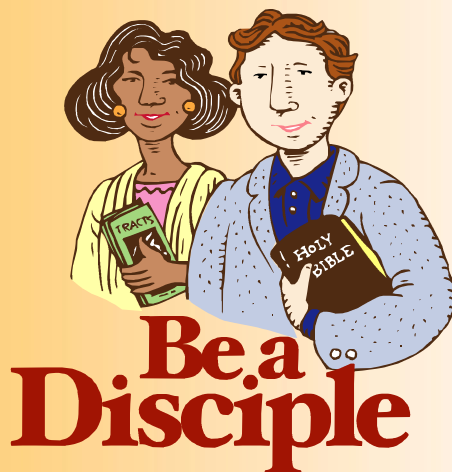

A Ministry for Equipping the Saints



Starting the Journey

Discipleship 101



Roger N. McNamara



Teacher's Edition



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Published by the Church Planting and Development Ministry Team
of
Baptist Mid-Missions, Cleveland, OH 44130-8011

Printed in the United States of America

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Since this introductory course is designed for new believers, perspective members, and people exploring the claims of Christ, this first lesson presents the plan of salvation in simple, understandable terms. The goal is to help people see and understand their need of a Savior and to bring them into a personal relationship with him if they have never trusted him for salvation.

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This second lesson deals with the changes that occur in people’s lives when they accept Christ as Savior, and the issues of assurance of salvation and baptism. It is important for people to understand that change and growth are normal parts of the Christian life, and that they need to take the first step of obedience to Christ as soon as possible after trusting Christ as Savior.

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This lesson deals with the believer’s struggle and inner conflict with sin. The battle with sinful desires sometimes intensifies rather than diminishes when a person gets saved. The indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit is described, and biblical counsel is given on how to live a life that is pleasing to God.

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Genuine salvation results in change that can be seen. There will be a new willingness to do what God wants us to do, and our speech and conduct will be altered. There will be a desire to use our gifts, talents, and skills to serve others and to tell them what Christ has done for us. This lesson will also teach people how to share “their story” effectively.

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The final class in this series gives a brief panoramic view of what has been covered in the first five weeks, and then poses a series of potentially life-changing questions each person must answer for himself. Knowledge demands a response. Having been exposed to some elementary truths from God’s Word, people must decide whether or not they will follow God’s way. The lesson also explores the next series of lessons that will be taught in the 102 classes.

Introduction

The heart of the Savior's Great Commission command in Matthew 28:18-20 is to "make disciples" from among all people groups. Discipleship, however, is more than a profession of faith. It is more than genuine conversion. It is more than church membership or church involvement.

Genuine, biblical discipleship is a life-long, progressive process in which people learn to "observe (do, live out) all things whatsoever I (Jesus) have commanded you." A disciple was a student of his master. He not only became familiar with what his master taught, but he followed him wherever he went, did whatever he was told to do, and in general took on the lifestyle, the values, and the habits of his master. Anyone watching or listening to the disciple could tell who his master was by what he said and did.

Many today claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, but their lives do not demonstrate this to be the case. In some cases, they may never have been born again. The bigger problem, however, is the lack of discipleship training in most churches. Even Bible-believing churches often fall short in the area of discipleship. Many have no plan, no process, and no program for moving people through the various stages of spiritual growth from conversion to growth to maturity to ministry.

Starting the Journey is an introductory series of six classes for new believers, perspective members, and people who want to explore the claims of Christ. It exposes them to some of the elementary truths of Scripture that anyone wanting to be a follower of Christ should know. It is NOT an in-depth Bible study on any of the subjects that are touched upon. The goal is to expose and to challenge people to the early stages of discipleship.

Starting the Journey is the beginning point to a four-level discipleship process. It is the entry point for anyone who comes to our church or who wants to know more about Christ and the Bible. Everyone who comes to our church will take this course regardless of whether they are saved or unsaved, a new believer or a mature believer, transferring from another church or a first-time church member. This is the entry point for each one.

We refer to these classes as our *101 Classes*. They are followed by our *102 Class* which consists of eight sessions that outline our philosophy of ministry and serve as our "get acquainted" or membership class. Together, the 101 and 102 Classes form the first level of our discipleship process. Our prayer is that you will be able to use these lessons to disciple others in your own ministry.

Your Servant in Christ,

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February 2009

Lesson # 1

God's Purpose for Your Life

Scripture Text: *For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption.* (Acts 13:36)

Welcome to Class 101. This is the first in a series of classes designed to help you understand WHO you are and WHY God has placed you here on earth.

Life's Journey

We are all on a journey through life from birth to death. At various times throughout that journey we find ourselves asking questions like these:

*Why am I here?
What am I supposed to be doing?
Is there a reason for me being here?
Is there a purpose and meaning to life?
Am I just a biological accident or a created being?
How can I know if there is a God, and how can I know him if he does exist?*

Life is like a continuum or a line along which we journey. We are all at different points on that continuum, but our journey either carries us closer to God or further away from him.

You may be a committed Christian who has served God faithfully for many years. Or you may be a brand-new believer who is just beginning to learn what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. For you, everything is new and exciting as you explore this new-found life.

Some of you may be still searching – looking for the answers to life. You're not quite sure if God exists or if there is meaning and purpose to life.

