. If the disciples of Jesus do more than what is required of them what will the people think?
3. How do you think this Christ-like behavior affects other?
4. How are friendships formed?

Point of The Lesson:

Do more than is required.

Application:

At the next group meeting report any occasion you had to be generous by giving up your rights.

Lesson 10

Love Your Enemies

Group Icebreaker:

What does the word love mean to you?

Introduction:

In the New Testament portion of Scripture two primary Greek words are used to describe love: agape and phileo. These two words have distinct meanings. It is imperative to know which of the two words is being used in a particular passage of Scripture to develop an understanding of the text.

The word phileo deals with the **emotions** of love. It's the **feeling** of love! The use of this word denotes a fondness for an object. Some examples of fondness for an object are:

1. A mother love towards her child.
2. A husband love towards his wife.
3. Brothers and sisters love towards one another.
4. The Pharisees loved being greeted in the marketplace.
5. People love money.

The word agape deals with the **spirit** of love. It's the **service** of love! The use of this word denotes doing the right thing and is akin to the word charity. The word agape reveals itself in its character and actions:

1. Agape is the character of God, Himself. In the Scripture that says, “*God is love*”⁵⁹ the word used is agape.
2. Agape is how love behaves. The often-quoted passage on love in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 13 outlines agape's behavior.

Reading the Scripture:

Love Your Enemies The Sermon on the Mount Matthew 5:43-48 & Luke 6:27-36

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR, and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and pray for those who persecute you. And just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way, in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the **tax-gatherers**⁶⁰ do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, in order

⁵⁹ 1 John 4:8, 16

⁶⁰ **Tax gatherers.** Known as publicans these people were not well thought of by the Jews. They were local people who were assigned to collect taxes for Rome. Much of the time they were not fair in the amount of money they collected from the people.

to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Therefore you are to be perfect⁶¹, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The Commands:

- ❖ Love your enemies.
- ❖ Do good to those who hate you.
- ❖ Bless those who curse you.
- ❖ Pray for those who mistreat you.
- ❖ Do good and lend expecting nothing in return.
- ❖ And just as you want people to treat you, treat them the same way.
- ❖ Therefore you are to be perfect.

The Lesson:

Jesus opens His teaching with the statement, “*You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR, and hate your enemy.’*” Only the first part of the quotation is from Scripture. Nowhere in the Old Testament was it ever taught to hate your enemy. Evidently some leaders were teaching this concept at the time of Jesus.

Jesus commands His disciples to love their enemies. The word used is *agape*⁶². Jesus is stating that His disciples must “do the right thing by their enemies.” Fondness for them is not required, just godly behavior. Then He describes six practical ways to love a person’s enemies:

1. Serve your enemies.
2. Do good things for your enemy, not bad things.
3. Treat your enemy, as you would want to be treated.
4. Bless, speak well of or praise him.
 - a. The primary sense of the word bless used here seems to concern speaking well of your enemy, who is cursing you.
 - b. However, the true meaning of the word bless is “**to kneel or bow the knee to.**”
 - c. The thought conveyed by the word is that of a camel bowing down on its knees to allow a burden to be put upon it.
 - d. Read the example of Balaam’s donkey in Numbers 22:21-34
5. Pray for him.
6. Loan him what he needs, even if he can’t or won’t repay.

Jesus motivates His disciples by challenging them to become like their Father in heaven. He states that God does good towards both the righteous and the wicked alike. He causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on both. Love does not behave one way for some and another way for others. It is always consistent and does not change. For those called to be His disciples it helps to remember that we were once His enemies. But due to God’s persistent abiding love towards us we are now His friends.

⁶¹ **Perfect.** “Complete” or “fully mature”.

⁶² **Agape.** *Love . . . actively doing what the Lord prefers . . . always defined by God – a “discriminating affection which involves choice and selection”. Simply defined as a love that gives what is needed, rather than what is wanted (i.e. the benevolence which God, in providing salvation for men, has exhibited by sending his Son to them and giving him up to death . . . 1 John 4:8, “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love,” and John 15:9-10, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”)*

Group Discussion:

1. What makes a person your enemy?
2. In what ways is it hard for you to love your enemies?
3. List some practical ways you can love your enemies.

The Point of the Lesson:

Do good to everyone.

Application:

At the next group meeting report any occasion you had to love an enemy and what was the outcome of it?

Lesson 11

Receiving Honor

Introduction:

In His previous teaching Jesus talked about love. Real love is the character of God. Its nature is to do the right thing and its actions benefits others. Real love does not behave differently towards anyone, whether good or evil. And it is not based on feelings that are subject to change.

Using love as a platform Jesus in rapid-fire succession lists three loving actions that His disciples should perform: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. However, these are secondary issues. The real issue He addresses is the spirit behind the actions. Why does a person do these acts of love and from whom will he receive honor?

Reading the Scripture:

Receiving Honor The Sermon on the Mount Matthew 6:1-18

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.' For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face⁶³ so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

The Commands:

- ❖ Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them.
- ❖ Do not sound a trumpet before you.

⁶³ **Anoint your head and wash your face.** Jews put ashes on their heads when fasting. They put oil on their heads only for joyous occasions.

- ❖ Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.
- ❖ You are not to be as the hypocrites.
- ❖ Go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret.
- ❖ Do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do.
- ❖ Do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do.
- ❖ Anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men.

The Lesson:

The passages of Scripture on the issues of almsgiving, prayer and fasting contain **five** common elements. The first element is that Jesus gives specific commands regarding each of the issues. The second element is that good deeds are being performed: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. The third element is the hypocrite. The fourth is being seen by men and the fifth is that the Father who sees in secret rewards.

Jesus addresses the good deed of giving alms first. The meaning of the word alms is compassion. It is associated with giving money to the poor and should not be confused with the tithe that belongs to God. Alms could be giving directly to an individual or collected in a pooled fund to be distributed to the poor.

Jesus instructs His disciples to do their almsgiving in secret. He wants them to do it in such a way that other men do not notice. When a person receives charity from another he knows, there is always a sense of indebtedness that goes with it. When the giver is unknown to the poor, the only thanks he can give is to God.

The second instruction is to not sound a trumpet before giving alms. In Jesus' day wealthy people, who were puffed up with pride, may have actually sounded a trumpet before they gave alms making it clear to everyone that they were charitable people. The point Jesus is making is that people shouldn't announce their giving. He reinforces this thought with His next command, *"Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."* We know that it is impossible for the left hand not to know what the right hand is doing but the point is to be discreet.

In His discussion on good deeds Jesus draws attention to the word hypocrite. It is His first recorded use of the word. Therefore, we should gain a clear understanding of its meaning so it can be applied properly in future contexts. A hypocrite is an actor under an assumed character. He is playing a role. What you see, is not reality; it's phony.

Jesus said hypocrites could be found in the synagogues and streets. They are also found in churches and other public places. Whenever an audience gathers, their performance can be seen. They are actors performing on a public stage. And they live for the applause of men for the role they are playing.

The hypocrite is motivated by a pride that says, "See how good I am" and a desire to receive the credit for his performance. The hypocrite does his acts of righteousness out of love for himself not others.

Jesus moves on to the second good deed; prayer. He tells His disciples to get away from people. Go to the inner rooms and close the door so people can't hear you pray. The hypocrites pray publicly because they want people to think they are pious. But prayer is a private conversation between a man and his God.

He tells the disciples not to use meaningless repetition like the Gentiles do. Their chants and mantras are worthless. Perhaps the Gentiles think God doesn't hear well so they have to repeat themselves. Maybe He is sleeping or not listening at that moment and they have to gain His attention. Or might their motive be to weary Him with the same petition over and over so He will answer their prayer? In the book of Isaiah the prophet, chapter 65, verse 24 it says, *"It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear."*

The third good deed deals with fasting. Most people think that it means to abstain from food. However, that is not the true sense of the word. Four **conditions** must be met in order for something to be considered a fast. A person (1) does without something (2) that is needed or desired (3) for a period of time (4) with the express purpose of accomplishing something greater. God does want His people to fast, but according to the prophet Isaiah it's not for food.⁶⁴ The reference is Isaiah 58:6-14:

*"Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' **If you remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, and if you give yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness, and your gloom will become like midday. And the LORD will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. And those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; you will raise up the age-old foundations; and you will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell. **If because of the Sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure, and speaking your own word, then you will take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.**"***

During the time of Jesus people made a great show of fasting. They wore sackcloth and put ashes on their head. People knew they were voluntarily suffering in order to gain God's favor. Jesus tells His disciples to put on a happy face not a gloomy one. The reason why is that people are able to read facial expressions.

A gloomy face indicates sadness or suffering. When people see a gloomy face they naturally ask the reason for it. The hypocrite then has an opportunity to draw attention to his humble state by exclaiming, "Oh, I'm fasting for the benefit of this or that." Men may applaud his efforts but God is dishonored. It appears that the individual's humbleness is required to move God's hand in his favor. A gloomy face also indicates hopelessness and lack of faith in God to work in a situation.

