

Detox – Blessed...Living a Different Kind of Dream*

*Detox from Religion – Rediscover the simplicity of following Jesus.
A lifetime spent living like Jesus is a lifetime well spent.*

Toxic Religion : My success is an indication of God’s favor.

The Jesus Way : Jesus is our life, and nothing else can satisfy.

“I’m living the dream.” It’s a common response among Western Christian friends when asked how are they doing. It usually means I have a good job, make good money, live in a luxurious home (compared to the rest of the world’s standards), have 2 or 3 kids playing soccer, vote their convictions during elections, give their surplus to Goodwill, take a couple of well planned vacations each year, are enjoying good health, say the Pledge of Allegiance on occasion, enjoy religious freedom, spend currency that reads “In God we trust,” and attend weekly religious services (they may even attend a really cool church).

It’s not that this wrong, but the challenge is God has a dream for our lives that doesn’t depend on any of this. The dream just described is often short-lived. God has a higher and better dream for our lives that he has revealed through Jesus, a dream that fulfills our true purpose and destiny.

Living the Jesus way requires a new dream that can be achieved only through a redemptive imagination. Stop and pause for a moment. Reflect on the world and your place in it. Answer this question, “If the kingdom of God was to come right here, right now, and God had his way in this place, circumstance, or situation, what would it be like?” Maybe you are reflecting on your own challenges. Better yet, maybe your mind has shifted to an issue in your community or beyond to the world. Maybe you are dreaming about peace within your family, community, or world. God gives us this gift of imagination to use for his good. He gives it to us to tap into his goodness and desire for the redemption of every element of his creation.

We have this redemptive imagination when we see the world through Jesus’ eyes. The gateway to this kind of redemptive imagination is found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Here Jesus explains what it really means to be blessed – and it is radically, dramatically different from what these followers thought they knew. Over and over again in this teaching, Jesus calls ‘blessed’ those who dare to go against their traditional religion and live the Jesus way. Jesus turns everything upside down!

What is blessedness? Jesus’ contemporaries had long heard the religious scholars and priests enumerate the hundreds of laws they were required to keep in order to achieve a blessed status. Likewise, there seems to be a fair amount of confusion about what it means to live blessed in America. Is it good health? Is it about prosperity? As Jesus introduced the Beatitudes, he pronounced those “blessed” who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are persecuted, who are meek, and who are peacemakers (Matthew 5:3-10). Jesus’ teaching required that his followers abandon their previously held notions of blessedness and adopt his way of truth.

In this context, blessed is the result of God’s presence and approval of their lives. To be blessed is to be in a relationship with Jesus. We are truly blessed when we walk with him in this life. Through this teaching, we discover that Jesus’ sense of blessing is not at all based on living *our* dream, but is an internal state of contentment that is possible for all who live *his* dream.

God’s dream for our lives begins on the inside as it is planted, watered, and grows like a mustard seed into something much bigger than anyone thought. God’s kingdom comes when we seek first his ways. When we live, love, and leave like Jesus, we are blessed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Q – Whose dream are you living?

Q – What does God’s blessing look like in your life?

* *Detox – For the Overly Religious* – Chapter 5 by David Putman. Edited for this group lesson by Craig Cooper.

DISCIPLESHIP – A Disciple Bears Fruit*

Read or have someone else read *John 15:1-8*

(Ask the questions below. Add comments after questions as appropriate after people answer.)

Q – What is Jesus' main message in this passage?

Real disciples stay connected to Jesus, and by remaining connected, they have an impact. The word simply means “to stay, to continue, to cling to, to be connected to.” The King James Version uses the word abide. J. Oswald Sanders says that abiding in Christ “means keeping unbroken contact with Christ in a union of intimate love.”

Q – How do we remain in Jesus? What does this look like in real life?

Q – How is remaining in Jesus related to discipleship?

Remaining in Jesus has everything to do with discipleship! It is the foundational spiritual discipline on which all the rest are built. We cannot grow apart from an abiding relationship of love with Jesus.

Jesus spoke little to His followers about spiritual exercises, even though they were undoubtedly a big part of their religious heritage. Instead, Jesus called his disciples to “come and see” (John 1:39), “come follow me” (Mark 1:16-20), “come and be with me” (Mark 3:13-14), and “remain in me” (John 15:7-8). Jesus did many things in His three-year earthly ministry, but the one constant was His presence and His fellowship with the disciples. This relational connectedness brought spiritual transformation over time in their lives.

Q – What is fruit? Note: If it is something we can do without Him it is not fruit. What is there in our life that if we take Him away will go away?

If there is nothing that will go away if He goes away then we probably have little fruit. Don't do religious good things and call them fruit. God is looking for transformation in our lives! A radical change.

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

2 Corinthians 3:18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

The apostles were transformed over a three year period by being with Jesus. You will be too! They were so transformed that they even astonished the religious leaders of the day. Discipleship begins with leaving everything to follow Jesus.

Q – In what tangible ways can we stay connected to – remaining in – Jesus on a regular basis?

It is staying in a very close, intimate friendship with Him. It is spending much time with Him, alone and with others. We can't get nutrients as branches from the vine without being close to the vine! As the disciples spent time with Jesus His life developed their character and personalities. Yet when He was taken away from them at the crucifixion, they panicked. Even after the resurrection, they regressed back to some of their old ways. They were paralyzed by fear. But then the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised came upon them...and everything changed. They became resolute. They had purpose. They were bold. God will do the same with us and through us when we are spending time with Jesus, remaining connected to Him.

Ministry Time

Q – What fruit have you seen in your life that you want to thank the Lord for growing?

Q – How can we pray for you right now in remaining connected with Jesus?

Q – What fruit would you like to start growing in your life?

Supernatural Transformed Mind – The Mind is a Gatekeeper*

“But be transformed by the renewing of your minds...” Romans 12:2

The only way to consistently do Kingdom works is to view reality from God’s perspective. That’s what the Bible means when it talks about renewing our minds.

The mind is actually a powerful instrument of the Spirit of God. He made it to be the gatekeeper of Kingdom activity on earth. The great tragedy when the mind goes astray is that God’s freedom to establish His will on earth is limited. The mind is not to be tossed out; it is to be used for its original purpose. If the mind weren’t vitally important to our walk with Christ and our commission, Paul wouldn’t have urged us to “be transformed by the renewing of our minds.” In fact, only a renewed mind can consistently bring Kingdom reality to earth.

When we come into agreement with the primary mission, our minds become powerful tools in God’s hands. This explains why there is such an intense war being waged for your mind and your mental agreement. Every thought and action in your life speaks of allegiance to God or to Satan. Both are empowered by your agreement. Renewing your mind means learning to recognize what comes from hell, and what comes from heaven, and agreeing with Heaven.

The word for “agreement” in Hebrew is *chazah* and means ‘to see’. In Greek the root word is ‘*sugkatatihemai*’ which means ‘to vote for’. So you could say being in agreement is to see like the other person and to vote for their viewpoint. There really are only two candidates for our vote of trust – God or Satan – and they represent two opposite perspectives on reality.

Discussion Questions

1. Read Romans 6:16. What kind of bond is created through obedience? Our actions will produce that bond with whoever we obey. What are some ways that we come into obedience with God or Satan?
2. Read Matthew 7:24-27. Both the wise and the foolish man heard the word, but what distinguished them from each other? What part of our day to day lives represents faith, or lack of faith?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. What do you think it means to be a “new creation”? Do you think it at least includes the potential to experience things you’ve never even thought of before? Do things you’ve never done? What does it take to move past an attitude that says, “Anything can happen,” to the attitude that says, “Impossible things *must* take place in order for me to walk as a new creation”?
4. Why do you suppose that people will admit that they experienced the supernatural power of God when they received salvation, but now, years later, they have no expectation to walk in the supernatural ministry of Christ? How much of this thinking can be from ‘bad teaching or disappointments in God’? Have you ever had disappointing times or unmet expectations with God that keeps us from believing Him?