Regardless of where you are on life's continuum, we're glad to have you in this class. I hope by the time we get done, perhaps even today, you'll be convinced that God really does exist and that he has a purpose for your life. Even more than that, I hope you'll discover that purpose as we study together.

Finding Meaning

Let me begin by directing your attention to Acts 13:36. Look at what it says . . .

*For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep,
and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption.* (repeat)

Now that's a pretty straight forward verse. It is telling us that King David, the greatest king ever to sit upon the throne of Israel, experienced the same things that everyone does. He lived . . . he died . . . he was buried . . . and his body decomposed.

That pretty well sums up life, doesn't it? Life would be pretty meaningless if that was all there were to it. But notice the phrase in the beginning of the verse where it says . . .

After he had served his own generation by the will of God.

It says "he served his own generation BY THE WILL OF GOD." In other words, in serving his generation, David was fulfilling God's will or God's purpose for which he created him.

God had a purpose or a plan for David's life and he fulfilled that purpose by doing what God wanted him to do, and being what God wanted him to be.

That verse tells me God has a plan or purpose for my life, for your life, and for each of our lives.

In the time we have left, I want to explore FOUR things that will help you understand God's purpose or at least a major part of it, for your life.

The first thing I want to share with you is this:

You were born for a Purpose

Man is not a biological accident. He is not here as the result of random chance. Rather, the Bible teaches man was created by God in his own image, and that God had a purpose in doing so.

Created to Manage

First of all, man was created for the purpose of managing or supervising the earth. He is to be earth's caretaker. Look in your Bibles at Genesis 1:27,28 . . .

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him.
Male and female created he them.
And God blessed them, and God said unto them,
Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth and SUBDUE it;
and have DOMINION over the fish of the sea,
and over the fowl of the air,
and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*

God created man and placed him in a perfect environment with all kinds of plants, animals, and resources. Everything he would ever need was at his disposal. Many today would argue that we have not done a very good job of managing earth's resources, especially in the last hundred years. While that issue can be debated pro and con, the fact remains that man was born for a purpose, and part of that purpose was to manage and to enjoy earth's resources.

Created for Enjoyment

Second, man was created to live a happy, fulfilling life. God created man and placed him in a garden where everything he needed was close at hand. He wasn't there just to maintain and manage the garden, but to enjoy the fruits of his labor.

I Timothy 6:17 tells us God "giveth us richly all things to enjoy." The beauty of a sunset, the taste of warm apple pie melting in your mouth, the sense of satisfaction and fulfillment that comes with a job well done, the soft touch of a hand, these are all things that bring joy, happiness, and fulfillment to life.

Jesus Christ said in John 10:10 . . .

*I am come that they might have life,
and that they might have it more abundantly.*

We were created with the purpose that we might enjoy a happy, fulfilling, and purposeful existence while we are here on earth.

Created to be Loved

A third reason God created man was to love him. The Bible says that God is love (I John 4:8). Love is worthless unless you have something or someone on which to bestow it. You can love “things,” but they can’t love you back. You can love an animal, and while they can show affection, they can’t verbalize their feelings to us. Only a person can reciprocate love. In Jeremiah 31:3 God says . . .

Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.

The Bible is filled with verses that talk about God’s love for people. The best known verse in the Bible speaks of God’s love for us when it says . . .

*For God so LOVED the world that he gave his only begotten Son,
that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
(John 3:16)*

Scripture tells us God loves the world (John 3:16), God loves us (I John 4:11), and God loves me (Galatians 2:20).

Each of us was created as an object of God’s love. He created us that he might lavish his love upon us. That is part of the purpose for which we are here.

Created for Relationships

The fourth purpose for which God created man was that he might have a personal relationship with us. God is a relational being. He loves to interact with his creation, especially with the people he created. Genesis 3:8,9 tell us . . .

*And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden
in the cool of the day . . . and the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him,
Where art thou?*

Over and over in Scripture we find God seeking out man, pursuing him, reaching out to him, and seeking to establish a personal relationship with him. God loves to spend time in fellowship with his people. You were created to have a personal relationship with God.

So, the Bible tells us that we were born for the purpose of:

Managing the earth and its resources
Experiencing a happy, fulfilling and purposeful life
Being recipients of God’s love
Having a personal relationship with God

You were born with a Problem

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to know something is wrong. All you have to do is look around. It is pretty easy to see we are not doing a very good job of managing the earth and its resources, Most people are not living happy, purposeful lives, and relatively few people have a meaningful and personal relationship with God or feel loved by him.

The Problem

The problem isn't with the creation or the Creator. The problem is with us. Having been placed in charge of things, we want to run them our own way rather than by God's rule book. God created everything and determined how it should function. He is the Master Designer. He established natural laws and principles that govern how things should be done in order to function properly.

Man is born with an innate desire to control. He is naturally self-centered and often demands his own way. He is a rebel at heart. No sooner is he born than he begins asserting his will over everyone around him. When he is hungry, he wants fed. When he is wet, he wants changed. When he is fussy, he wants held. When he is sleepy, he is cranky.

It doesn't bother him in the least to kick, and scream, and cry until he gets his own way. He doesn't care what time of day or night it is, he doesn't care what anyone else is doing, he doesn't care how tired you are. He just wants his own way. Psalms 58:3 says . . .