On the other hand a happy face indicates joy radiating from within. This person is full of hope and confidence that God will work in the midst of the situation. People also want to know why a person is joyous. This can give rise to the Apostle Peter's admonition to *"always being ready to*

⁶⁴ The only food fast that God declared was once each year on the Day of Atonement. (Yom Kippur)

make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”

Jesus tells His disciples to do all these good deeds in secret because their Father who sees in secret will reward them. They will receive their honor, glory and applause from Him. In contrast to a hypocrite, a disciple’s motive for good deeds is based on humility. He desires to see God receive the credit. And his acts of righteousness are based on love for God and others.

Doing good deeds always require a sacrifice. In almsgiving it’s money, in prayer it’s time and in fasting it’s food or something else. The end result of doing good deeds is a reward for everyone who does them. For the hypocrite it is the applause of men and for the disciple it is treasure laid up for him in heaven.

Group Discussion:

1. Why are actors so highly regarded in society?
2. Describe an honor you received and tell how it made you feel.

The Point of the Lesson:

Get a better reward for your good deeds.

Application:

Do a least one good deed before the next meeting and don’t tell anyone about it.

Lesson 12

Prayer

Group Icebreaker:

As a child did you say any prayers and if so can you remember them?

Introduction:

In the previous lesson one of the issues we covered was prayer. Jesus told His disciples how to pray in contrast to the hypocrites and Gentiles. In the midst of the discourse on prayer He gives his disciples what has become known as the “Our Father” or the “Lord’s Prayer”. It conveyed concepts that were contrary to the way Gentiles prayed and Jesus specifically focused on one particular aspect of it.

Reading the Scripture:

Prayer
The Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 6:9-15

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.' For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Group Discussion:

1. Do you think by saying the Lord’s Prayer over and over that we are guilty of using meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do? Why or why not?

The Command:

- ❖ Pray then in this way.

The Lesson:

Jesus is teaching about prayer. He wants His disciples to understand the spiritual principles behind the words they are saying. Prayer isn’t meant to be rote or meaningless repetition. In addition to being an effectual prayer, the Lord’s Prayer, also provides a good **outline** for approaching God. It contains **an address, praise and petitions**.

“*Our Father who art in heaven*” is the address. Using the words “Our Father” indicates that family is involved. It recognizes that each disciple has the relationship of a child and that he has brothers and sisters. Love, for his brothers and sisters is shown in the fact that he is incorporating them into his prayer. The address is directed to the Father in heaven and therefore cannot be confused with the disciple’s human fathers since some of them are still living on earth. It recognizes that God is their creator (Father) and that honor and obedience is due Him.

“*Hallowed be thy name*” is the praise. The word hallowed means purified or holy. By saying this, the disciples are declaring that the name of God is pure, free from any uncleanness. Being His

children, they should recognize they bear His name. With this comes the responsibility to live up to that name.

The first petition is *“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”* The disciples recognize that God’s will is not being done on earth and are asking Him to bless the earth by extending His complete rule over it. (A more in depth examination of the Kingdom of God will be taught in lesson #18)

He then instructs the disciples to petition God for three more things: food for the body, forgiveness for the soul and guidance for the spirit. *“Give us this day our daily bread”* is the first of these petitions. By using the words “this day” Jesus is indicating that the Lord’s Prayer should be prayed daily as long as the disciple has life. This petition recognizes that God is the provider for the body.

*“And forgive us our debts, as we **also have forgiven our debtors**”* is the next petition. The words debts and debtor used here can be translated other ways. Other words that could be used for debt might include: side slip, lapse, miss the mark, transgress, trespass, deviate, fall, fault, offence, or sin. The idea behind the word debt is **something** that caused harm. A debtor is the one who **causes** the harm; hence he becomes indebted to the one he harms.

This petition is the pivotal point in Jesus’ instructions on prayer. After drawing the prayer itself to a close He refocuses the disciples attention to this point. From the wording that is used in the prayer, the disciple is telling God that he has already forgiven everyone’s debts against him. So, if he hasn’t forgiven them he is lying to God. The seriousness of lying to God is demonstrated in the deaths of two disciples, Ananias and Sapphira in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 5, and verses 1-11.

Some may read the translation as *“Forgive us our debts as we **forgive our debtors.**”* In doing so the disciple is still trapped by his own words. In one case it could be read, God forgive us **when** we forgive our debtors. God will, **when** the disciple does! In the second case it could be understood as, God forgive us **like** we forgive others. In this variation God will forgive in **like** manner as the disciple. Therefore, if the disciple does not forgive, then in **like** manner neither will God.

It doesn’t matter how an individual reads the Scripture; the point is the same. If the disciple doesn’t forgive others, than God won’t forgive him. How can God do anything else, since the whole gospel of Jesus Christ is based on forgiveness and reconciliation? God is always willing to forgive, but are we?

Another issue arises from this particular petition and that comes from its placement within the prayer. It falls before the third petition, which reads, *“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”* God cannot deliver the disciple from evil because he won’t forgive and God will not forgive him until he does. The lack of forgiveness in the Church is the primary reason that it is suffering from evil in its midst. This last petition also recognizes that God is capable of keeping the disciples from evil and delivering them from it once they become involved in forgiving others.

Some translations of the Bible contain two additional statements. *“For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen”* In the first statement the disciples acknowledge that the one to whom they are praying is God, totally sovereign, living forever and capable of fulfilling their petitions.

God, who is in charge of His kingdom, provides daily food, His power forgives sins and His glory does not lead men into temptation but delivers them from evil. By substituting the word love for God in the previous sentence it would read, Love provides daily food, forgives sins, and doesn't lead men into temptation but delivers them from evil. Does this give you some idea about a disciple's purpose in the Kingdom of God?

The prayer ends with the statement, “*Amen.*” It means that the thing is sure or the truth.

Group Discussion:

2. Name one person you have not forgiven and tell the group why.

The Point of the Lesson:

Practice the Lord's Prayer daily.

Application:

Write the names of everyone you have not forgiven on a piece of paper. Forgive each one and then burn the piece of paper. Distribute the ashes to the wind so they are carried as far as the east is from the west. Then pray the Lord's Prayer with the understanding of your words you are saying.

Lesson 13

Acquiring Treasure

Group Icebreaker:

Visualization helps people to learn. If you have a treasure chest of sorts bring it to the meeting and ask the group what the object is. After it has been properly identified ask the group what a treasure chest is for. Then ask the questions, “As a child what was your most treasured possession?” and “Why?”

Introduction:

Jesus continues the Sermon on the Mount.

Reading the Scripture:

Acquiring Treasure The Sermon on the Mount Matthew 6:19-23

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore your **eye is clear**,⁶⁵ your whole body will be full of light. But if your **eye is bad**,⁶⁶ your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”

The Commands:

- ❖ Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth.
- ❖ But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

Group Discussion:

1. According to the Scripture passage just read where are the two places that treasure can be stored?
 - a. Earth
 - b. Heaven
2. Name some treasures that can be laid up on earth?
 - a. Gold
 - b. Silver
 - c. Precious Jewels
 - d. Money
 - e. Clothing
 - f. Houses
 - g. Cars
 - h. Furniture
 - i. Toys of all kinds . . . for male and female of varying ages.

⁶⁵ **Eye is clear (good).** The meaning of this is “being generous”. Proverbs 22:9 says, “*He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.*”

⁶⁶ **Eye is bad.** The meaning of this is “being stingy”. Proverbs 28:22 says, “*He that hasteneth to be rich hath an evil eye and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.*”

The Lesson – Part 1:

As with most of Jesus' teachings He starts on an elementary level, then moves the hearer to a deeper level and then on to the core of the issue. It is no different with this one. As the disciples listen to his first statement they can easily understand the meaning of it. *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.*

To begin with Jesus is talking about treasure, precious things, not ordinary things. He is not talking about the necessities of life. Generally, the things you need are being used on a regular basis; therefore moth and rust do not destroy them because they are not sitting idle. And thieves don't normally risk breaking in somewhere to take things that are not valuable. For example, thieves may break in and steal money but usually won't take your undershirt.

Group Discussion:

3. How hard should a person work to gain treasure?
4. How much is enough?

The Lesson – Part 2:

Jesus' next command forces the disciples to think on a little deeper level. *But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.* This presents a few problems. The ancients, from commoner to Pharaoh, had precious things buried with them for the afterlife. But these things all remain in the earth to this day. How then will the disciples get their treasures from earth to heaven? Does God beam them up?

A second problem comes to mind. In the first command it appeared that He didn't want them to be accumulators or hoarders of treasure, but now He tells them that's exactly what He wants them to do. It seems it is just a matter of where He wants them to store the treasure. But what good are gold, silver, precious jewels in heaven? Surely Jesus must be talking about more than these things. The treasures in heaven must have eternal value.

These eternal treasures are alluded to throughout the Scripture and the Apostle Paul summarizes them in his first epistle to the Corinthians. *But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.* Faith is likened unto gold, hope to silver, and precious jewels to love. Faith like gold is refined by fire. Hope like silver needs to be purified by removing the dross. And love like precious jewels comes in all kinds of sizes, shapes, and colors.

Group Discussion:

5. Name some actions that require faith.
6. Name some actions that require hope.
7. Name some actions that require love.

The Lesson – Part 3:

Jesus concludes the two commands with the core issue *“for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* He wants His disciples to understand that a person has a choice to value temporal or eternal things. And whichever they choose, that is what they will work for.