Closing

Let’s take some time to pray and talk out these issues with the Holy Spirit. Let’s ask the Holy Spirit to show us any areas of unrenewed thinking into which we have slipped. If you have stepped out in obedience and then stopped when it didn’t seem to bear fruit, ask the Lord if there is fear or disappointment there. If He shows you anything, confess it and ask the Lord to restore your hope and expectation to walk into the “normal Christian life.” He has provided for us a life filled with His supernatural, life giving Spirit and all the goodness that life brings. Let’s pray.

* From "*The Supernatural Power of a Transformed Mind – 40 Day Devotional*" Day 4 - by Bill Johnson. Editing by Craig Cooper.

* All verses from NIV unless noted otherwise.

Supernatural Transformed Mind – Called to the Impossible*

“Then Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Most assuredly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; For whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.’” John 5:19

Many believers think miracles and power are for extra-special anointed people of God. Many get hung up on the idea that Jesus did miracles as God, not man. In reality he did miracles as a man in right relationship with God because He was setting forth a model for us, something for us to follow. If He did miracles as God, we would all be extremely impressed, but we would have no compulsion to emulate Him. But when we see that God has commissioned us to do what Jesus did – and more – then we realize that He put self-imposed restrictions on Himself to show us we could do it too.

Jesus so emptied Himself that He was incapable of doing what was required of Him by the Father - without the Father's help. This is the nature of our call – it requires more than we are capable of. When we stick to doing only the stuff we can do, He is not involved in the call.

How do you believe that God will be faithful and come through to you if you ask Him for the impossible?

1. Realize that God is not a respecter of persons. The same God who was with all the heroes of faith in the Scriptures and Jesus Himself is with you and the same Holy Spirit they had you have! Where ever there is a similar situation in the Bible read that story and then ask God to do the same thing for you today.
2. Remember the times He has come through in the past for you. Repeat these times to yourself.
3. Share testimonies with each other in your groups. If He did this for someone else you know it will be a reminder that He will do it for you.
4. Having faith to do the supernatural is not exerting some kind of mental effort to have faith for our circumstances. It is simply trusting that God will do it. It is believing that at the right time a 'big brother' or 'all powerful father' will arrive on the scene and work. This means that we need to trust God. As you mature your faith is linked to knowing the Father and His faithfulness. When we say we are strong we are saying we have faith in God's power that will show up.

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Hebrews 11:1

That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. 2 Timothy 1:12

Discussion Questions

1. One of the most difficult tendencies to correct in an American Christian is self-reliance, because most Americans grow up believing that maturity looks like being completely self-sufficient. Jesus demonstrated the complete opposite – His maturity grew as He grew in dependence on His Father. Read about His dependence on the Holy Spirit in Matthew 4:1-2. What are your thoughts on becoming less self-reliant?

Closing

What is something in your life that you need the supernatural for? Let's pray together about it and ask for a supernatural move as we pray.

* From "The Supernatural Power of a Transformed Mind – 40 Day Devotional" Day 9 - by Bill Johnson. Editing by Craig Cooper.

* All verses from NIV unless noted otherwise.

Father Is Looking For Those...Who Put Him First*

Our Father is looking for those who will seek Him in everything. Have you noticed that the more important spiritual people are in their position, the more likely they are to find a solitary place where they can pray and meditate? Let's consider some busy people who continually seek God ...

EXAMPLE 1: DR. BEN CARSON, chief of pediatric neurosurgery at John Hopkins Children's Center found time each morning for prayer and reading from the book of Proverbs. He said, "During the day, if I encounter a frustrating situation, I think back to one of the verses that I had read that morning. How often God had prepared a verse for that day."

EXAMPLE 2: In 1946, I (Devon Fromke) met Dr. H. J. OCKENGA when he visited the campus of Seattle Pacific University. After the morning chapel address he shared several significant things from his personal life. At that time he was the president of the National Association of Evangelicals and later moved on to found Fuller Theological Seminary, becoming its first president. He had been the senior pastor at Park Street Church in Boston and later became president of Gordon College.

With all these important positions there was a quality and spiritual tone that set Dr. Ockenga apart. He explained to us, "I have always been very busy, but here is my secret—I keep a prayer list...and write a brief summary of the petition, number it and date it. When it is answered, I write "answered" across it. It is in leaving things with God that I am released from anxiety. Therefore I need not worry about it." When asked how he found time to pray, he continued, "I exercise, shave and bathe. Then I pray until breakfast—picking up where I left off on my prayer list. I've had this prayer habit from the time I went to college."

EXAMPLE 3: President ABRAHAM LINCOLN recognized his need. A gentleman having an appointment to meet the President arrived a quarter of an hour early. While waiting for the appointed time he heard in the next room a voice as if in grave conversation. He asked the attendant standing by, "Who is talking in the next room?" "Oh, it is the President, sir." "Is anybody with him?" the gentleman inquired. "Is that his habit so early in the morning?" "Yes, sir, he spends every morning from 4:00 to 5:00 reading the Bible and praying."

EXAMPLE 4: Consider the mighty voice which challenged the religious system of Europe and ignited the reformation MARTIN LUTHER. Martin Luther once confided, "I am so busy that if I do not spend two or three hours each day in prayer, I could not get through the day."

EXAMPLE 5: When asked about the amazing growth of his ministry, YONGGI CHO answered, "How can I pray a minimum of three hours every day and still pastor one of the largest churches in the world with a congregation of over 400,000, plus travel every month to church growth conferences? The key is setting up my priorities. By praying, I can save many hours—by having my mind renewed and prepared with answers almost before questions are asked. God shows me potential problems in our ministry so I can apply preventative spiritual solutions. Frankly, I cannot afford to skip even an hour of prayer time."

PONDER THIS PRINCIPLE: It is important to not just pray but also to spend time listening and waiting for the answer. C. S. Lewis wrote, "If God had granted all the silly prayers I've made in my life, where would I be now?" This means that much of our time in His presence should be waiting—listening to hear His voice. Only then can we know how to pray according to His will—and have the confidence He will answer.

GOD'S WORD IS CLEAR:

*...They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength... (Isaiah 40:31 KJV)
...men have not heard...neither hath the eye seen...what (God) hath prepared for him that waiteth for him
(Isaiah 64:4 KJV)*

*...Our soul waits for the Lord... (Psalms 33:20 NKJV)
Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation. (Psalms 62:1 NKJV)
My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. (Psalms 62:5 KJV)*

PRAY: Father, we can only say that we must have more than desire; we must have your enablement to keep this a priority every day.

* From "Father is Looking for Those - Fromke, DeVern" by DeVern Fromke. Editing by Craig Cooper.

Father Is Looking For Those... Who Want to Be Enjoyed by Him*

In this lesson we talk about the joys of the Father-Son relationship. One great example of this is how our heavenly Father finds such delight in His Son, the Lord Jesus. But here is another example shared by David Morken of an earthly father who finds enjoyment in his son.