They go astray as soon as they be born.

As we grow older, we become more civilized and more cultured, but we still have this same basic nature that says, "I want what I want when I want it." It is expressed in a variety of ways.

*Look out for Number One!
Do your own thing.
If it feels good, do it.
It's my life and I'll do what I please.
No one is going to tell me what to do.*

The Bible calls this attitude sin! Notice that the middle letter in "sin" is "I". Sin is an "I" problem. It is about doing things my way rather than God's way. It is choosing to be my own boss while ignoring God and what he says. Selfishness and self-centeredness lie at the heart of our problems.

The Universality of Sin

God's Word teaches that we all are infected with this virus of sin. It permeates every fabric of our being and influences everything we do. No one, other than Jesus Christ, is exempt from this problem. Listen to what the Bible says about the universality of sin.

Isaiah 53:6 says . . .

ALL we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned EVERY ONE to his own way.

Romans 3:10 tells us . . .

There is NONE righteous, no, not ONE.

And Romans 3:23 states . . .

*For ALL have sinned,
and come short of the glory of God.*

Sin is a universal problem that affects each one of us. Some people may deny they have a sin problem, but God answers that objection in First John 1:8 by saying . . .

*If we say that we have no sin,
we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

In others words, to deny the presence and impact of sin on our lives is to be dishonest with ourselves. We're not being truthful, either with ourselves or with others.

The Consequences of Sin

Actions have consequences. There is always a cause and effect to everything we do. Sin impacts our relationship with both people and God. The Bible teaches that sin builds a barrier between us and God making it impossible for us to have a personal relationship with him. A wall of separation lies between us. Isaiah 59:2 says . . .

*But your iniquities have SEPARATED between you and your God,
And your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear.*

Brick by brick, stone by stone, man has built a wall between himself and God that he cannot escape. Man is trapped in a prison of his own making. As a result, he is isolated and alone, unable to relate to God, unable to find God, and unable to fellowship with God.

Worse yet, he finds himself condemned as guilty of violating God's laws, and under the penalty of sin's judgment. Romans 6:23 declares that "*the wages of sin is death*" . . . not just physical death, but spiritual and eternal death in that awful place of separation called hell.

Trapped

Man is faced with a seemingly unsolvable dilemma. On the one hand, he insists on living life however he chooses, but this only leads to all kinds of negative consequences, broken relationships, unhappiness, and severe penalties. He is trapped in a maze of his own choosing with seemingly no way out.

Try as he will, man cannot change. He attempts to clean up his life, to change his habits, to undo some of the hurt of yesterday, but he finds himself falling right back into the same attitudes and actions. Jeremiah 13:23 asks the question . . .

*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?
Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.*

All of his efforts to reform, to garner God's favor fall short. He may get baptized, give generously to charity, get involved in helping those less fortunate than himself, but it is to no avail because the prophet Isaiah says . . .

*We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags;
and we all do fade as a leaf;
and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.
(Isaiah 64:6)*

All the good works in the world cannot deliver him. Man really is faced with a seemingly unsolvable problem. There appears to be no way out of his self-imposed dilemma.

Your were born with a Provision

I have some good news for you – as hopeless as man’s predicament appears, there is a way out – a means of escape.

One Way

That way is through Jesus Christ! In John 14:6 he declares . . .

*I am the way, the truth, and the life;
no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

Jesus didn’t say he was “a” way, but “the” way. There is only ONE way to escape sin’s penalty, and to have a personal relationship with God . . . and that is through Jesus Christ.

Church membership won’t do it.
Baptism won’t do it.
Good works won’t do it.
Giving to the poor won’t do it.
Turning over a new leaf won’t do it.
Becoming a better person won’t do it.

There are not many roads that lead to heaven. There is only ONE road that leads to heaven, and that road is Jesus Christ. Listen to what God’s Word says in Acts 4:12 . . .

*Neither is there salvation in ANY OTHER;
for there is NONE OTHER name under heaven given among men,
whereby we must be saved.*

There are not many options for dealing with sin. There is only ONE option, and that option is Jesus Christ.

Divine intervention

God himself took the initiative to make it possible for man to be restored to fellowship with him. He came to earth and became a man that he might pay man’s sin debt, and thus open a way for us to have a personal relationship with him.

God demonstrated his love for us by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, to pay our sin debt. Romans 5:8 says . . .

*But God commendeth (demonstrated) his love toward us, that,
while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

When Christ died on the cross, he didn’t die for his own sin, because as the Son of God he didn’t have any sin. When he died, he died for your sin, and for my sin. He paid the penalty for our sins because we couldn’t pay it ourselves. But in doing so, he made it possible for us to be delivered from the penalty of our sin. Romans 6:23 says . . .

*The wages of sin is death;
But the gift of God is eternal life THROUGH Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Jesus Christ became sin for us so we might become the righteousness of God in him (II Corinthians 5:21). He took all that belonged to us – our guilt, our sin, our wrongdoing, our self-righteousness, and nailed them all to the cross. In return, God offers us forgiveness, cleansing, a new relationship, an eternal inheritance, a home in heaven, and membership in his own family. You were born with a provision already made for you.