Can a person see that things such as: faith, hope and love which last forever are of more value than gold, silver, and precious jewels which are temporal? According to Jesus it depends on the kind of eye an individual has. Either it is good or evil, clear or bad, or full of light or full of darkness. The eye sees what the heart values!

Jesus used the Hebraic expression “good” or “clear eye” to indicate that a person is generous. An “evil” or “bad eye” indicates that a person is stingy or greedy. References to this can be found in the book of Proverbs. In chapter 22 versus 9 it says, “*He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed, for he giveth his bread to the poor.*” Likewise, in chapter 28 versus 22 it says, “*He that hasteneth to be rich hath an evil eye and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.*”

The spirit that is controlling a person determines whether he is generous or stingy. It takes faith in God, hope for eternal rewards, and love for others to be generous. This is especially true when a person is poor. Jesus would later refer to a poor widow who contributed two small coins to the treasury as having given more than all the others. Why? She was rich in faith towards her God.

The Point of the Lesson:

Choose your treasure and store it in the appropriate place.

Application:

Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

Before the next group meeting perform one act that requires faith, one that requires hope and one that requires love. Record your actions and share them at the next group meeting.

Lesson 14

The Scales of Justice

Group Icebreaker:

Tell the group one decision you made that you regretted?

Introduction:

“Do not judge lest you be judged.” This statement falls with conviction on Jesus’ hearers like a ton of bricks. It is perhaps one of the most misunderstood passages of Scripture and difficult to swallow for many. If that statement were left to stand on its own it would appear that Christians should never make a decision regarding anything. However, this is not the case. Taken in the context of the statements that follow it, we see Jesus is speaking about two different subjects: **1)** judging other people and **2)** discerning what is good and what is evil, then taking the appropriate actions.

In this lesson, the topic of judging other people will be covered. In lesson #15, we will cover discerning good and evil for one’s self. Before going into Jesus’ commentary on judging other people, let’s see what elements are required in order to make a **fair, impartial** judgment of another person.

1. A **judge**.
2. A **law**.
3. An **accuser**.
4. An **accused**.
5. Testimony of **witnesses**.
6. A **verdict**.
7. And if necessary, a **sentence**.

A legal, civil, religious or divine **authority**, must appoint the judge. The questions to those who are disciples of Jesus Christ are “Have you been appointed a judge and if so by whom?” According to Scripture there is one who has been appointed by God to judge and that is Jesus Christ. The book of Acts 10:42-43 says, *“And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”*

A legal, civil, religious or divine **authority**, must establish a law. There are many laws that have been established by a constituted authority and include: family, civil, God’s law, the Law of Moses and the Law of the Spirit to name but a few. In order to bring charges against the accused it is important to know which law he is under. The judge must have a thorough knowledge of that law and remain within its boundaries in order to produce a righteous judgment. For example, it would be inappropriate for a U.S. municipal magistrate to pass a sentence under Islamic law. He was not appointed to do it, has no knowledge of the Koran, and certainly would not be able to stay within its boundaries.

The accuser must bring his case to the judge of the constituted authority. He cannot serve as judge! Otherwise it would be a travesty of justice because there would be no impartiality, due to his bias in the case. And the accuser cannot legally charge the accused. Only those who have legal authority over the accused can bring formal charges.

To be a fair impartial trial, the accuser must bring satisfactory evidence to convict the accused of breaking the law. Usually the evidence is in the form of, the testimony of witnesses. According to the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:1, he states that *EVERY FACT IS TO BE CONFIRMED BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES*.

The judge, not the accuser, is the only one who can render a verdict of innocent or guilty. Both the accuser and the accused must abide by his decision. If the accused is found guilty the judge alone decides the appropriate sentence for the crime committed. Then the judge hands over the guilty party to the person who will carry out his sentence. The accuser is not permitted to carry out the sentence, only those appointed by the judge!

Perhaps Jesus issued this command because He knew the hearts of men. Most want to serve as lawmaker, judge, accuser, witness, and executioner when they see another do something, they consider wrong in their eyes. But most would not want to be treated by another in the same manner.

Group Discussion:

1. What commentary do you have on the introduction to this lesson?

Reading the Scripture:

The Scales of Justice
The Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 7:1-5, Luke 6:36-42

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. And **do not judge**⁶⁷ and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.” And He also spoke a parable to them: "A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit? A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher. And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

The Commands:

- ❖ Be merciful.
- ❖ Do not judge and you will not be judged.
- ❖ Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.
- ❖ Pardon, and you will be pardoned.
- ❖ Give, and it will be given to you.
- ❖ First take the log out of your own eye.

The Lesson – Part 1:

After His opening volley of words, “*Do not judge lest you be judged*”, Jesus begins to reinforce his position. He explains the system of justice in the family of God. The first part of God’s justice

⁶⁷ **Do not judge.** Do not be a faultfinder. This does not mean that we are not to be wise and discerning people who can make sound judgments.

system He expresses this way, *“For in the way you judge, you will be judged.”* In other words, the method and manner in which a disciple judges another, is the same way in which God will judge the disciple.

Since we will be judged in the same manner as we judge others, some sobering thoughts should come to mind. One thought might be, “Which law do I want God to judge me under, the Law of Moses or the Law of the Spirit, which is the law of liberty?” Another thought might be, “Would I want God to serve as both my accuser and judge at the same time?” Would I expect God to listen to other witnesses instead of just the accuser? Would I hope that He would check the credibility of those witnesses? And would I want the opportunity to provide for my defense? Then perhaps we should accord others these same courtesies!

Jesus explains the second part of God’s justice system this way, *“By your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.”* In other words, the verdict and sentence you mete out to others is the same one you will receive from God. *“Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned: forgive and you will be forgiven.”* The disciple of Jesus needs to ponder more questions. Do I want God to condemn me or forgive me? If He condemns me do I want the punishment to be gentle or harsh?

Jesus indicates that the law of sowing and reaping is in effect when He says, *“Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap.”* Not only does a person reap what he sows, but also it will return to him in like manner many times over. Just as one seed produces many seeds, furnishing both bread to the eater and seed to the sower, so are a person’s judgments in this world.

Group Discussion:

2. Based on what you have just learned, how will you judge others?

The Lesson – Part 2:

Jesus continues to teach His disciples about the judgment of others by speaking a parable to them. He begins the parable with two rhetorical questions. *A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit?* And then finishes it with the command, *“first take the log out of your own eye.”*

Several conclusions can be drawn from the parable within the context of Jesus’ subject. First, Jesus equates the blind man as one who seeks to judge another. Second, the reason he is blind is because he has a log in his own eye that is blinding him. Third, the one who judges another should not be directing, leading or making disciples of anyone else since he cannot see clearly himself. Fourth, anyone who judges another, certainly should not follow someone like himself, since they are both blind and will fall into the same trap. And fifth, both blind individuals should find someone who has clear vision to lead them.

Jesus second statement is *“A disciple is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.”* For a disciple, it is important to know if his teacher judges other people or not, since the disciple will become like him. According to the Apostle John, Jesus was not sent to judge anyone. *“For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”*⁶⁸

⁶⁸ John 3:17-18

As we continue to focus on Jesus' second statement we understand that a disciple needs to be fully trained. Training consists of two parts: learning and application or to say it another way, hearing and obeying. An individual is not trained unless he accomplishes both parts. It takes time to become trained. And a disciple can never be taught anything from his teacher that the teacher does not already know. A point for Christians to ponder is, whom do they want as their teacher: Satan, who is identified in the book of Revelation as the accuser of the brethren or Jesus Christ, the savior of the world?

Jesus states the final part of the parable this way:

*And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, **first take the log out of your own eye**, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:3-5)*

Some observations are in order to grasp what Jesus wants His disciples to understand. First, both individuals in the parable are related to one another as siblings. They have a common parent. And since Jesus is discussing values in the family of God, the disciples are assured that He is talking about everyone who has God as their Father.

Second, any individual with a log in his eye is certainly going to have a difficult time seeing a speck in someone else's eye. The log would block his view, essentially rendering him blind. Also the person with the log in his eye must be looking pretty hard in order to see a mere speck in another's eye. He must be scrutinizing his brother very closely. He is definitely looking for something.

Third, it is interesting to note that the person with the log in his eye made the discovery of the speck in the other's eye based on **his** sight alone. Usually the person with the speck in his eye would notice the irritation before anyone else. Then that person would remove it himself or possibly ask another if he is having difficulty doing it himself.

Several questions arise about the individual with the log in his eye. How can he not notice a log in his own eye? Has he been so desensitized to pain that he doesn't notice it? And if he is that insensitive, would anyone want his assistance in removing their speck since it requires a gentle touch to do so? Why has he not removed his log? Is he even able to remove specks since he finds it so difficult to remove logs? And since he hasn't noticed the log in his own eye can anyone be sure that he can actually detect specks in other people's eyes?

Group Discussion:

3. From this parable we are able to gain spiritual insight by asking several why questions.
 - a. Why was the person with the log in his eye looking at his fellow believer so closely? (In order to find fault in him.)
 - b. Why would a believer wish to find fault with another? (To make the other person of less value or to gain power over another.)
 - c. What issues do faultfinders have? (Their judging of others arises from a need to increase their own self-worth. They do not really believe that God is doing His job parenting and consider Him a poor dispenser of justice. They believe they are better judges of what needs to be done than God; hence they appoint themselves as judges. The root cause of this stems from pride.)

d. Decide for yourselves; is the root cause of judging another good or evil?