WHEN our eldest son, Hubert, was a little fellow, we were visiting Balboa in southern California. One day we went to see the beautiful ships in the harbor; Hubert seemed to want every one of them. He would say with boyish excitement, "Oh, Daddy, wouldn't you like to have that one? And he would point his chubby finger at a gleaming motor cruiser—or sleek sailboat. As we approached a bigger, more luxurious vessel that probably cost over a million, again Hubert said, "Daddy, wouldn't you like to have that one?" "Hubert," I replied, "let me ask you a question. Suppose a man were to come to Daddy and say, 'Mr. Morken, I want to give you a choice between two things. You may become owner of all these ships in the harbor, and we'll add to them the Queen Mary, the Queen Elizabeth, and all the ships of the President lines. (Hubert was interested in ocean liners!) Furthermore, I will give you enough money to operate them all. That's the first choice. Or, (and I pointed to Hubert) you may have this little boy.' Now which do you think Daddy would choose?" Without a moment's hesitancy my son replied, "Why, Daddy, I think you'd choose me." He looked at me with his big brown eyes and added, "Because you love me." I said, "Hubert, this is part of the reason."

"What's the other part?" he asked. "The other part is that you love me. If you owned that beautiful ship, we might have a lot of fun aboard it, but we could never love it, because wood and brass cannot receive love nor give love. The ship could never love us; it has no ability to love anything." I asked Hubert, "Do you know why you are worth more to God than all the stars in the heavens?" "No," he replied. "Because," I explained, "God made the stars, and the biggest and brightest among them can be enjoyed by us all. They can be studied and measured by the scientists. God knows their names, but they cannot receive love, nor can they love God—or anyone else. But you can!"

In this loving response of a father and son we recognize the unique relationship God has planned with His family. God gives to us all that really matters—Himself; we in return give to Him—ourselves. All the things in this universe rightfully take second place, and PERSONS take center-stage—the Father and His Family!

Consider this—if mere things could have satisfied King Solomon, his kingly position with its glory and fame, his vast wealth and his amazing wisdom would have been enough. But he pronounced it all vanity of vanities. Likewise, if mere things could have satisfied the heart of God, the whole vast universe was before Him. But God desired more; because of His very personhood, He desired fellowship. By divine intention and design every personality is so constituted that it requires the mutual response of fellowship. So there is a need for pure love and mingling of our spirit with His Spirit that reaches out as an enormous vacuum to be filled.

PONDER THIS PRINCIPLE: An indescribable "deep" within every person reaches out as an enormous vacuum to be filled; but there is also a "Deep" within God which is calling out for fulfillment and satisfaction. We were made for God and only God can fit into the "great empty space within man."

GOD'S WORD IS CLEAR: When the psalmist wrote, *Deep calls unto deep at the call of the fountainhead... Psalms 42:7 (Fenton)* we have David's attempt to describe this spiritual "longing." Something (deep) within God and deep within man—each is calling out for the other. But it is interesting that God is THE Fountainhead; He is the first one to call. And man has been responding in many ways ever since.

Consider one more attempt to explain this mystery. *Ecclesiastes 3:11 states, He has made everything beautiful in its time; also He has set eternity in their hearts... (NKJV).* Who can explain this "eternity" in our hearts? Every man has it—and will forever try to give it meaning.

WE PRAY: Father, once again we are shut up to You for a greater measure of revelation. We join Paul in exulting, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Romans 11:33 KJV)*

* From "Father is Looking for Those - Fromke, DeVern" by DeVern Fromke. Editing by Craig Cooper.

Walking in the Anointing

To walk in the anointing - The enabling of the Holy Spirit - means to walk in a way compatible with the Holy Spirit's character. Then His great power can be released through us and we can accomplish things we could never do alone. We all must make the choice to walk either in our own power or to walk in the anointing. The book of 1 Samuel shows us these two contrasting choices in the lives of Saul and David. These examples show how our character and life choices DO influence whether the Holy Spirit works through us?

1. The spirit of Saul (1 Samuel 18:9–12)—It is quite sobering to realize that Saul started out walking powerfully in God's anointing but ended up losing it. The Holy Spirit in his life was replaced by a tormenting spirit fueled by jealousy. Saul, the chosen king of Israel, was ruled by this spirit and even went so far as to actively pursue David in order to kill him. When we walk in the spirit of Saul, our lives are influenced by these same spirits of fear, deception, and murder.

Questions: (1) What event provoked Saul's jealousy for the first time? (See verse 8.) Do you think Saul's life would have turned out differently if he had not yielded to this initial temptation of jealousy? Discuss.

(2) Have you ever felt jealous over someone else's success or blessing? How did you handle it?

(3) Saul's unchecked jealousy eventually led to an attempt at murder. What are some other undesired consequences that come when we do not deal with jealousy?

(4) Saul moved from jealousy to deception when he "prophesied in the house" (v. 10). Why was this not the same thing as a true prophecy? How can you distinguish between true spiritual gifts and Satan's counterfeits?

(5) Saul probably never imagined that he would one day be trying to kill the young man he had brought into the palace as a trusted friend and ally. But that's just the way Satan operates. He inches his way into our lives and goes as far as we will allow him. Have you ever known someone who began with a "small" sin but ended up so much further down the road than he ever thought possible? What is the best way to prevent this sad scenario?

SUMMARY: What were some of the characteristics that kept the Holy Spirit from working in Saul?

2. The spirit of David (1 Samuel 18:1, 10, 14–15, 30)—The spirit of David was the opposite of the spirit of Saul. David's life was marked by covenant relationships, praise and power, and wisdom and soundness. With Saul's son Jonathan, David had an enduring friendship that withstood the severest of trials. Because David was a worshipper, he was constantly releasing the presence of God in every situation he faced. No matter the threat, David always managed to stay one step ahead of his enemies as God gave him wisdom and direction.

Questions: (1) Have you ever had a close friend like David had in Jonathan? How did the relationship empower both of you? How can Christians promote such friendships?

(2) What most helps you to worship God from your heart? What is the difference between singing songs and worshipping God?

(3) If you lack wisdom in a given situation, how do you determine what to do? What are some indications of God's will in a particular situation? How can praying in the Spirit help you make wise decisions?

(3) Even when David had the opportunity, he refused to raise his hand against Saul. What does this teach us about dealing with our enemies? Is revenge ever justified? Discuss.

SUMMARY: What were some of the characteristics that enabled the Holy Spirit to work in David?

Fire in Your Belly

The prophet Elijah was a fiery, passionate man. After Moses, he is perhaps the greatest example in the Old Testament of a man who knew God and walked powerfully in His ways. James 5:17 NIV says that *“Elijah was a man just like us.”* That means that he had human limitations and weaknesses just like we do, but he never let that stop him from passionately following God. From the life of Elijah, we can identify three areas of passion that we can emulate.

1. Passion for the will of God (1 Kings 17)—In verses 4 and 9 of 1 Kings 17, we read about a place called “there” where God’s provision was found. First, the Lord instructed Elijah to go into the wilderness and be fed “there” by ravens; second, He told him to go to Zarephath and a widow would provide for him “there.” God always has a place called “there” where you can find His perfect will for whatever situation you face.

Questions: (1) The place called “there” - the place God calls us too - often does not seem logical or practical. Why do you think this is so?

(2) Why do you need faith to make it to the place called “there”?

(3) Share a time when God led you to a place called “there” and it turned out to be more wonderful than you could have ever imagined.

2. Passion for the name of God (1 Kings 18)—At this time in Israel’s history, her people worshipped both God and Baal. In verse 21 of 1 Kings 18, however, Elijah passionately challenged them to make up their minds as to whom they would serve. Then later in the chapter he called upon the name of the Lord, who came down in fire and consumed the altar and everything around it, thus proving He was the one true God.