You were born with a Promise

There are three great words of promise with which you need to be familiar. They are:

Important Words

- 1) *Saved* – It means to be found, to be delivered or to be rescued from danger. In Luke 19:10 Jesus said . . .

For the Son of man is come to seek and to SAVE that which was lost.

The Bible teaches that you and I, along with everyone else, were lost in sin and separated from God, but Jesus Christ came into the world to seek out those who were lost in sin, and to rescue or save them from the penalty of their sin.

- 2) *Born Again* – It refers to a second or new birth, to being born a second time or to be born from above. Jesus said in John 3:3 . . .

Except a man be BORN AGAIN, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Just as we are born into the human family by means of a physical birth (1st birth), so we must be born into God's family by means of a spiritual birth (2nd birth).

- 3) *Regeneration* – It refers to being made alive again. It is to take that which is dead and restore it to life by infusing new life into it. Titus 3:5 tells us . . .

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of REGENERATION, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.

The moment a person believes in Jesus Christ as his/her personal Savior, the Holy Spirit of God comes and infuses new life, spiritual life into that person and they become alive unto God for the first time.

What must I do?

The question naturally arises, how does one go about experiencing this new birth that results in a person being saved? How can he be made alive again? The Bible teaches there are four things a person must do to be saved. Here they are:

- 1) There must be an admittance of your need of a Savior.

God cannot help us until we agree that we need help. He cannot save us until we admit that we are lost and need to be rescued. As long as we think we are o.k. and can make it on our own, we will not endorse God's assessment of us – that we are lost in sin and need to be rescued.

This admission of a need to be saved involves a change of heart and mind on our part. It requires taking an honest look at ourselves and coming to the conclusion that we have sinned against God, that we are sinners, and that we cannot live up to his standards in our own strength. The Bible refers to this as “repentance.” In Luke 13:3 Jesus said . . .

I tell you, Nay; but, except ye REPENT, ye shall all likewise perish.

Repentance involves not only a change of mind concerning our situation, but also an acknowledgement to God of our sinful behavior. The Bible refers to this as “confession.” It simply means to agree with God concerning our actions – that they are often selfish, self-centered, and sinful. First John 1:9 says . . .

*If we CONFESS our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

2) There must be an acknowledgement of who Jesus is (Lord) coupled with faith that he died to pay the penalty for our sins, and that he rose from the dead and is alive today.

The Bible repeatedly teaches that Jesus Christ took upon himself the responsibility for our sins, and bore the penalty for those sins when he was crucified upon the cross. He was there as our substitute. He died in our place, and paid the price for our sins (II Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 1:4; Isaiah 53:5).

Although Christ died and was laid in a tomb following his death, he did not remain dead. The Word of God teaches that God raised him from the dead on the third day. He now sits at the right hand of God the Father interceding for us. To be saved, a person must believe that Jesus Christ is God in human form (Lord), that he died for our sins, AND is alive today. Romans 10:9 says . . .

*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus,
and shalt BELIEVE in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead,
thou shalt be saved.*

To “believe” means more than to agree or assent to something being true. It is to actually trust, rely upon or depend entirely upon that which you believe. We can all agree that a chair is strong enough to support us, but until we sit on the chair we have not believed or trusted in it.

To “believe in Jesus” involves accepting the fact that Jesus died for our sins and rose again. It is putting our faith and trust in what he did and relying upon that for our eternal destiny.

3) There must be an opening of the heart and a reception of Jesus Christ as the CEO (Lord) of your life.

Jesus Christ has done everything necessary to provide salvation for us, and now he searches for people who are willing to invite him to come into their hearts and to take charge of their lives. In Revelation 3:20 he says . . .

*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock;
if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him.*

Jesus is willing to come into your life, if you will just invite him to do so. He doesn't force his way in. He waits for us to open the door and invite him in, and when we do that, he enters our lives bringing forgiveness, salvation, restoration to God, entrance into God's family, and eternal life.

In John 1:12 we are told that . . .

*As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God,
even to them that believe on his name.*

So, in order to be born again and to become a child of God there must be repentance and confession of your sin to God. You must believe that Jesus Christ is God, and that he died for your sin and rose again from the dead. There must also be an invitation for Christ to come into your life as your Lord and Savior. But that is not all . . .

4) There must be an acceptance of God's free gift of salvation.

Salvation, eternal life, and being born again are all free. They are not things we can accomplish on our own. We do not merit them nor can we earn them. They are based entirely on God's grace. Salvation is entirely a work of God. It is his gift to those who place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ and his finished work on the cross of Calvary. All we can do is receive or accept it.

Romans 6:23 highlights the fact that eternal life is a gift when it says . . .

*For the wages of sin is death; but the GIFT of God is eternal life
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Ephesians 2:8,9 reinforces the idea that salvation is a free gift based on God's grace in these words . . .

*For by GRACE are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves;
it is the GIFT of God;
Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

There are only two things that can be done when a gift is offered to you. You can either accept it or reject it. You may believe in Jesus, and that he died for your sins on the cross, but if you have never received him into your life, you are not saved and do not have a personal relationship with God.

Until you open the door of your life to Christ and invite him to come in and take control, you have not been born again and do not have eternal life. You can agree with all the biblical facts concerning the Savior, sin, and salvation, but until you invite him into your life, nothing has really changed.