The Point of the Lesson:

There is only one judge, and I'm not him.

Application:

Make a conscientious effort not to judge another. Prepare to tell the group at the next meeting of any trials you encounter in this endeavor.

Lesson 15

Developing Discernment

Group Icebreakers:

- Bring a book with a Bible cover on it to the group meeting and show it to the group while asking what it is? (The response is most likely to be "a Bible.")
- Bring a book with a Bible cover on it to the group meeting and show it to the group while asking what it is? (The response is most likely to be "a Bible.")
- Have everyone open their Bibles to John 7:24.
- You begin reading a few lines from the book with the Bible cover on it.
- Then ask the group to relate John 7:24 with what has just transpired.

Introduction:

In the previous lesson, the topic of judging other people was discussed. Jesus' disciples were told not to judge other people. Several passages in the New Testament support this action and we will review them here. The first statement is from the book of Romans.⁶⁹ *"Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS."* In effect, the apostle Paul equates those who judge other people, as being stubborn and having unrepentant hearts. They are storing up wrath for themselves.

Another statement in the book of Romans says, *"Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand."*⁷⁰ The apostle Paul continues in this vein of thought.⁷¹ *"But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, 'AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD.' So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God."*

James, the Lord's brother and head of the Church in Jerusalem adds strength to the issue of judging others in the epistle under his name. He states, *"Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?"*⁷² Near the end of his epistle James reinforces the point again when he says, *"Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door."*⁷³ Every one of these Scriptures supports Jesus'

⁶⁹ Romans 2:1-6

⁷⁰ Romans 14:4

⁷¹ Romans 14:10-12

⁷² James 4:11-12

⁷³ James 5:9

teaching: "Do not judge and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned."

Jesus' disciples are not to judge other people because God has not appointed them as judge. In the book of Acts it is written, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."⁷⁴ The book of Romans adds force to the point as it declares, "On the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus."⁷⁵ And the book entitled Hebrews sums it up. "For we know Him who said, 'VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.' And again, 'THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.' it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."⁷⁶

Although Jesus does not want His disciples to judge other people, he does expect them to discern spiritual truths and make decisions between good and evil. The three words: judge, discern and decision are very similar. In fact the word judge is used many times in place of discern and decision throughout Scripture and it is only by its **use** in the **context** that it's true meaning can be arrived at.

An illustration of this point comes from the Gospel of Luke 7:41-43 when Jesus tells a parable to a man named, Simon. "A certain moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more? Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more.' And He said to him, 'You have judged correctly.'" In this case Simon did not directly judge another person but correctly discerned a spiritual truth.

The meanings of the word discern are: to **perceive** or **recognize** or to make out **clearly**. It is a discovery of the truth about something or someone in which a personal opinion can be formed. Once the truth is known, an individual may take action regarding the matter. However, the action does not have to be the judgment of another, which requires issuing a decree or passing a sentence upon them. Jesus summarizes the concept in a statement He makes to His disciples at a later time. "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents (discerning), and innocent as doves (without passing judgment)."⁷⁷

Reading the Scripture:

Developing Discernment

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 7:6

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

Do not give what is holy to dogs⁷⁸, and do not throw your pearls before swine,⁷⁹ lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

⁷⁴ Acts 17:31-32

⁷⁵ Romans 2:16

⁷⁶ Hebrews 10:30-31

⁷⁷ Matthew 10:16

⁷⁸ **Do not give what is holy to dogs.** Dogs are considered fools, those who say in their heart, "There is no God." Proverbs 26:11 says, "As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly." The point is, don't give fools those things which are God's since they don't believe there is a God anyway.

⁷⁹ **Do not throw your pearls before swine.** Swine are those who lack discretion, the ability to make good decisions. Proverbs 11:22 says, "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a woman who shows no discretion." The

The Commands:

- ❖ Do not give what is holy to dogs.
- ❖ Do not throw your pearls before swine.

Group Discussion:

What criteria do you use to discern between good and evil?

The Lesson:

Throughout Scripture disciples are encouraged to be discerning. In fact, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is the discerning of spirits, which is to assist the Church in determining what is good and what is evil. Discerning good and evil according to the writer of the book of Hebrews requires training the senses.⁸⁰ Through training and practice, maturity in discernment comes. In trials, two or more witnesses were required before a judgment could be rendered. To accurately discern between good and evil, three factors need to be considered before an opinion is formed. All three are to be in agreement. They are:

1. The individual's **actions** or deeds.
2. The individual's **words**.
3. The Word of **God**.

As the saying goes, “You cannot judge a book by its cover” neither can you discern good and evil by outward appearance alone. An individual's actions or a situation's outward appearance is important in discerning but cannot be the exclusive test. For example, if we saw someone pointing a gun at someone else, we don't have enough information to discern whether it is good or evil; we need more information. Nicodemus once reminded the rulers of Israel about making an accurate discernment when he said, “*Our Law does not judge a man, unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it.*”⁸¹ Jesus also said, “*As I hear, I judge.*”⁸²

Words are an important indicator of what is in the heart: the spirit behind the motive. Jesus alluded to this when speaking with the Pharisees. “*For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil.*”⁸³ **Motives matter to God.**

Previously in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used three illustrations of men **doing good deeds**: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. The people who did these goods deeds received rewards. Those who did them privately received their reward from God. Those who did them to be seen publicly received praise from men, but Jesus labeled them as hypocrites. He knew their motives. According to the book of Proverbs, “*Every man's way is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts.*”⁸⁴

The Word of God, as revealed through **Scripture** or the **Holy Spirit**, is the final factor in discerning good and evil. Do actions and words or appearances and motives line up with the Word of God? The book of Hebrews says, “*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints*

point is, don't give women, who show no discretion, something that is valuable since they won't know what to do with it anyway.

⁸⁰ Hebrews 5:14

⁸¹ John 7:51

⁸² John 5:30

⁸³ Matthew 12:34

⁸⁴ Proverbs 21:2

*and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*⁸⁵ For those who use the Scriptures in discerning, it is important to do so correctly and calls for more than just a cursory knowledge of them. The Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy in his study of the Scriptures. *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.”*⁸⁶

In the first part of his teaching on discernment Jesus issues a pair of commands to His disciples that require discerning good and evil and then taking the appropriate action. *“Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”* These commands test the disciple’s ability to understand the Scriptures and accurately apply them. In the literal sense, no one but a child or insane person would even think of doing anything like Jesus is indicating. Common sense dictates that animals do not know the value what is holy or valuable, so why give them holy things or pearls in the first place. It is better to give them their food.

However, most people upon hearing the commands recognize that there has to be more to them than the literal interpretation. They understand that Jesus is using these commands figuratively in order to communicate a deeper spiritual truth to the disciples. But it takes more than this intuitive sense to know what Jesus is talking about and then to apply it accurately.

In the natural world, children begin using their five senses immediately, but it takes several years to develop them fully. Part of this natural maturing process requires learning words to communicate the senses. And children must also learn to associate concepts and ideas to make mature decisions. In most societies, children are not even held accountable for their decisions until they reach puberty. For example, a three-year old child might attempt to feed a pig his mother’s jewelry but a twelve year-old wouldn’t even consider it. The same principle holds true for disciples as well. Once a person has been born again into the kingdom of God he begins to develop his spiritual senses, learns words to communicate them and uses Scripture to develop God’s ideas and concepts.

In order to understand what Jesus is spiritually talking about in issuing these two commands we’ll start with some general observations.

1. The commands are more specifically directed to an immature disciple, since a mature one would not even consider doing anything like this in the first place. The mature person has had his senses trained to discern good and evil.
2. The giving or throwing action indicates an attempt at feeding something to the animals.
3. Dogs and swine are beasts. They do not have the same nature as the one doing the feeding: in this case a disciple. Therefore they cannot be fellow believers in Jesus Christ.
4. The word “holy” indicates something belonging to or dedicated to God.
5. The term “your pearls” indicates something valuable that the individual who is doing the feeding possesses.

The first command deals with giving something **holy** to dogs. Dogs are referred to in the book of Proverbs, *“Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.”*⁸⁷ Through this Scripture we discover a dog is likened to a fool. And a fool according to Scripture is more than a silly or unwise person; he is one who does not believe in God. Psalms 14:1 says, *“The fool has*

⁸⁵ Hebrews 4:12

⁸⁶ 2 Timothy 2:15

⁸⁷ Proverbs 26:11

said in his heart, there is no God." In the proverb, both the dog and the fool return to their vomit, which consists of something they have eaten or partaken of and rejected.

In His teaching, Jesus said that the beasts would trample underfoot or despise what the disciple gives them and then turn on the disciple himself, to destroy him. A reference to this is found in the book of Proverbs, "*He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, and he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself. Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you, reprove a wise man, and he will love you.*"⁸⁸ A scoffer and a fool are one in the same. **The point concerning dogs is** "don't give anything that belongs to God to one who has rejected God already." (i.e. Holy Communion, spiritual gifts, yourself, etc.)