Questions: (1) Though most of us would say that we would never worship other gods, our lives sometimes show otherwise. What are some of the “gods” that we sometimes pursue? How does this dilute our worship of the Lord?

(2) A person who is passionate about the name of his God guards his speech because he wants to honor that holy name. How do we dishonor the Lord with our speech? (Encourage the members to think beyond profanity to more subtle ways that dishonor the Lord.)

3. Passion for the sons (daughters) of God (1 Kings 19)—At some point, every person comes face to face with an honest evaluation of his life. This often happens at midlife, and for some people it can be quite painful. However, God can restore passion for life and show anyone how to leave a legacy long after he is gone from this earth.

Questions: (1) After his victory on Mount Carmel, Elijah despaired, even to the point of wishing to die! Why do you think great spiritual victory is often followed by great discouragement? Have you found this to be true in your life? Share with the group. How can we guard against this tendency?

(2) What do you think is the greatest spiritual legacy you could leave behind? Are you taking steps to see it happen? Do you have spiritual children in your life that you are pouring your knowledge and spiritual maturity into? Have you asked God to give you a spiritual successor?

Ezekiel's Two Visions

So many of God's people are dry, devoid of the life-giving moisture of the Holy Spirit. For them, serving God has become routine, and the joy and vibrancy of the early years of knowing God have evaporated. When we find ourselves feeling that way, we must take immediate action to restore our spiritual fervor. Ezekiel 37 and 47 can help to reignite the fire of God's presence within us.

1. "Can these bones live?" (Ezek. 37:3). That is the question we are faced with when we go through a time of spiritual dryness. It feels like we will never experience joy and excitement again. We are like dry, withered leaves, with no life within us. Although we all feel this way from time to time, we don't have to remain in this state.

Questions: (1) Discuss some of the causes of personal spiritual dryness.

(2) What do you do, personally, when you find yourself becoming spiritually dry?

(3) Why are so many church congregations dead and dry? What are the characteristics of an alive, healthy church?

2. "Prophecy to these bones" (Ezek. 37:4). Ezekiel was instructed to prophesy to the dry bones, and as he did, life was restored, breath imparted, and strength renewed. After the bones connected, muscles and flesh formed on them.

Questions: (1) Spiritual life comes from connection. What are the ways you can get connected to the local church? How does this help bring life to your spirit?

(2) Why are some people reluctant to get connected?

(3) What is the greatest benefit you have experienced from being connected to the local body of Christ?

3. "Breath came into them, and they lived" (Ezek. 37:10). Only the breath of God's Spirit can bring life, even though there may be a wonderful structure and everything else is in place. We desperately need God to breathe on our services, small groups, families, and every area of life.

Questions: (1) Have you ever tried doing something in your own strength and ability rather than relying on the Spirit to accomplish it? What happened?

(2) What is it like when you do rely on the Spirit rather than your own abilities?

(3) How can you keep yourself full of God's Spirit? Do you need a fresh infilling?

4. "There was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple" (Ezek. 47:1). There are levels in our walk with God. We can wade in ankle-deep water (v. 3), move into knee-deep and waist-deep waters (v. 4), or plunge into waters deep enough to swim in (v. 5). We should be constantly progressing to greater depths in our Christian journey.

Questions: (1) Discuss the various levels of moving in God's Spirit. What determines the level? Which level are you moving in?

(2) Why do so many people seem to stay at the same level for years? How do you get yourself moving in the river again if you seem to be stuck at a particular level?

5. "There will be a very great multitude of fish" (Ezek. 47:9). Trees lined the bank of the river Ezekiel saw (v. 7), and wherever the river flowed, there was life and blessing. When you restore the flow of the Holy Spirit in your life, you become a giver of life to others and a fisher of men for the kingdom of God.

Questions: (1) Examine yourself: Is God's river flowing from you? Do you share Christ with others? Are you bearing fruit in your character as well as in your actions?

(2) End the meeting by praying for those who are experiencing spiritual dryness.

Supernatural Transformed Mind – Submission to the Mission*

All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Matthew 28:18

God's idea was to have a planet engulfed in His glorious rule, with mankind flawlessly "proving the will of God" on earth as it is in Heaven. Of course, we know the original plan got derailed, and that Adam forfeited the rulership God gave him over the earth, putting humanity into slavery to the enemy. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God took back the authority man had given away and reclaimed our purpose on this earth. We, the Church, are called to extend His rule in this earthly sphere, just as Adam was called to do.

But too few of us today follow those precise instructions. Though well intentioned, we become self-appointed in our commissions, honestly believing we are submitting to God. In reality, it isn't possible to prove the will of God on earth as it is in Heaven unless we are completely plugged into the primary mission God gave us. 1 John 3:8 states clearly that through intimacy with God, we are to destroy the works of the devil. That was Jesus' assignment; it was Adam and Eve's assignment; it was the disciples' assignment. Believers, that is your assignment as well!

Discussion Questions

1. Read Luke 7:2-10. The centurion said, "For I also am a man under authority." Whose authority was Jesus under? Why did the centurion understand that Jesus could do what He did because He was *under* authority? Why did Jesus call the centurion's response "faith"?
2. Read John 5:26-27, 30, 36. Jesus often referred to Himself as One who had been "sent". According to John 5:36, what proves that Jesus was sent by God and operated under God's authority? You've seen that the works that Jesus did "proved the will of God," but how do they also prove that Jesus was operating under God's authority?
3. Read John 14:12 and Ephesians 2:10. Just as Jesus claimed that He could do nothing in Himself, so you cannot hope to fulfill your commission to "prove the will of God" without being in complete submission to the Father as He was. Similarly, when you do submit to the Father, you should expect that He will give you "works" that bear witness to His authority.

John 14:12 clearly links believing in Christ with doing His works, and here in this passage, as throughout the Book of John, Christ is specifically referring to the miraculous works that the Father gave Him to do as signs of His divine appointment. The promise that our faith would lead us to even greater works is huge! Why do you suppose believers have a hard time receiving this promise in faith?

Closing

Let's pray and ask God to show us any areas of unbelief in our hearts and ask Him to help our unbelief. Invite Him to expose any area of your heart where you are trusting in something other than Him. Putting our trust in other things is what keeps us from being fully submitted to Him. If He shows you anything, ask Him to guide you in transferring your trust and dependence to Him. Here is a prayer you can pray if you desire:

"Jesus, I receive Your promise that, through faith in You, I would do greater works than You did in ministry. I believe You have sent the Holy Spirit to live in me and anoint me as He did You, that I might fulfill the works the Father has prepared for me. Help me to live in greater dependence on and greater obedience to You, Holy Spirit. I believe You want to send me into the world as You sent Jesus, so I will wait for You. I love You."

* From "The Supernatural Power of a Transformed Mind – 40 Day Devotional" Day 3 - by Bill Johnson. Editing by Craig Cooper.

* All verses from NIV unless noted otherwise.

Miracles of Guidance

Romans 8:14 in the King James Version says, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." When we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us, we can expect Him to lead and guide us in every circumstance. We are not left to figure everything out on our own but have the wonderful presence of the Spirit to shed light on our paths. Whenever we face decisions for which we need guidance, we can be assured that He will show us what to do and reveal to us what we need to know (John 16:13).

1. The ways in which the Holy Spirit leads are many and varied. Sometimes His ways seem ordinary and subtle, and other times He moves in obviously supernatural ways. But the way in which He speaks is always secondary to what He is actually speaking.