Invitation

I'm going to ask that we bow our heads for a moment, please.

The good news is that we can receive Christ as our Savior at any time, including right now. If you have never invited Jesus Christ into your life as your personal Savior, you can do it right now by praying a simple prayer of commitment to God like this one:

*Lord Jesus, thank you for making me for a purpose and loving me.
I acknowledge that I have ignored you and gone my own way.
I now realize I need you in my life.
I am sorry for all my sin. I ask you to forgive me.*

*Thank you for dying on the cross for me.
Please come into my life and make me into a new person.
I accept your gift of salvation and want you to be in control of my life.
Please help me to grow now as a new Christian.
This I pray in Jesus' name,
Amen.*

Lesson #2

All Things New

Scripture Text – *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.* (II Corinthians 5:17)

Welcome back to our second session of Class 101.

Last time we saw that God has a **PURPOSE** for our lives. There is a reason why we are here. Does anyone remember the three reasons why God created people and placed them here on earth?

That's right. Human beings were created to **MANAGE** God's creation and everything in it. Second, we were created to **ENJOY LIFE** – to live it more abundantly. Then, we were created to **LOVE** and to be **LOVED**. And finally, we were created for **RELATIONSHIPS** – God created man with the capacity to know and to relate both to **HIM** and to those around us.

It doesn't take long to discover that something is very wrong with this whole scenario. Things aren't working out the way they were supposed to. There is a huge problem that has gummed up the whole works. Who can tell me what that problem is?

That's right. It is **SIN**. Rather than obeying God and enjoying the life God intended us to have, we have all gone our own way to do whatever we want to do. We don't like to have anyone, including God, telling us what to do or how to live our lives.

That rebellious attitude brings us into conflict with God and results in us incurring a penalty we can never fully pay – namely **DEATH** and separation from God forever.

God, however, has made a **PROVISION** for us. He sent his Son, Jesus Christ to pay our penalty by dying on the cross. He became sin for us so that we could be right with God.

God promises to save and forgive anyone who will do four things. Do you remember what they were?

- 1) **ADMIT** their sinfulness to themselves and to God
- 2) **ACKNOWLEDGE** that Jesus Christ is God and that he died for their sins and rose again the third day
- 3) **INVITE** Christ in to take control of their lives
- 4) **ACCEPT** salvation as a free gift

The Bible tells us that when a person does those four things everything changes. Everything becomes new. That's where we want to spend our time today – exploring some of the new things that come from trusting Christ as our Savior.

A New Creation

If you open your Bible to II Corinthians 5:17 you'll find this amazing statement. It says . . .

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a NEW CREATURE;
old things are passed away;
behold, all things are become new.*

A New Person

The verse above is telling us that when a person receives Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior, that person undergoes a spiritual transformation that results in him becoming a new creature or a new creation.

Jesus referred to this as being “born again” or as a new birth. It is a spiritual birth by which we become members of God’s family (John 1:5,6). Second Peter 1:4 tells us that we are made “partakers of the divine nature.”

When we were born into our parents’ family we received a sinful human nature from them. In the same way, we receive a spiritual divine nature from our heavenly Father when we are born again into his family.

As a result, we have two natures: One is sinful, selfish, and self-centered. That is our human nature. The other one seeks to please God and serve others. That is our divine nature. You’ll find that these two natures will often be in conflict with each other. Each will seek to dominate and control your life.

The point I want to make here, however, is that because you have trusted Christ as Savior, you are a NEW PERSON! You are not the person you used to be. You are now a new creature or a new creation belonging to God.

Trusting Christ as Savior results in . . .

- A new creation
- A new life
- A new relationship
- A new reality (sin forgiven)
- A new destiny (heaven)
- A new inheritance
- A new companion (the Holy Spirit)

You are not the person you used to be. You are now “in Christ.” You are going to find a lot of changes will start to happen or are already happening in your life. You have started on a journey that God intends to use to conform you to the image of his Son, the Lord Jesus (Romans 8:28,29).

You’ll find that change is in the wind. Your habits will begin to change. Your priorities will change. Your relationships and friendships will change. Your values and your perspective will change. You’ll begin to value more the things God values as you look at life from God’s perspective.

New Priorities

Notice our text says “old things are passed away” or “are passing away.” Things that were important to you before won’t seem nearly as important now and things that you didn’t value previously will take on greater importance to you.

Before people get saved, their priorities center around making money, being secure, having fun, drinking with their buddies, and doing things that please themselves.

But when a person is truly born again, many of those things begin to lose their importance and are replaced with a new desire to know God better and to please him.

Colossians 1:10 says . . .

*That ye might WALK WORTHY of the Lord unto all PLEASING,
being fruitful in every good work,
and increasing in the knowledge of God.*

The Apostle Paul expressed it this way in First Thessalonians 2:4 . . .

*But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel,
even so we speak; not as PLEASING men, but God.*

As you grow spiritually, you'll find that PLEASING GOD will become more and more important in your life.

You won't be able to explain it perhaps, but you'll find yourself picking up a Bible and beginning to read it whereas you seldom did that before. You'll discover a lot of your old friends dropping by the wayside and new ones, Christians, taking their place. You'll find some of the things you used to enjoy will lose their attraction.