The second command involves casting pearls before swine. From Scripture we learn that pearls are associated with wisdom or precious truths. The book of Job 28:18 says, "*And the acquisition of wisdom is above that of pearls.*" Swine are referred to in the book of Proverbs 11:22, "*As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, so is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion.*"

A woman who lacks discretion is one who lacks: taste, perception, reason, intelligence, advice, behavior, judgment, or understanding. She entices people to sin. This reference to her character is found in the book of Proverbs 9:13-18. "*The woman of folly is boisterous, she is naive, and knows nothing. And she sits at the doorway of her house, on a seat by the high places of the city, calling to those who pass by, who are making their paths straight: 'Whoever is naive, let him turn in here,' and to him who lacks understanding she says, 'Stolen water is sweet; and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.' But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.*" **The point concerning swine is** "don't give wisdom to one who can't perceive or understand it." ("Remember, the **fear [reverence] of the Lord**⁸⁹ is the beginning of wisdom," Proverbs 9:10)

Summary:

Many sincere Christians want to give godly things they possess to everyone around them. However Jesus commands His disciples to be mature and discerning in giving these things to others. They include such things as the gospel, communion, wisdom, instruction and spiritual gifts. He recognized that some people will not only reject what the disciple is trying to give them but will actually despise it and turn on the disciple as well. Jesus sets boundaries for His disciples to live within because He loves and wants to protect them. So each of us should heed His warning and obey His commands.

Application:

Read: Mark 7:24-30 and answer the following questions. Briefly explain the reasons for your answers.

The Syrophenician Woman **Matthew 15:21-28, Mark 7:24-30** *Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"*

AD 30, Summer

And from there He arose and went away to the region of **Tyre**.⁹⁰ And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice. And behold, a

⁸⁸ Proverbs 9:7-8

⁸⁹ **Fear [reverence] of the Lord.** Holding God's Word above all other words.

⁹⁰ **Tyre.** A city located in Phoenicia (present day Lebanon) on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. It is approximately 35 miles NW of Capernaum.

Canaanite⁹¹ woman came out from that region, and began to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came to Him and kept asking Him, saying, "Send her away, for she is shouting out after us." But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" Now the woman was a Gentile, of the **Syrophoenician**⁹² race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. And He was saying to her, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the **dogs**,"⁹³ but she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs." And He said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish; because of this answer go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter." And her daughter was healed at once. And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having departed.

1. Was the Syrophoenician woman a swine? (No, she recognized value and went to receive it from Jesus.)
2. Was the Syrophoenician woman a dog? (Although Jesus initially associated the woman with dogs, she proved to Him that she was a believer.
 - a. She recognized and honored God.
 - b. She called upon the goodness and mercy of God.
 - c. She recognized and honored God's children.
 - d. She recognized her place, accepted it in humility respecting God and His choices.
 - e. She assured Jesus that she would accept anything at His hands and not turn on Him.)
3. How did Jesus make His judgment? (By what He heard.
 - a. *"I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me,"* (John 5:30)
 - b. *"For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil. And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned,"* (Matthew 12:34-37)
 - c. *"Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is counted prudent,"* (Proverbs 17:28))

⁹¹ **Canaanite.** Descendants of Canaan on whom a curse was placed by Noah, which called for them to be a race of servants. These people once inhabited the land of Israel but were driven out when the Israelites were given the land by God.

⁹² **Syrophoenician.** An individual who came from the area of Phoenicia that was absorbed into the Syrian kingdom.

⁹³ **Dogs.** In this case the word used is for the household pet, not the wild dogs.

Lesson 16

How to Live Forever

Group Icebreaker:

Have you ever become lost trying to get to a new destination? If so, describe the steps you took after becoming lost in order to get to your destination.

Introduction:

In the previous lesson Jesus began teaching His disciples about spiritual discernment. He wants them to discover and apply spiritual truths. *In this lesson . . .* He is pressing them to spiritually discern how to live forever.

Living life forever or “eternal life” encompasses more than just **how** a person gets “saved” and goes to heaven. It’s the **manner** in which a person lives life eternally. It’s how God sees life being lived. The Hebraic mindset of this is, that as long as man has breath he has life. And for as long as he has breath he should live a life that is honoring to God, because God is the creator and sustainer of his life. The concept that man lives one way while on earth and another way when he “gets to heaven” does not exist.

After teaching the disciples what living the “eternal life” is like (not being angry with your brother, being faithful, letting your yes be yes, praying, forgiving, etc.) Jesus returns to His main point. *“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*⁹⁴ In rapid-fire succession Jesus issues five commands that leave His hearers with clues on gaining entrance into the kingdom of heaven.⁹⁵

Reading the Scripture:

How to Live Forever The Sermon on the Mount Matthew 7:7-14

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it.

The Commands:

- ❖ Ask, and it shall be given to you.
- ❖ Seek, and you shall find.

⁹⁴ Matthew 5:20

⁹⁵ The terms “Kingdom of Heaven” and “Kingdom of God” are identical and can be used interchangeably. Both simply means, “the place where God rules.” A more in depth discussion on the Kingdom of God or Kingdom or Heaven is in the introduction to Lesson 18.

- ❖ Knock, and it shall be opened to you.
- ❖ However you want people to treat you, so treat them.
- ❖ Enter by the narrow gate.

The Lesson:

Upon first reading Matthew 7:7-14, it appears that Jesus is talking about three different subjects: prayer, the Golden Rule, and entrance into the narrow gate that leads to life.⁹⁶ However, upon reflection, a larger picture comes into view. It is a summary of how people should live life from God's perspective. How to live forever has a starting point, a route and a destination.

Sometimes by substituting a natural example, a spiritual one is more easily understood. So we will use the following illustration. When people want to go to someone's house that they've never been to before, they first **ask** for directions. Secondly, they **seek** to follow the directions. Some people will take a map along in case they get lost or confused about the directions. Others take their cell phones! And finally upon arrival at the individual's home, they **knock** to gain entrance.

Jesus said that the first step towards how to live forever is to **ask** for directions. He then states that the one to ask is God, the Father. Jesus assures His hearers that everyone who asks God will receive, because God is good. "Ask and it shall be given to you." James 1:5 also says, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

It is also implied but not stated that someone besides God might be asked for directions on how to live forever, since there are two ways, two gates and two destinations being compared. Asking God for directions shows that a person has a right heart, one that is filled with faith and is dependent upon God's provisions.

The second step is to **seek** to follow the directions or "the way" to the destination. Jesus makes the directions or "the way" to the destination quite easy to understand: *Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.* By treating others this way proves that a person has right thinking, he considers others equal to himself and is not hindered by pride. It is the narrow way! Jesus assures His hearers that everyone who seeks to follow these directions or find the narrow way will do so. "Seek and you shall find."

The final step is to enter through the correct gate or door. Jesus indicates that there are two gates or doors through which men may pass. One leads to life eternal, the other to destruction. Jesus tells His disciples that they must enter the narrow gate if they want to live forever, otherwise they will be destroyed. The narrow gate is only the width of a man and one person at a time may enter it. That gate is Jesus! In John 10:9 Jesus declares, "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." To anyone who **knocks** on Jesus' door . . . He will open it.

All the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are involved in helping people live forever. The Father gives the way, the Holy Spirit leads the way, and the Son opens the door. The directions for living forever are simple: 1) depend on God, 2) follow the Holy Spirit and 3) go through Jesus. To make it easier God provides a road map called the Bible in case people get lost. He also stations other people along the way to redirect the steps of those who get off the route. They are called apostles, prophets, *evangelists*, pastors and teachers. And if those things weren't enough,

⁹⁶ These individual subjects are dealt with in other lessons.

God sent the Holy Spirit to live inside His people, so they would have a direct line of communication to Him.

There are other conclusions that can be drawn from Jesus' lesson on living forever. If a person doesn't ask the Father for the directions on how to live, he will only discover what others believe the way to live is. Of course those people haven't lived forever, didn't create this world and certainly don't have an eternal perspective, so how would they know the way? Their way is broad and easy to find.

People are followers. Like sheep, they will follow a shepherd to safety and pasture. But they will also follow a goat to slaughter. Jesus said He was the good shepherd and sent the Holy Spirit to lead and guide His flock. He also gave them His commandments and godly people to assist them along the way. The goat (Satan) on the other hand wants people to go the way of the world and uses false prophets and false teachers to deceive them.

Life without end is gained by entering one of two gates, a narrow one or a wide one. Jesus said He was the narrow gate (door) of the sheep. And in John 6:37 Jesus said, *"All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."* On the other hand, the wide gate leads to destruction. It is well advertised, easy to find and many people can get through it at one time.

An analogy of the two gates can be drawn from the world we currently live in. The gate that leads to destruction can be compared to the entrances of movie theaters, amusement parks, and sporting events. The crowds are huge, people are pressing to get in and many can enter at one time. On the other hand the gate that leads to eternal life can be compared to the entrances of homes. The crowds are sparse, no one stands in line and usually one at a time goes in.

The gate that leads to eternal life is small in comparison to the gate that leads to destruction and there are few who find it. However, many people can enter through a narrow gate over a long period of time. And the gate can become busier and easier to find when those who have once entered it show others the way to the gate.

Group Discussion:

1. What clues does a person leave when they are lost?
2. What is your response to people who are lost or going the wrong way?
3. What do you think God needs to do in order to get more people saved?
4. What could God do that would make **you** more effective at showing the lost how to live eternally?