Questions: (1) What are some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit speaks that are so ordinary that we sometimes overlook them?

(2) Why is there a tendency for people to look for the flashier demonstrations of the Spirit's guidance? What is the danger in this?

(3) In your opinion, what is the most common way that the Spirit speaks?

2. Sometimes God does speak in truly miraculous ways. Scriptures tell of angelic visitations, visions of all kinds, supernatural voices, and miracle-working gifts. These kinds of things are not as frequent as the more ordinary ways in which God guides us but should not be ruled out or discredited as legitimate forms of guidance.

Questions: (1) What is the ultimate test for the validity of a supernatural occurrence? (It cannot contradict the Word of God in any way.)

(2) What are some other ways to guard against supernatural experiences that may not be from God?

3. Prayer and fasting is an excellent way to help ourselves hear from God. When these two spiritual tools are combined, supernatural power in the heavenlies is released to bring tremendous breakthroughs.

Questions: (1) Share a time when you used prayer and fasting and received a breakthrough concerning guidance in some area of your life.

(2) Is there a difference between "fasting" and simply "not eating"? Discuss.

(3) What is wrong with the often heard phrase, All we can do is pray? Why do you think we fail to grasp how truly powerful prayer is?

4. The inward witness is one of the most common ways that God guides us. It has often been compared to sensing a "red light" or a "green light" in our spirits. It is a sense that we should move forward or should not proceed in a certain situation.

Questions: (1) Have you ever ignored an inward witness and regretted the result? Share with the group.
(2) Have you ever obeyed an inward witness without understanding everything about it but later realized why God directed you in that way? Share with the group.

Group Leader: Pray for everyone to be more able to recognize the voice of the Spirit. Then pray for anyone who needs specific guidance in an area of life.

Father Is Looking For Those...Who Are Instant in Season*

How available are we for divine encounters? Each morning we ask the Lord to use us as His witness, and yet do we miss opportunities daily because...? We will consider several reasons. Just listen to this account of one who was...

INSTANT IN SEASON: I RECALL this story of one of God's servants who boarded a plane. He had just finished a very exhausting week and was looking forward to some quiet time relaxing during the flight. But God had other plans. In his row, the window seat was occupied by a (clearly) limited young lad and between them in the middle seat was an obviously successful businessman who immediately opened his laptop computer to do some work. They were hardly off the runway, when the young lad turned to the middle businessman and asked, "Sir, do you brush your teeth?" There was a moment of uncomfortable silence...until the man graciously answered, "Yes, I do...every morning...why do you ask?" "Well, your teeth will fall out if you don't," was the lad's quick response.

A few moments passed, and the next question came... "Do you fly in airplanes very much?" Though the businessman clearly disliked being interrupted, he again courteously replied, "Yes, I do fly every week." The boy seemed satisfied and waited several minutes before asking his next question, "Sir, do you go to church?" The question from the lad next to the window really needed an answer. So the man carefully answered, "Yes, I go to church sometimes, but may I ask why you are so interested?" The servant of God who had quietly listened to their conversation had not become involved, but he pondered what the lad's answer might be. Then it came—with much emphasis, "Well, it isn't enough to go to church, you really need to love Jesus. I hope you do...would you ask the man next to you if he loves Jesus?"

What a strained silence—and awkward moment—as the business man turned and whispered, "I think you had better do that." So the young lad leaned over to get the attention of the servant of God (who had overheard the entire episode with much delight)... "Sir, do you love Jesus?" The servant of God recognized his opportunity, so he was quick to respond, as his broad smile met the face of the businessman. "Yes, I do love Him—very much; in fact, He is my real purpose for living."

It was in that moment he realized God had maneuvered this divine encounter. Without hesitation, the businessman admitted that this unusual question was one he could not answer but that had really troubled him for months. For the next hour he opened his heart and the servant of God was keenly aware that God had placed him in the right seat at the right time. Not only were many deep questions answered, but that seeking businessman was urged to trust Christ as his personal Lord and Savior...without delay. Eternity will reveal what happened!

I am uncertain as to the further details of this encounter, but it serves to demonstrate: God will help us to fill the deep need in another—if we live expectantly—and quietly wait for Him to open doors. If you seek to be a God-pleaser more than a man-pleaser, God can arrange circumstances. Usually when we dare to follow the immediate impulse of the Holy Spirit we will be used by God; but if we start to analyze the situation or personal consequences we will squirm out of becoming available. I know—and have recognized later, that I missed an opportunity.

PONDER THIS PRINCIPLE: The eyes of the Lord look everywhere to find expectant, humble, willing vessels whom He can use. The good news is this: almost every day we discover how God is using folk to transform lives by their simple obedience.

GOD'S WORD IS CLEAR:

...be instant in season, out of season...do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry... (2 Tim. 4:2, 5 KJV).

We realize that Timothy was not an evangelist, yet Paul was encouraging him to be available for this work.

WE PRAY: Lord, would You please keep me in such intimate fellowship with You that I am expectant...that I will take the low place...that I am drawing from Your supply daily? Today I am praying that I will become totally available to You.

* From "*Father is Looking for Those - Fromke, DeVern*" by DeVern Fromke. Editing by Craig Cooper.

* All verses from NIV unless noted otherwise.

Presence of God (Part 1)

C.S. Lewis, "One definition of Hell is to sit in an endless church service without the Presence of God."

God is raising up a people who have a passion to see one thing happen! That one thing is the habitation of God on this planet. They are not living for an organization, person, or a program. They are living and committing their life to seeing the Trinity inhabit themselves, the church, and the earth. They are not addicted to media, food, drugs, or anything else but the presence of God. They are people who want God Himself more than anything else. They are becoming preoccupied with Jesus and not things. They are taking steps to do whatever it takes to meet God.

As a church our goal is to see the presence of God more than anything; more than filled pews, successful programs, and big budgets. The reason the church exists is to raise up people to be passionate lovers of God. This is a fulfillment of the first commandment.

Matt. 22:37-38, ³⁷Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment.

We are called temples in the Scripture because we are to be an inhabitation of God. We want to see the Spirit of God inside of us to get bigger and bigger in us.

1 Cor 3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

HOW DO WE GET HIS PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES?

1. His Presence Comes to Humble People

We have to be humble to be in His presence.

Ps. 25:14 The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.

1 Peter 5:6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Q – The Bible says we can humble ourselves in *1 Peter 5:5-6*. How do we humble ourselves?

Q – Why is pride such an enemy of God's presence in our lives?

2. Ask for His Presence

Most of the time God will not just show up. You have to ask Him to show up. Ask Him to be a part of whatever you are doing. When Jesus was baptized (*Matt. 3:16*) He was filled with the Holy Spirit. A physical sign of this was the dove that came and sat on Him. This is a good analogy of walking with the Holy Spirit. Each of you have the Holy Spirit inside of you when you became saved. The Holy Spirit is gentle like that dove. He is not loud and demonstrative. Picture a dove on your shoulder.

Q - How would you move differently if a dove was always on your shoulder?

We have to learn how to invite Him and flow with Him when He comes. In the Old Testament there were many instances of where God told the Israelites how to handle His presence. There were rules about how to go into the Holy of Holies where He was. David got a man killed because he moved wrongly in bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem. David's presumption was deadly! When the Israelites crossed the Jordan God gave them specific instructions on how to move and follow the Ark of the Covenant which represented the presence of God (*Joshua 3:3-4*).