Things that you wouldn't have been caught dead doing before, you'll now find yourself wanting to do. Things like going to church, reading the Bible, spending time in prayer or even talking to people about God and the changes he has made in your life.

Even the way you view and handle money will change. You may not be able to explain it, but since becoming a new PERSON in Christ your PRIORITIES are becoming new as well. In reality, that's not really surprising because everything changes when Christ comes into our lives.

New Practices

Habits are simply learned responses. They are fixed ways of doing things. We feel comfortable with them because we are accustomed to them. When most people get saved, they find a lot of their habits begin to change and are replaced with a whole new set of practices.

That's not surprising because our text tells us that "old things are passed away; behold all things are become NEW."

I don't have any idea what habits may need to change in your life. The list of possibilities is almost endless. Everything from anger, to bitterness, lying, cheating, stealing, lusting, impure thinking, pornography, drinking, drugs, swearing, pride, fear, infidelity, compulsive behavior, and a whole lot more.

Hatred will be replaced by love. Selfishness and self-centeredness will be replaced with concern and compassion for others. Meanness will be replaced by kindness. Getting will be replaced by giving. Stinginess will be replaced with generosity.

When Christ comes into a life, he changes the person, his priorities, and his practices. If someone professes to receive Christ and his life doesn't change . . . he probably is not telling the truth because a changed life is one of the clearest indicators that a person has truly been born again.

A New Confidence

Being born again is the greatest experience that can ever happen to a person. There is often a sense of release. A burden of guilt is lifted from our backs. There is a new sense of joy because everything is right between us and God. Life takes on new meaning. It is a joyful, happy experience when we are cleansed from our sins.

It doesn't take long, however, before doubts, fears, and questions begin to flood the mind. In Mark 4, Jesus taught that Satan soon comes to snatch away the word that was sown in people's hearts. Doubts arise and we begin to question what we have done – "Does this really work?" "Can I know for certain that I'm saved?" "How can I be sure?" "What will happen if I sin?"

These questions are not unusual at all. Most believers will have them. It is natural to wonder if so great an issue as our eternal salvation can be settled by merely putting our trust in Christ. Be assured, however, that it does work and that you can be confident your sins have been forgiven.

The Witness of Scripture

First John 5:13 says . . . "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may KNOW that ye have eternal life."

John was writing to new believers. He referred to them as "my little children" (2:1; 3:18). He said the purpose of his writing was that they might KNOW that they had eternal life. He wanted them to be assured of their salvation. He wanted them to be confident they were saved. He wanted to remove any doubts about their salvation from their minds. He wanted them to have a "know-so" salvation.

What did he do in order to give them this confidence? He wrote "these things" – the book of First John, to give them assurance of their salvation. He outlined in this portion of Scripture several things they could use to evaluate whether or not they were saved.

First, there would be an openness and a willingness to acknowledge and confess sin (1:9). Second, there would be a desire and an effort to keep the commandments of Christ (2:5). Third, there would be a love for other believers and a desire to be with them (2:10,11,19). Fourth, there would be a purifying of the believer's life as sinful habits were replaced by godly habits (3:3,9). Fifth, there would be a willingness to share their goods with others who are less fortunate than themselves (3:16-19). Sixth, there would be willingness to publicly confess Christ as Savior (4:13-15).

We often fall short in exemplifying all of these markers consistently. But there should be a desire and effort to have these traits in our lives. An unsaved person will seldom exhibit these qualities and will have little concern about them.

Our salvation must be based on Scripture and what God says rather than on our inconsistent behavior. His Word is his promise. He tells us that if we will do certain things, then he will do certain other things.

Look at John 1:12. What does the verse say God will do if we believe on Christ and receive him into our lives? It says he will give us "the power (authority) to become the SONS (children) OF GOD." In John 3:16, what does Jesus say a person will have if he believes on God's only begotten Son (Jesus)? He says

he will have ETERNAL LIFE. In John 5:24, what does Jesus say a person who believes on him has? He says he has EVERLASTING LIFE and is passed from DEATH unto LIFE.

In John 10:28, what does Jesus say people have who follow him? He says they have ETERNAL LIFE and will NEVER PERISH. They are safe and secure in the hand of Christ and no one can pry them lose from his hand. In Acts 16:31, what does Paul say will happen to those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? He says they will be SAVED. In Romans 10:9, what are we told will happen to the person who confesses Jesus as Lord and believes in his heart that God raised him from the dead? He says that person will be SAVED.

God's Word gives us the assurance that we are saved. Because God is God and cannot lie, we can be confident that he will keep his promises to save us when we trust in Christ. The very fact he promises us ETERNAL LIFE and EVERLASTING LIFE should give us confidence. If the life he gives us is "eternal," then it is unending. It can never end or be taken back. Otherwise, it wouldn't be eternal.

Not only do we have the witness of Scripture, but we also have . . .

The Witness of the Spirit

When a person receives Jesus Christ as Savior, the Holy Spirit of God comes and regenerates him, and makes him alive unto God (Titus 3:5). The Spirit of God is the active agent in our salvation. He "births" us and imparts the "divine nature" to us (II Peter 1:4). Then he takes up his residence in us and seeks to assure us that we are now the children of God.