The Point of the Lesson:

If you want to get to a new destination follow the instructions of those who have been there before.

Application:

Pray for the thing that you need from God that will make you more effective at showing the lost how to live eternally.

Lesson 17

Fruit Inspection

Group Icebreaker:

What is your favorite fruit and how do you check it for quality?

Introduction:

As Jesus begins to draw the Sermon on the Mount to a close, He continues to admonish His disciples to be discerning, to know the difference between good and evil. He cautions them to be wary of false prophets. Then He explains how to discern them and their error.

The simple definition of a prophet is a person who declares the will of a god to people. They are usually endowed with supernatural gifts, which serve as signs and wonders to people that their testimony is authentic. One of the common gifts is the extraordinary ability to foretell some future event; hence many times they are called seers. As their primary responsibility is to reveal the will of god they can be classified along with teachers. Some prophets and teachers are true and some are false.

The one true God wants people to heed His prophets and His teachers because they are sent as gifts to aid the people in walking in the way of righteousness. However, the Israelites were told to test the prophets to see if they were false. These tests can be found in the thirteenth and eighteenth chapters of the book of Deuteronomy. There are two tests and the failure to meet both tests, resulted in the death of the prophet.

The first test involved speaking in the name of the Lord. Even if the sign or wonder came to pass as the prophet declared but he told the people to serve other gods, he was false. The second test involved a prophet speaking his own mind. Even if a prophet came to the people in the name of the Lord but his sign or wonder did not come to pass as he said, he was false.

Reading the Scripture:

Matthew 7:15-29, Luke 6:43-49

Fruit Inspection

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 7:15-20, Luke 6:43-45

Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit; nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.”

Matthew 7:21-29, Luke 6:46-49
Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'⁹⁷ Everyone who comes to Me, and hears My words, and acts upon them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation upon the rock; and when a flood rose, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard, and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house upon the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great.” The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

The Command:

- ❖ Beware of false prophets.

The Lesson:

With the giving of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection from the dead, power was given to the Church to prophesy and perform signs and wonders. However, it would provide an **opportunity** for false prophets and teachers to creep in unnoticed and destroy God's people from within. Jesus foresaw this time of deception and warned the disciples that in the last days false prophets would come and mislead many. Knowing that some would be able to both speak in His name and perform signs and wonders that would come to pass, Jesus instructed His disciples to use a third method to test the prophets and teachers: the test of character. *“You will know them by their fruits.”*⁹⁸

These false prophets are difficult to detect because they disguise themselves as members of Jesus' flock but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. From a previous lesson we discovered that dogs are those who have rejected God in their hearts and wolves are part of the canine family. The Apostle Paul spoke to the Church at Ephesus concerning these men.⁹⁹ *“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”* Based on the book of Jude verse 11 it appears that the false prophets and teachers have three basic traits in common. Jude says, *“For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.”*

Cain, Balaam and Korah have several things in common with one another. Each of them intimately knew God, heard Him speak, and was placed in a position of prominence by God. They each worshipped God and made offerings to Him. However, none of them was content with God. Each was motivated by covetousness and wanted to override God authority by doing things their own way. And each of them was responsible for the death of God's people.

⁹⁷ 'DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'. *Leviticus 26*. **Lawlessness** here means living without law or in violation of the law. Followers of Jesus Christ are still under law . . . The Law of the Spirit of Christ, a higher standard of living, the Spirit of the Law.

⁹⁸ Matthew 7:16, 20

⁹⁹ Acts 20:29-30

Cain¹⁰⁰ was the first-born son of a man and woman. He knew the story of Adam and Eve's failure to obey God, their consequences, and the curse upon the land. And He knew of God's forgiveness and mercy towards his parents when God provided skins as a covering for their nakedness. Yet Cain tried to obtain God's favor by the works of his hands and the sweat of his brow when he brought an offering from the produce of land that God had cursed. God rejected Cain's offering but accepted his younger brother Abel's, who brought the first born of his flocks.

Abel honored God. He had respect for God's authority and trusted in His ways of doing things. He recognized God's favor was not obtained by man's effort but through his thankfulness for God's provision. Abel did not have to work by the sweat of his brow on the land that God had cursed to bring his offering. He had only to be thankful to God for his sheep. They provided Abel with food, drink, and clothing. Then, through no effort on Abel's part, the sheep multiplied naturally providing an offering to God and an increase in his wealth. Because Cain coveted his brother's favor he murder him.

Balaam¹⁰¹ was a prophet of God. He was able to accurately hear God's voice, foretell the future, and had power to bless or curse people. Balak, king of the Moabites, hired Balaam to curse Israel. However, God prevented him from doing it. First, Balaam was rebuked by his own donkey and second, God only allowed him to bless Israel. But Balaam coveted the king's gold. Despite knowing God's will in the matter, Balaam instructed the king on a method that would destroy Israel. The king was to send the women of Moab to entice the men of Israel. The women would turn the hearts of the men to worship and serve the gods of Moab thereby causing God to destroy His own people because of their sin. The plan worked and many of God's people were destroyed.

Korah¹⁰² was an Israelite. He was a descendant of Levi, whose tribe officiated as priests. He belonged to the clan of Kohath, which was held in high esteem because God had chosen them to bear the sacred furnishings and utensils used for worship in the tabernacle. Korah was a leader of his people. He knew God, he had seen all the miracles that God had performed through Moses and that God had chosen Moses to lead the people. Yet he rebelled because he coveted Moses' power and authority. His rebellion resulted in the destruction of himself, his family and two hundred and fifty other leaders of Israel and their families.

After the short review of these men's lives we see that their primary focus was **self-promotion**. Their actions show they were motivated by personal gain not by the love of God and man. Cain, Balaam and Korah are used in Scripture as examples that wrong motivation can occur in the three different aspects of man: body, soul, and spirit. The way of Cain involves the body. It is satisfying the desires of the flesh and is evidenced by **1) unholy living in the midst of the people of God.** The error of Balaam is satisfying the desires of the soul by greed and is evidenced by **2) teaching that causes the people of God to fall.** The rebellion of Korah involves the spirit. Its basis is pride and consists of grumbling and complaining against God, His leaders and His ways. It is evidenced through **3) causing division in the people of God.**

Jesus clearly tells His disciples that not everyone who declares that Jesus is Lord actually belongs to Him. He is cautioning His disciples about an error concerning salvation that will creep into the Church. According to the Apostle Paul in the book of Romans 10:8–11, the way of salvation is

¹⁰⁰ The story of Cain is found in Genesis 4:1-8

¹⁰¹ The story of Balaam is found in Numbers 22:1-21, 25:1-3 and 31:16. Also see Revelation 2:14.

¹⁰² The story of Korah is found in Numbers 16:1-35.

explained. *"THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"*¹⁰³ -- that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, **that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved;** for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, *'WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.'*"

The apostle Paul simply and correctly states the way of salvation. But men will pervert this truth. In his second epistle the Apostle Peter warns his hearers that the untaught and unstable will distort what the Apostle Paul teaches, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. Next he cautions them to be on their guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, they fall from their own steadfastness. Then he encourages them to grow in the grace and knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁴

The perversion that Peter is talking about concerns the lordship of Jesus Christ. It involves giving only mental ascent to the fact that Jesus is Lord. People will simply say the words "Jesus is Lord" and believe they will be saved. To them the statement becomes a magical incantation or ticket to heaven. Whereas the truth of the matter is that when a person confesses that Jesus is Lord, he is in fact stating that he will do everything that his Lord commands him to do. When a person does not do as his Lord commands it shows that he is a hypocrite, saying one thing and doing another. His behavior reveals his character. He really doesn't believe in his heart that Jesus is Lord or he would do what Jesus says. As James puts it in his epistle, *"Faith without works is dead."*

Jesus affirms this when He says, *"I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."*¹⁰⁵ Those who pervert the gospel of grace do so by declaring that they are no longer under law, but grace. What this means to them is that they are free to live in any manner of their **choosing**, which it is a perversion. In essence they are saying that there is no authority greater than themselves and they can do whatever is right in their own eyes. There is no one who is Lord of their life.

In his epistle to the Romans chapter 6, verses 14-15, the Apostle Paul does state that the followers of Jesus Christ are no longer under law, but under grace. When read in context of the whole epistle it is understood that Jesus' disciples are no longer bound to follow to the letter of the Law of **Moses**. But by the grace of God they are bound to follow the law of the **Spirit**. The obligation under the law of the Spirit is to be motivated by love for God and others in everything a person says and does.

The Apostle Paul brings further clarity to the issue in his epistle to the Galatians by contrasting the Law of Moses and the Spirit of Christ. In Galatians 5:18, he states that a person being led by the Holy Spirit is not under the Law. But he doesn't stop there. His next statements show whether the Holy Spirit or a person's own flesh is leading him. *"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Deuteronomy 30:11-20

¹⁰⁴ 2 Peter 3:16-18

¹⁰⁵ Matthew 7:23

¹⁰⁶ Galatians 5:19-23

Jesus clearly exposes this perversion of the Gospel in His parable of the two house builders. Both men built houses to protect themselves from the storm. The storm represents the wrath or judgment of God since He alone controls the forces of nature. The houses represent the means by which the men will be saved from the wrath or judgment of God. One man's salvation was based on sand, which equates to only hearing Jesus' words. This man's hope of salvation was destroyed. The other man's salvation was based on rock, which equates to **both hearing and doing** Jesus' words. This man's hope of salvation proved adequate.