Today you won't die if you mishandle His presence because of grace but His presence will leave. We need to learn how to discern His presence and then be still when He comes in. Listening to God usually starts small. But it will grow bigger if you listen. Go to your upper room and wait (*Acts 1:13*). Pray for His presence to fill you and your circumstances.

Q – What are some of the ways God speaks to us? (Quiet, still small voice – speaking to Elijah (*1 Kings 19:12*), Wind in Upper Room (*Acts 2:2*), Earthquake in Korah's Rebellion (*Numbers 16:31*))

Q – What are some ways that you have found to increase the presence of God? (Walk slow and close)

Presence of God (Part 2)

Review from last time: God is raising up a people who have a passion to see one thing happen! That one thing is the habitation of God on this planet. How do we get His presence?

- 1. His Presence Comes to Humble People**
- 2. Ask for His Presence In Everything You Do**

3. Simple Obedience

Simple obedience to the Holy Spirit with humility brings His presence. His presence can come at different intensities. Walk slow and close to the God head. Walk with quick simple unquestioning obedience and respect.

Q – Why is it generally easier to obey Him in the big things than it is in the little things?

4. His Presence Will Cost You

It will cost you respectability. His presence will cost you man's opinion and Christendom's opinion. You can't live in both God's presence and man's. When you ask for more of God that automatically makes you different than the status quo.

Romans 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

It is important to not be conformed to the world. The Bride must be totally in love with Jesus and nothing else.

Galatians 1:10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Q – What are some ways that we compromise in our walk with God to please others?

Q – What are some of the costs you have made to follow God's presence?

5. Listen to His Voice

Isaiah 55:1-3 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

Where does life come from? Come unto him and hear! He is saying listen carefully to me and eat what is good. Then your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Listening to His voice is the number one cure for anything we are dealing with! The true riches come from eating spiritual bread – words of life from Jesus.

Luke 14:15 When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

Matthew 4:4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Expect to converse with God everyday! It's your inheritance.

John 6:50-51 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Q - What is spiritual bread? What does this look like during a normal week?

Q – How do we practically converse with God everyday?

Q – How would you rank your ability to walk with God on a scale of 1-10? How can we improve that?

Passion for God (Part 1)

Rev 22:17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

Christianity is to be a passionate thing! We are the bride who is thirsty and won't settle for anything but the real water – Jesus! We have a dream here at Relationship Church of seeing a people who are focused on only one thing – the inhabitation of God on this planet! We want people to desire Jesus more than anything else.

Barriers To Passion:

1. Not Knowing Our Purpose

"Two of the greatest tragedies in the Christian life to me. First, Christians who wake up in the morning and don't live their day to shape the course of history. Second, is so many soldiers in the army of God who go to bed night after night with no blood on their swords." – Bill Johnson

Most Christians have nothing to live for besides coming to church and some low level ministerial job. Being a Christian the way God has designed us to operate is the most adventurous journey available! God wants to take us on a journey and show us awe inspiring things about Himself, the universe, the earth, and ourselves.

God wants you to make a deep impact. It is built into us to do something great that lasts. He wants you to have a life of meaning that is filled with relevance and significance. He wants you to make a contribution to the lives of those you care about. You were created to change history and your environment.

Eph. 2:10 (NASB) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Matt. 28:18-0 ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The good news is that this is a God given desire. Why? Because God is this way and we are created in His image (Gen. 1:26). He has made you to make a relevant impact in the lives of others. The great God created us with a pursuit of greatness deep within our emotional genetics. Remember, it was God who said to Adam to take dominion over the whole earth, subdue it, and multiply. This command is still valid – it was never nullified!

The devil doesn't want this to happen because this is how the Kingdom of God is advanced. He does whatever he can to distract you with the cares of the world. Ask God for Your PURPOSE, set your PRIORITIES, PURSE with PASSION, ignore PERSONAL rejections. There are many things we do in life that are "grunt" work and routine. But there needs to be something in life that "drives" us for God and family. Go to God and pray for the reason you are on planet earth at this moment. Ask God to give you *something that excites and motivates you!*

Q – If someone asked you what is your main purpose in life, what would you say?

Q – How do we go about finding our purpose to live?

Q – What are some examples of a purpose to live for?

Q – For those of you that God has asked you to do something how well are you doing in pursuing that goal? Are there things that are holding you back? How has the devil tried to distract you from achieving that goal?

Q – How do we stay focused on our purpose and manage non-essentials that constantly crop up in our lives? Regularly ask those who know us best if we are setting our priorities correctly. Constantly go before God and ask Him. We need to get "ruthless" with dropping those things that are helping us achieve our purpose.

Q – If someone disagrees with the way you are living your life, how do you deal with it? Do you tend to go along with them or is it easy for you to be a lone ranger?

Passion for God (Part 2)

Review from last time: Christianity is to be a passionate thing! We want people to desire Jesus more than anything else.

Barriers To Passion:

1. Not Knowing Our Purpose

2. Waste Your Life on Jesus

I want to challenge you to be wasted on Jesus. You are going to be wasted on something!

“If you live for self-preservation that is what you will get.” – Lou Engle

“Moving beyond convenience produces passion.” – Bill Johnson

Think about it? Who has the Godhead – the Holy Spirit – inside of them? You do. Is the Godhead inside of you so that He can be a loser? The Godhead is inside of you to destroy the works of the devil just like Jesus did.

1 John 3:8b ...The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

*Mark 16:17a And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons;...
Rev. 17:14 They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.”*

This verse shows that you were created to overcome! You are a part of the world changers from eternity. In Jesus, you married into indescribable wealth and power. As the church takes hold of the truth of who we really are as esteemed heirs of God's throne, then our lives will portray a divine inner strength and a fierce determination to be wholly His. The fun part is we are doing it with Him – our bridegroom. It is His show that He shares with us.

Rom. 8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

All of us want to be a part of something that we can pour our whole heart into and be passionate about. If we don't have something to die for then we don't have anything to live for.

3. Reverse Our Boring View of God

“Religion is a group of people working for God who don't enjoy it.” – Matt Peterson, Morningstar Ministries

There is a craving in every human being to be in awe of something – to be fascinated. This is why we love circuses, stunts, movies, science fiction, fantasy, etc. We are made to wonder about great and powerful things. Hollywood fills this God given desire with endless movies and TV shows.

One of the biggest lies of the devil that the Church has believed is that to be spiritual means you are boring. The exact opposite is true. God is showing us His Son Jesus in a new way. If He is our bridegroom then we ought to be fascinated with Him. These times are coming. God is leading us on a journey to show us what God is really like. He is letting us see Jesus as He is and not some dead religious icon representation.

Throughout church history most believers have not been fascinated by the Lord. They have simply gritted their teeth as they seek to avoid evil. However, a new anointing is being released worldwide to see the awesomeness and beauty of the Lord Jesus. God is answering our craving for awe and wonder by revealing to us the ultimate awe and wonder – the God man Jesus.

The reason many people go into sin is to answer a craving for adventure, stimulation, etc. But in the end the stimulation leaves us burned out and used up. But as we learn to see the Beauty of the Lord it will give us supernatural strength that goes on and on. We won't even desire to go into sin because it is an inferior pleasure compared with the beauty of God. In *Rev. 4:8*, the overwhelmed seraphim gazed on God and were stunned by what they saw. These *“burning ones”* cried out, *“Holy! Holy! Holy!”* Let's start crying out to see the beauty of the Lord and not accept any cheap substitution like Hollywood entertainment, video games, etc.

Q - What is your image of God?

Q - Have you ever thought about the Lord being something so beautiful that you are awestruck by it; Like a bridegroom is when he sees his Bride walk down the aisle? Pray that people see Jesus in His Beauty!