In First John 3:24 we are told that we can "know that he (God) abideth in us BY THE SPIRIT which he hath given us." He reiterates this in the next chapter when he says, "Hereby KNOW WE that we dwell in him, and he is us, because he hath GIVEN US OF HIS SPIRIT." Romans 8:16 tells us that "the Spirit itself BEARETH WITNESS with our spirit, that WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF GOD."

God wants us to be confident that we are saved and so he sent us the Holy Spirit to dwell within us to constantly reassure us that we belong to God. This "witness" of the Spirit often results in a quiet, inner peace and security that God has saved us because we have trusted in his Son, the Lord Jesus. The doubts dissipate when we listen to the Holy Spirit and believe God's Word.

The Witness of Self

Look at Second Corinthians 5:17 again and notice what it says . . .

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a NEW CREATURE;
old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

That verse tells us that if we are "in Christ" – if we have professed Christ as Savior, then we are NEW CREATURES – new creations of God. "Old things" such as sinful habits, desires, and practices are going to pass away and will be replaced by new habits.

First John 3:9 tells us that "whosoever is born of God doeth not commit sin." That verse bothers many believers until they discover the word "commit" is a present tense verb indicating habitual or repeated action. It could be translated, "does not habitually sin." Believers will still sin on occasion, but the sinful habits that held them in bondage before will soon be broken.

A changed life is one of the clearest evidences of a saved life. When Christ comes into a person's life, his life will change. If it doesn't, then he hasn't gotten saved. Some people will change more than others and some will change quicker than others, but they will all change.

Take a moment to list some of the changes that have occurred in your life since you trusted Christ. Then list some of the things that still need to change in your life.

A person who is born again will have a desire for the Word of God. First Peter 2:2 says . . .

*As newborn babes, DESIRE the sincere MILK OF THE WORD,
that ye may grow thereby.*

Babies are born hungry. They are ready for nourishment as soon as they arrive. The same is true of new believers. They will have a hunger for the Word of God. They want to know more about him and what he expects of them. Sometimes they will sit and read the Bible for extended periods of time. They just can't get enough of it. That hunger to know the Bible is another indicator that the person has been saved.

Another factor that gives us confidence that we are saved is a desire to obey and serve God. When Saul of Tarsus encountered the risen Savior on the road to Damascus and was converted, the first thing he said was, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

He wanted to serve Christ and do whatever he might want him to do. He wanted to be obedient to his commands. He sought out other believers and began to congregare with them. He listened and asked questions. He wanted to learn as much as he could about this new life in Christ he was experiencing.

Then he began telling others about how Christ had changed his life and what he could do for them. He shared his testimony with people who were unsaved. He eventually became a skilled teacher, writer, missionary, and church planter. His life had been transformed by his new-found relationship with Christ, and as a result he had a desire to serve in whatever opportunities God opened to him.

So, we can be confident our sins are forgiven and we are saved by taking God at his Word and believing the promises found in the Bible. We can be sure we are saved by listening to the inner witness of the Spirit. We can know we're saved because of a new-found love for other believers, a desire to serve the Lord, and a willingness to share our faith with others. The changes God has wrought in our lives serve as evidence that we are saved.

Before we move on to the next point, let me deal with . . .

The Issue of Sin

Being saved is not the same as being sinless. We still possess a sinful, human nature and we still commit sin even though we have professed Christ as Savior.

Galatians 5:17 tells us . . . "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

Once a person gets saved, there is a life-long battle that ensues between our old and new natures – between our sinful nature and our divine nature. The Bible refers to our old nature as "the flesh." All the old desires are still there and they will seek to reassert themselves.

Sinful desires will still surface. A flash of anger, an impure thought, and evil desire will spring to the forefront when we least expect it.

Contrary to what we may think or feel, God doesn't kick us out of the family when we disobey him and sin against him. You wouldn't do that to your own children and God doesn't do it to his children.

Sin hinders our fellowship with God, but it does not sever our relationship with him. Having been born into his family, we are still his children even when we disobey him. God has already made provision for our sin. Christ has already paid the penalty for it.

Because he loves us, God will often chasten or discipline us like children when we disobey him. He knows that to allow us to go on in our sin will lead to more sin, and to greater heartache. So he chastens us to show us the seriousness of our sin and to cause us to repent or change our minds about our behavior. We need to be sorry for our sin and to see it as rebellion and disobedience to him. And when we do, we are invited to come into his presence to confess or acknowledge our sinful behavior to him, and seek his forgiveness.

First John 1:9 says . . .

*If we CONFESS our sins, he is faithful and just to FORGIVE us our sins,
and to CLEANSE us from all unrighteousness.*

Confession wipes the slate clean and restores our fellowship with God once again.

A New Compliance

Becoming a follower of Jesus Christ changes everything. We no longer belong to ourselves, but to him. He is not only our Savior, but he is also our Lord and Master – the CEO of our lives. When we invite him into our lives we are giving him control of our lives and committing ourselves to live in obedience to his commands.

The reason we do that is because we love him. Jesus says simply, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

The Pronouncement concerning Baptism

The best-known command of Jesus is found in Matthew 28:19,20. Look at what it says . . .

*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, BAPTIZING them
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:
teaching them to OBSERVE all things whatsoever I have COMMANDED you.*

There are three aspects of his command found here:

- 1) To go and “teach” or make disciples from all nations – We are to seek to win people to faith in Christ.
- 2) To “baptize” those we win to Christ.
- 3) To teach them to “observe” or live in obedience to everything Christ taught.