In the gospel of John 12:47-50, Jesus reiterates this truth. *"And if anyone hears My sayings, and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."*

The Point of the Lesson:

Don't believe every word someone speaks . . . inspect his fruit.

Application:

Jesus wants His disciples to be fruit inspectors, to discern good and evil, and to choose for themselves that which is good without judging others. By using Scripture we can begin to discern false prophets and teachers.

1. Read the following passages of Scripture in order one at a time.
 - a. Jude
 - b. 2 John :7-11
 - c. 1 John 2:18-23, 4:1-6, and 5:1-5
 - d. 2 Peter 2:1-22
2. Identify the behaviors of false prophets and teachers revealed in each passage of Scripture.
3. List each behavior under one of the three basic character traits exhibited by Cain, Balaam or Korah.

The Way of Cain (desires of the flesh . . . unholy living in the midst of the people of God)

1. Ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness.
2. They defile the flesh.
3. Caring for themselves.
4. They are worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.
5. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned.
6. They indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires.
7. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime.
8. They have eyes full of adultery and that never cease from sin.
9. They forsake the right way.
10. They entice by fleshly desires.

Error of Balaam (greed . . . teaching that causes the people of God to fall)

1. They deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.
2. They speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.
3. They do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.
4. They do not abide in the teaching of Christ.

5. They do not listen to the Apostles.
6. They deny that Jesus is the Christ.
7. They do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God.
8. They secretly introduce destructive heresies.
9. In their greed they will exploit you with false words.
10. Entice unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed.
11. Promise freedom while they live in corruption.

Rebellion of Korah (grumbling and complaining against God, His leaders and His ways ... pride causes division in the people of God)

1. Reject authority.
2. Revile angelic majesties
3. These are grumblers, finding fault.
4. Mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.
5. Ones who cause divisions.
6. They do not remain in the Church.
7. They do not keep God's commandments.
8. Despise authority.
9. Daring.
10. Self-willed.

Overview of Jesus' Relationship to His Disciples

1. **James*** (“**Jacob**”): brother of Jesus. Authored the New Testament epistle: “James”. (Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3)
2. **Judas*** (“**Jude**”): brother of Jesus. Authored the New Testament epistle: “Jude”. (Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3)
3. **James, son of Zebedee*** (“**Jacob**”): cousin of Jesus, son of The Virgin Mary’s sister, Salome (Mark 15:40, 16:1). Also known as “Boanerges” or one of the “sons of thunder”. (Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:14-20; Luke 5:1-11, Mark 3:17)
4. **John*** (“**Jehohanan**”): cousin of Jesus, son of The Virgin Mary’s sister, Salome (Mark 15:40, 16:1). Also known as “Boanerges”, one of the “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17), “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23, 19:26, 21:7, 21:20), and former disciple of John the Baptist. Authored the New Testament “Gospel of John”, “1 John”, “2 John”, “3 John”, and “Revelation”. (Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:14-20; Luke 5:1-11, Mark 3:17)
5. **James, son of Alphaeus*** (“**Jacob**”): cousin of Jesus, son of Joseph’s brother, Cleopas (Luke 24:13-35). (Cleopas’ wife was Mary (“**Mariam**”). She is also known as “the other Mary” at Jesus crucifixion and at the open tomb. – Matthew 27:61, 28:1, Luke 24:9-10). Also known as James the less or James son of Alphaeus (“**Cleopas**”). (Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:14-20; Luke 5:1-11)
6. **Thaddeus***: cousin of Jesus, son of Joseph’s brother, Cleopas (Luke 24:13-35). (Cleopas’ wife was Mary (“**Mariam**”). She is also known as “the other Mary” at Jesus crucifixion and at the open tomb. – Matthew 27:61, 28:1, Luke 24:9-10). Also known as Judas the son of James or Judas not Iscariot.
7. **Simon***: cousin of Jesus, son of Joseph’s brother, Cleopas (Luke 24:13-35). (Cleopas’ wife was Mary (“**Mariam**”). She is also known as “the other Mary” at Jesus crucifixion and at the open tomb. – Matthew 27:61, 28:1, Luke 24:9-10). Also known as the Zealot.
8. **Simon* (renamed by Jesus to “Peter”/“Petros”/“Rock”)**: partners in a fishing business with Jesus’ two cousins James and John, sons of The Virgin Mary’s sister Salome, and brother to Andrew. Also known as Simon bar Jonah (Matthew 6:17). Authored the New Testament epistles: “1 Peter” and “2 Peter”. (Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:14-20; Luke 5:1-11)
9. **Andrew***: partners in a fishing business with Jesus’ two cousins James and John, sons of The Virgin Mary’s sister Salome, brother to Simon (“**Peter**”), and former disciple of John the Baptist. (Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:14-20; Luke 5:1-11)
10. **Matthew***: was the chief tax collector in Capernaum. He undoubtedly collected the taxes from the fishermen, including James, John, Peter and Andrew, when they brought in their catches to be sold at market. He may also have been the royal official from Capernaum, whose son Jesus healed. Also known as “**Levi**”. Authored the New Testament “Gospel of Matthew”. (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32)

The remaining Disciples have no immediate recorded relationship to Jesus: Philip*, Bartholomew, son of Talemai*, Thomas*, and Judas Iscariot*.

* Matthew 10:1-4, Mark 3:13-19, Luke 6:12-16

“Torah” Defined

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Law is Hitting the Mark while Sin is Missing the Mark *Insights from Hebrew*

LAW! Such a harsh word. A word disliked and abhorred by many Christians. But was this always the case? Why did David delight in the “Law”? (Psa 1:2, 119:70,77,174) Why did Paul – the misunderstood apostle say the same thing? “I delight in the law of God, in my inner being.” (Rom 7:22). A simple word study into the original Manuscripts of the Scriptures can help us understand God’s Law in new light.

The word commonly translated as “LAW” in our English versions of the Scriptures is “Torah” in the Original Hebrew and derives from the root word “Yarah”:

Strong’s Hebrew Concordance H8451 – תורה – tôrâh

From H3384; a precept or statute, especially the Decalogue or Pentateuch: – law.
(Brown-Driver-Briggs’ Hebrew Lexicon – law, direction, instruction)

Strong’s Hebrew Concordance H3384 – ירה – yârâh

A primitive root; properly to flow as water (that is, to rain); transitively to lay or throw (especially an arrow, that is, to shoot); figuratively to point out (as if by aiming the finger), to teach: – (+) archer, cast, direct, inform, instruct, lay, shew, shoot, teach (-er, -ing), through.
(Brown-Driver-Briggs’ Hebrew Lexicon – to throw, shoot, cast, pour)

Looking at the definitions given on the Strong’s Concordance and BDB Lexicon, it is clear that Torah and its root word Yarah are connected to “direction & instruction”. And not only is it connected to these ideas, it also denotes “shooting an arrow” or “taking aim”. A few examples of usage of the word “Yarah” is given below:

Genesis 46:28 And he sent Judah before him unto Joseph, to **direct** (H3384) his face unto Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen.

1 Samuel 20:20 And I will **shoot** (H3384) three arrows on the side thereof, as though I shot at a mark.

Psalms 64:7 But God shall **shoot** (H3384) at them with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded.

Exodus 4:12 Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and **teach** (H3384) thee what thou shalt say.

Leviticus 10:11 And that ye may **teach** (H3384) the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.

Psalms 119:102 I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast **taught** (H3384) me.

Since we have looked at the meaning of Torah, let us look at another word which is closely connected with it in Scripture – the word “SIN”. The word commonly translated as “SIN” in our English versions of the Scriptures is “Chatta’ah” in the Original Hebrew and derives from the root word “Chatta”:

Strong’s Hebrew Concordance H2403 – חטאת – chattâ’âh

From H2398; an offence (sometimes habitual sinfulness), and its penalty, occasion, sacrifice, or expiation; also (concretely) an offender: – punishment (of sin), purifying (-fication for sin), sin (-ner, offering).

(Brown-Driver-Briggs’ Hebrew Lexicon – sin, sinful, sin offering)

Strong’s Hebrew Concordance H2398 – חטא -châtâ’

A primitive root; properly to miss; hence (figuratively and generally) to sin; by inference to forfeit, lack, expiate, repent, (causatively) lead astray, condemn: – bear the blame, cleanse, commit [sin], by fault, harm he hath done, loss, miss, (make) offend (-er), offer for sin, purge, purify (self), make reconciliation, (cause, make) sin (-ful, -ness), trespassive.

(Brown-Driver-Briggs’ Hebrew Lexicon – to sin, miss, miss the way, go wrong, incur guilt, forfeit, purify from uncleanness)

Looking at the definitions given on the Strong’s Concordance and BDB Lexicon, it is clear that Chatta’ah and its root word Chatta are connected to “missing & going astray”. It denotes “missing the mark”. An example is given below:

Judges 20:16 Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men left handed; everyone could sling stones at a hair breadth, and not **miss (H2398)**

The relationship between Sin and Law

As per John’s explanation in his 1st Epistle, Sin = Breaking the Law (**1 John 3:4** “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.”).