Purity for God (Part 1)

Read *Matthew 24:36-39*. In the end times it will be wicked like in the Days of Noah. But God is raising up a people like the 8 who went through the flood who are building an ark for people to run to. The Ark is the presence of God just like the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. They will be people of light who are equally pure to mirror those in the dark.

The Body of Jesus has been going through an intensive time of purity the last 3 years. He is cleansing us so that more of Him can flow through us. He is cleansing us so that we can truly be a Bride without Spot. He has been dealing with sin in our lives and areas of compromise.

We are in the middle of the Baptism of Fire. Fire in the Bible represents Purification!

Luke 3:16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. I But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

1 Peter 4:12 (NASB) ¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;

Hebrews 12:26-29 (NIV) ²⁶At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." ²⁷The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our "God is a consuming fire."

Q – What are some things the Lord has been shaking in your life? What are some things that have been purified in this time of burning?

Q – How does someone act when they are on fire and how can we compare it to our walk with God?

1 Corinthians 3:13-15 (KJV) ¹³Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. ¹⁴If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. ¹⁵If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

Remember Gideon's army that demolished the enemy. We all want to be a part of that army. Do you remember how it went through two "cuts" before the final number of people were chosen by God. We are going through tests and fiery trials now to become a part of that final army who will also be a beautiful righteous bride.

Zechariah 13:9 (NIV) ⁹This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'"

Count yourself worthy that you are being purged! You are His people and the Lord is your God!

2 Pet. 3:14 (NIV) ¹⁴So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

Read the story of Gideon in *Judges 7:1-8*.

Q – What are some lessons that we can learn from the battle preparation that was going on here? (Numbers are not the important thing for victory. Fear has to be dealt with. Motives have to be analyzed)

1 Thess. 5:6 (NIV) ⁶So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.

1 Pet. 4:7 (NIV) ⁷The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

Purity for God (Part 2)

God is raising up the NT equivalent of OT Nazirites! What is a Nazirite? (*Naz' uh rite*) Member of a class of individuals especially devoted to God. The Hebrew term means consecration, devotion, and separation. Two traditional forms of the Nazirite are found. One was based on a vow by the individual for a specific period; the other was a lifelong devotion following the revelatory experience of a parent which announced the impending birth of a child.

Numbers 6:1-6 ¹The LORD said to Moses, ²“Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of separation to the LORD as a Nazirite, ³he must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or from other fermented drink. He must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. ⁴As long as he is a Nazirite, he must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins. ⁵“During the entire period of his vow of separation no razor may be used on his head. He must be holy until the period of his separation to the LORD is over; he must let the hair of his head grow long. ⁶Throughout the period of his separation to the LORD he must not go near a dead body.

There were 3 people in Bible that we know of that were Nazirites: Samson (*Judges 13*), Samuel (*1 Samuel 1*), John the Baptist (*Luke 1:15-17*). Paul also took the Nazirite vow for a time (*Acts 18:18; 21:22-26*).

The Nazirite's 4 outward signs were 1. Do not cut your hair, 2. Abstain from wine and other alcoholic products, 3. Abstain from grapes and raisins, 4. Avoid contact with the dead. These 4 signs were an outward indication of their inward devotion to God. We can use these as a teaching lesson of the inward works that God wants to do in us in raising up Christians who are extremely devoted to God for great works. We do not need to follow the outward signs but take their principles and apply them to our lives.

4 Inward Signs of a Nazirite:

1. Do Not Cut Your Hair

This is symbolic that nothing in the world would touch him even down to cutting his hair. It was symbolic of keeping impure things away from him. “*He must be holy until the period of his separation to the LORD is over*”

2. Abstain From Wine and Other Alcoholic Products

As NT Nazirites we are to be committed to always being led by the Spirit of God and no other spirits. Just as someone drunk will be led by the influence of alcohol we are not to be led by anything else but the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5:15-19 (NLT) ¹⁵So be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. ¹⁶Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. ¹⁷Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do. ¹⁸Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you. ¹⁹Then you will sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, making music to the Lord in your hearts.

3. Abstain from Grapes and Raisins

In the OT grapes and raisins represented deserts and things sweet. They did not have the massive amount of sugar and deserts that we have available to us today. By abstaining from sweet things the NT Nazirite was saying that his sweetness was going to come from his intimacy with God.

Psa. 34:8 (NIV) Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

4. Avoid Contact With the Dead

Stay away from dead things! We are not talking about real dead things but anything that causes a slow death to your soul and body.

Philippians 4:8-9 (NLT) ⁸And now, dear brothers and sisters, let me say one more thing as I close this letter. Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. ⁹Keep putting into practice all you learned from me and heard from me and saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you.

Another Level of Praise (Psalm 149)

Some Bible translations title Psalm 149 “The Lord Delights in His People.” When we lift our hands and simply say His name, it is music to God’s ears. At the end of many of the psalms, we see the words *Praise the Lord!* It’s almost a command.

Seven Signs Of The Highest Praise

1. The Kind Of Praise With No Inhibitions (vv. 1–2)—Seven verses in Psalm 149 start with the word *let*. We must “let it out” when praise rises within us, or it will remain smothered and eventually go stale. Roosters have to crow, and believers have to praise!

2. The Kind Of Praise To Give The Lord Pleasure (v. 4)—We enjoy watching our children play and laugh. God enjoys watching us laugh in the Spirit, sing in the Spirit, and leap for joy. When we no longer care what others think about the way we praise, then we are truly giving God great pleasure.

3. The Kind Of Praise That Comes From Lowly Circumstances (v. 4)—It is easy to praise the Lord when we live comfortably, but to praise when our circumstances are bad is a sacrifice of praise. In Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas sang hymns while in jail. Job praised God even though he had lost everything (Job 1:21).

4. The Kind Of Praise That Is Intimate With God (v. 5)—Our bed is a place of meditation and quietness where the body is resting and the spirit is awake. It is also a place of intimate relationship. God seeks praise that is undisturbed, intimate, and focused.

5. The Kind Of Praise Directed To God Himself (v. 6)—High praise of God is directed at God Himself, extolling His attributes and virtues, not just intended to encourage ourselves or others. It is the kind of praise that brings angelic powers.

6. The Kind Of Praise That Includes Scripture (v. 6)—The two-edged sword is the Word of God. When we use the Word, our praise is reaching the ears of God, because the Holy Spirit wrote those words.

7. The Kind Of Praise That Recognizes Our Position Over The Enemy (vv. 7–9)—High praise is when we realize that we don’t have to fight with the devil. He is already defeated. As it says in *Psalm 2:4*, “*He who sits in the heavens laughs.*” He knows that the battle has already been won.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you praise without worrying about what people think? Are you concerned about how you look?
2. Are you able to praise through adversity, or do you moan and complain that God’s hand is no longer on you? Discuss how you reacted the last time a trial came into your life.
3. Do you include the Word when you pray and praise? Do you spend time alone with God giving Him praise, not just for what He has done in your life, but for who He is?

Another Level of Strength

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion. Psa. 84:5-7 (NIV)

When we are looking for a house to buy, we never look at the basement first. We should though! For without a firm foundation a house will soon crumble. It is the same with our Christian walk. In our Scripture reading, the psalmist sees people who are walking through the Valley of Baca, or *weeping*. We all go through times when our life seems shattered and we feel helpless. However, as in our psalm, if our strength is in God, our weeping will be turned into joy. Our earthly strength comes from a firm foundation, based on prayer and the Word. For every trial, there is a place of strength in Him.

Four Secrets Of Strength In Times Of Weakness

1. The Strength Of The Resurrection (Eph. 1:19–20)—In times of trial, when we feel exhausted and deserted, we must look to the resurrection. What a mighty power the Holy Spirit is, that He could infuse a dead body with life! We need only to meditate on the power of the resurrection to receive new strength. *“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies” (Rom. 8:11).*

2. The Strength Of Prayer (Eph. 3:13–16)—We must recharge our battery every day. Without the constant communion with God so necessary to everyday life, we weaken. Without our daily walk and talk with our Father, we lose the strength that comes from allowing the Holy Spirit to intercede and keeps us from trying to persevere in self. As Paul fell to his knees before God for the strength of the Holy Spirit, so must we, if we are to make it through our struggles. *“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength” (Isa. 40:29–31).*

3. The Strength Of Unity (Eph. 4:3-6)—We must always remember that each of us is an important part of the body. We can draw on the strength of our families and of our church family. The devil knows that if he can divide us one from the other, he can make us weak. Unity is strength. *“A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back to back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken” (Eccles. 4:12 NLT).*

4. The Strength Of Spiritual Warfare (Eph. 6:10)—Nothing frightens the devil more than the whole armor of God, because it's the very armor that God wears. If we put on the whole armor of God, no matter what the devil tries to throw our way, we will still be standing firm. Don't rely on natural weapons, but use your spiritual weapons for the full victory in every battle you fight!

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you do when you go through seasons of weeping? Do you sit down and take it, or do you firm up your foundation?
2. How much power do you believe it took for Christ to be resurrected? Do you believe that you also have access to that power?
3. How much time do you need to spend in prayer? Do you pray when times are hard, or do you war against the devil every day? Discuss the time you believe a person needs to devote to prayer. Discuss Eph. 6:10 and what it means to you.

Ministering To The Wounded

As we learned back in January, people around us are in bondage! *Gal. 4:2 (KJV)* ²*But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.* That bondage has caused many wounds in people. Today, God is calling for brave Christians to free people from their bondages and heal their wounds. We are a people that are learning how to answer that call!

1. Read Luke 10:25-37. In this parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus shows how two men who were ordained of God to love their neighbor “passed by on the other side” and ignored the need of a man in distress. The Samaritan, however, went out of his way to take care of the man. He exemplified true New Testament priesthood: finding wounds and ministering healing. What does this story teach us about the need to reach out to the hurting? What are some of the wounds you see around you in other people outside the church? How can we heal those wounds today?

2. *Jer. 6:14 (NIV)* *They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace.*

Jeremiah said that the priests dressed the wounds of the people in only a superficial way. How can we get below the surface to the real issues and pains people face in our church and workplace?

3. *Isa. 61:1-3 (NIV)* ¹ *The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, ²to proclaim the year of the LORD’S favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, ³and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.*

The Lord brings freedom and healing to those who are bruised. In this passage, what other things do we see the Lord doing for those in need?

4. In order to be a Good Samaritan, we must be willing to pay the price. How far should we go in reaching out to the hurting? Is there a limit? As we reach out to people with needs, what are some practical ways to help them?

Ministry

Before we can fully minister to others, we need to allow the Lord to heal our wounds. Invite those who are wounded to step forward and let the group pray for them. Be sure to give an opportunity for the lost to receive the Lord!

Wisdom with the Word – Part 1

What an amazing book! The Bible (Word) is a collection of 66 different books divided into two sections (Old and New Testaments) written by over 40 different authors over a span of 1,500 years in three different languages. Yet it presents a unified message of God's plan and purpose for humanity.

It contains history, poetry, humor, prophecy, romance, letters, biographies, songs, journals, advice, laws, and stories. It is an entire library of different kinds of literature. The Bible was also the first book ever printed on the printing press, it's the best selling book of all time, and portions have been translated into over 1,946 different languages. There are hundreds of manuscripts attesting to its authenticity.

WHY SHOULD I READ THE WORD?

1. It Sets You Free

John 8:31-32 ³¹To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³²Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

People all over the earth are in bondage and chains. These can range from physical chains to emotional chains. There are people who are in physical prisons and those who are in emotional prisons like addictions, abusive relationships, tormenting memories, etc.

The only thing that can set men totally free in their bodies and souls is the Word of God. As *John 8:31-32* says it is the teachings of Jesus that are the true truth and it His words that will set us free. How can that be?

The Word of God are not mere words like the words on this page you are reading. The Bible says that when we read them with the Holy Spirit as our guide they are *alive* and *powerful*. They are not mere words. They are the Words of our God.

Heb. 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

When we apply the Word to our life it sets us free like nothing else can!

2. It Changes You

What happens after we get freedom by applying the Word? We are changed! We become like the very words we are applying to our life. Since the words are God's words we are becoming like our Father God!

2 Tim. 3:16-17 ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

3. You Get to Know God

For those of you who are married, do you remember getting a letter or card from your spouse while you were dating? You were so excited to read what was written. Through that process you got to know the other person better. It is the same way with God. We get to know Him better by listening to His voice and reading His letters to us. His letters are the 66 books of the Bible. Read His letters and get to know Him.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is your biggest hindrance in reading the Word?
2. What are some ways that you have found to keep the reading of the Word from becoming boring?
3. What is one of the most powerful truths you have read that has set you free?

Wisdom with the Word – Part 2

HOW DO I READ THE WORD?

1. Read With The Holy Spirit

John 16:13 (NIV) ¹³But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

Don't read the Bible like any other book. It's not. It is the *living* Word of God. To activate the *living* part of the book you need to read it with the living Holy Spirit.

How do I do this? Before you start reading ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you as you read it. Tell Him that you want Him to be a partner with you. If you don't understand something when you read it ask the Holy Spirit for understanding. If you will talk to the Holy Spirit this way as you read the Bible it will come alive! Ask the Holy Spirit how does this verse apply to you? Why did He write this?

Eph. 1:17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

2. Treasure It

Prov. 2:1 (NAS) If you will...treasure my commandments within you...

Value the words spoken to you by the Bible and the Holy Spirit. Notice that it is the *treasuring* of commandments not the *accumulation* of commandments. Knowledge alone does help us. We have to apply the Word to our lives.

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

3. Be Consistent

Dan. 6:10 Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

You need a daily time with God. Schedule it. Follow it. Getting to know God is the goal of our life. Getting to know Him is just like any other relationship. It takes time. You have to learn each other's characteristics. Nothing can substitute for spending time with God. It can't be taught. You can't receive a relationship with God through the laying on of hands. You have to spend time with Him. Consistency will pay richly!

4. Meditate On It

Psa. 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

The best way for the Word of God to change your life is to read with the Holy Spirit, treasure it, and then meditate on it. Meditation means to think about the verse(s) over and over as you go through the day.

Meditation is a popular "new age" thing to do in our culture. But God's meditation is different than the common technique of meditation being taught. Popular meditation techniques have you to "empty" your minds and relax. It is a passive meditation technique. Biblical meditation is not passive. It is actually the exact opposite of today's pop teachings. Biblical meditation is active. Biblical meditation means you actively think about the verses and what they mean. As you do this you ask the Holy Spirit how these verses should be applied as you go through the day. When we do this the Word of God will not stay resident in our minds but start to move into our souls and affect all of our lives.

Josh. 1:8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is your favorite time of day to read the Word?
2. What is something that the Lord has showed you recently in your Bible study?

There is only one lesson for December. If your group meets twice this month plan a Christmas party for fellowship.