While “Law” means to “shoot”, “take aim”, “direct” and “instruct”, “Sin” means to “miss” or “go astray”. If we put this thought in a picture form, “Torah” is an archer who aims/shoots at a target, while “Sin” is the same archer “missing the mark”. If we stop taking aim at the perfect instructions of God, we stand to miss the mark, thereby falling into “Sin”.

– Word Study by Key2Changes.com

What does it mean to Walk with God?

It does not mean to have the intellectual understanding of the workings of God. No, I am walking with God . . . *is* like a dance . . . *What does that mean?*

(defined) Torah law is the same word for “Walk”, Jewish law is not called any of the legal terms; Jewish law is called “the walk” . . . here we uncover the essences of Faith as it should be understood and lived according to the *Scriptures* . . . to live with *faith* is not only to live in action, but it is to live faithfully . . .

. . . *(the root of faith is)* Emunah “*Faith*”, Emun “*Practice*”, Ne’eman “*Loyalty*” . . . Biblical faith directs us towards a living relationship with God, that’s the essence of Covenant; in relationships there is moments of intimacy, there is moments of distance, highs, lows, relationship is real, its dynamic, but to walk with God, to be wholehearted is to be “loyal” in our encounter with God. We like, touch the ultimate good. We align ourselves with that “*Vision*”, in that direction, and then the walk begins. One step at a time. We do not have all the answers. There is so much unknown, so much mystery, but we are always given enough to take the next step . . .

Let’s look at the word “Israel”. Inside the word “Israel” is “struggle”, but the word itself “Israel” is made up of two words, one is “Straight” and then you have “God”, so think about what that is saying to us, what is it to live by the faith of Israel; it is to put God up in front of our “*Vision*”, and then “*Straight*”, we have a path, we have our eyes set on the Kingdom of God, our highest

ideals, our values that will never be corrupted, we will . . . live out our lives with Laser like Focus, “Straight” ahead.

The default of this world is struggle, and the definition of Israel is to “Struggle and to Prevail”, we have the keys, how to persevere in the hard times and prevail . . . we have been gifted . . . “Israel” . . . we are going to be challenged and pushed to the ends of our limits and beyond; and that seems to be one of the fundamental purposes of life . . . to grow beyond ourselves, in the struggle I become more than who I am, maybe that is the purpose here, to become more than who you are . . . that is why Israel is called “to embrace the struggle, to embody the struggle”, when you prevail you emerge triumphed, you emerge greater and stronger. A life of *Faith* is not something that you can just casually say, “*I believe*” . . . that is not going to last, Biblical “Faith”, you contend with the world, you struggle with the world, you struggle towards God, you struggle with yourself, and in the struggle you discover your strength, you discover your character, your inner value, you discover yourself; the challenges of life are going to hit us and there is nothing we can do about that, but in confronting the suffering of life, you can do something honorable, admirable, knowable, worthy, glorious, powerful, helpful, upright . . . right there, that is the light of Israel . . . in that struggle you can bring the light of those amazing gifts to the world. *Faith* is not trying to convince yourself of the existence of a transcendent power that you can believe in . . . that is a cognitive approach to faith, that is the approach to solving a scientific problem. The prophets were not scientists . . . I do not believe that I love *God*, I live my love *for God*, and out of my loyalty and action, a deeper relationship is developed. *Faith* is a life committed to action, to love . . . a covenant . . . God makes a covenant with us. . . a covenant is a commitment . . . to be committed in practice, in action, to be loyal in your life, that is the root of what the word means, it means “Loyal”, it is to be loyal to the internal calling inside of you . . . there is a calling inside of all of us . . . God’s law is written in our heart if we just open it up and look in . . .

What did Abraham have, “a Calling”, a move away from organized religion, and it is a return to a relationship, a return to a simple pure wholehearted “walk with God” . . . walking and living in alignment with God . . . with the highest ideal you could imagine . . . that is *Biblical Faith* . . . to live life with love as your driving force, with unshakable character, and the courage of Joshua to struggle and prevail and conquer the land of Israel . . .

. . . we have no idea how much power you will discover in your walk through life as you start aiming towards the higher good, and in pursuit of your highest self, and in pursuit of the ultimate good, that’s where you will find the meaning in your life, when you start living with character, and you start walking with God aligned with your ideals, good things will happen, you will be blessed . . .

. . . that does not always mean you’re going to succeed in every endeavor or in every project, but “Committed”, living “Committed” to “walking with God”, ensures that every day in pursuit of that goal you will be blessed, even if the goal is never accomplished. Everyone needs to take a strategy of how they are going to live life, this is the Biblical Strategy, this is the “Biblical Walk”, to walk uncompromisingly, “Straight with God” . . . that is the Deeper Meaning of the Biblical Promise:

“He who Blesses Israel will be Blessed” - *(meaning) If you live a life committed to manifesting the ultimate good, committed to building Zion, you will attract good into your life, that is the essences of what it means to walking with God. To live in the Walk. We have a covenant, and a commitment to the ultimate good. We have temptations to our right and we have self-doubts to the left, and Biblical Faith is to walk in alignment with that Vision no matter. That is the essence of loyalty to the King.*

. . . What is that next stage, the Law is going to be written on our hearts. What does that mean? It is a mistake to say that this is a prophecy that has already been fulfilled, it must be fulfilled again, it must be fulfilled in our generation. That's the message. Open your heart. There is like a place inside of you that is calling you to be a higher being, and if all of us hear that calling, if all of us live by that, we manifest a joint destiny that all of us are collected to. From the mountains of Judea to the Colorado Rocky's, it's like one destiny, a House of Prayer for all Nations, that will be a Blessing for all Nations. So, "to walk with God", may our Walk direct us to that ultimate Prophetic Vision . . . aligned with his Torah, may we all walk whole heartedly with God, all the way to a new rebuilt Jerusalem.

– excerpts from an audio teaching of a Judean Rabbi on the Biblical Definition of "Torah"

You Who Practice Lawlessness Matthew 7:21-23

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'¹⁰⁷

Lawlessness (Strong's No. 458 – *translation: anomia*) properly, without law; *lawlessness*; **the utter disregard for God's law** (*His written and living Word*). 1 John 3:4, "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; **sin is lawlessness.**" While "Law" means to "shoot", "take aim", "direct" and "instruct", "Sin" means to "miss" or "go astray". If we put this thought in a picture form, "**Torah**" (*the teaching and instruction of God*) is an archer who aims/shoots at a target, while "Sin" is the same archer "missing the mark". If we stop taking aim at the **perfect instructions of God** ("**Torah**"), we stand to miss the mark, thereby falling into "Sin" (i.e. 2 Thessalonians 2, **The Man of Lawlessness**).

Jesus clearly tells His disciples that not everyone who declares that Jesus is Lord actually belongs to Him. He is cautioning His disciples about an error concerning salvation that will creep into the Church.

Both the apostle Paul (Romans 10:8-21, ". . . *But they have not all obeyed the gospel . . .*") and Peter (2 Peter 3:16-18, ". . . *care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.*") talk about this error, concerning the lordship of Jesus Christ, which involves giving only mental ascent to the fact that Jesus is Lord. People will simply say the words "*Jesus is Lord*" and believe they will be saved. To them the statement becomes a magical incantation or ticket to heaven. Whereas the truth of the matter is that **when a person confesses that Jesus is Lord, he is in fact stating that he will do everything that his Lord commands him to do**. When a person does not do as his Lord commands it shows that he is a hypocrite, saying one thing and doing another. His behavior reveals his character. He really doesn't believe in his heart that Jesus is Lord or he would do what Jesus says. As James (James 2:17) puts it, "*Faith without works is dead.*"

¹⁰⁷ 'DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'. *Leviticus 26*. **Lawlessness** here means living without law or in violation of the law. Followers of Jesus Christ are still under law . . . The Law of the Spirit of Christ, a higher standard of living, the Spirit of the Law.

In **John 12:46-50**, Jesus reiterates this truth:

*I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness. And if anyone hears My sayings, and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. **He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.** For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."*

– excerpts from Lesson 17: Fruit Inspection, on pages 80-84

Learn what Jesus teaches us to do, what it means and how it is applied to our lives today as we walk by the Spirit!

Fishers of Men . . . introduces Christians to the subject of becoming disciples of Jesus Christ and covers the first 17 lessons He taught His disciples. Beginning with His command to “Follow Me,” Jesus lays a solid foundation of instructions for developing the character of Christ within individuals.

- ***Jesus’ teachings have completely transformed my life. (M.M.)***
- ***Jesus invites you to walk with Him and learn from Him. (J.G.)***
- ***I have been going to church for over 30 years and have never heard anything like this before. Why don’t churches teach this? (J.R.)***

Upon coming to faith in Jesus Christ at age 33, Michael Gibson earnestly wanted someone to disciple him in the faith. Finding no one . . . he became a student, and then teacher of God’s word.

One statement in particular captured his attention, “Go . . . make disciples . . . baptizing them . . . teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20) From that he wrote his first book, “Follow Me” (1996), a compilation of the four gospels into one account while highlighting each of the 263 instructions Jesus commanded His disciples to do and teach. Subsequently, he has written the three-part teaching series, “A Journey with Jesus” and many other books which help equip believers to do the work of the ministry.

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