Jesus commanded that his followers publicly identify with him by being baptized. Baptism is an act of obedience to Christ's command motivated by our love for him and our desire to please him.

Over and over in Scripture you'll find that when people got saved, the first thing they did was to be baptized in obedience to God's command (see Acts 2:41; 8:12; 8:38; 9:18; 18:8). Baptism is the first step of obedience for new believers. You cannot be an obedient Christian without getting baptized following your conversion to Christ.

The Prerequisite for Baptism

In Scripture, the only requirements for baptism were a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ and a willingness to live in obedience to him. People who were not saved had no desire to be baptized and did not want to be identified with Christ. Only those who believed in him and who had become his followers were baptized.

In Acts 2:42, it was those who "received his word" – those who believed what Peter preached to them about Christ, that were baptized. In Acts 8:12, it was those who "BELIEVED Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ" that were baptized. In Acts 8:36,37, the Ethiopian eunuch was not allowed to be baptized until he declared his faith in Christ by saying, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." In Acts 18:8, Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue in Corinth "BELIEVED on the Lord with all his house, and many of the Corinthians hearing BELIEVED, and were baptized."

Baptism is often referred to as "believer's baptism" because only believers should be baptized. Parents sometimes want their young children and babies baptized. Often, this is based on a false understanding of baptism. Baptism cannot take away sin. Only the blood of Christ and faith in Christ can do that. Babies and young children who are not believers should not be baptized until they are old enough to trust Christ for themselves.

The Practice of Baptism

There is only one form of baptism used in the Bible. The word "baptism" comes from the Greek word "baptizo" which means to dip, to submerge or to place beneath. It was used in ancient times to describe a ship that sank beneath the waves.

Immersion involves dipping or submerging a person entirely under water just as is described by the word "baptized." Scripture describes the person being baptized as "going down into the water" and "coming up out of the water."

For example, when Jesus was baptized it says that "he WENT UP straightway OUT OF the water" (Matthew 3:16). In Acts 8:38,39 we read that Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch "WENT DOWN both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were COME UP OUT of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip." In John 3:23 we are told that John the Baptist baptized near the town of Salim "because there was MUCH WATER there."

Sprinkling, pouring, and anointing are not biblical forms of baptism and do not meet the biblical criteria. Any believer who has been "baptized" in this manner has not been biblically baptized and needs to submit himself or herself to believer's baptism. The mode of baptism is very important because of what it pictures . . .

The Picture of Baptism

Baptism does not wash away sin nor does it have any saving merit. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. Baptism is the initial act of obedience by new believers in which they identify themselves

as followers of Jesus Christ. Baptism pictures the believer's union with Christ in his death, his burial, and his resurrection. Romans 6:3,4 says . . .

*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ
were baptized into his DEATH? Therefore we are BURIED with him by baptism
into death; that like as Christ was RAISED up from the dead by the glory of the Father,
even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

As the believer stands in the water he is identifying with Christ's death on the cross on his behalf. As the individual is submerged into the water he is identifying with Christ's burial, and when he is raised up from beneath the water he is identifying with Christ's resurrection to new life.



Only immersion portrays this picture of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, and the believer's acceptance of it on his behalf.

The Period of Baptism

The question of when a person should be baptized is fairly easy to answer. First, a person should be baptized only after receiving Jesus Christ as his/her Lord and Savior. Baptism is a picture of the believer's union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. For this reason, only those who have put their faith and trust in Christ are eligible to be baptized. If a person has not yet accepted Christ as Savior, he cannot personally identify with Christ and his finished work because he has not yet appropriated it for himself by receiving Christ as Savior.

Second, believers should be baptized as soon as possible following their acceptance of Christ as their personal Savior. In Acts 2:41, those who believed Peter's preaching concerning Christ on the day of Pentecost were baptized the same day they believed, and were added unto the church. In Acts 8:36-38, the Ethiopian eunuch stopped right where he was (along a desert highway), and was baptized in a stream along side the road. He was baptized within minutes of being saved. In Acts 16:30-33, the Philippian jailer and his family were baptized the same night they trusted Christ as Savior.

In Scripture, there was no prolonged period of instruction or waiting to prove oneself before being baptized. People were baptized upon their profession of faith in Christ. Further instruction would take place within the discipling context outlined by the Savior in his Great Commission command to teach them to do everything he had commanded.

There are some situations in which a person may not be able to be baptized immediately. One such example is found in Acts 9:28 where Saul of Tarsus had to wait three days before being baptized after being temporarily blinded on the road to Damascus. But as soon as he was physically able, he took the first step of obedience to Christ and was baptized. There are times when people may be sick, incapacitated, incarcerated or in a location where it is not possible to be baptized. While their baptism may temporarily be delayed, they should seek to be baptized as soon as possible when their situation improves.

The Precedent of Baptism

In Acts 2:41, those who were baptized upon their confession of faith in Christ also “were added unto them.” The word “them” refers to the body of believers that comprised the newly formed church in their community. They not only identified with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection by being baptized, but they also united with the local church which baptized them.

Baptism is a church ordinance which is administered by the local church. The implication of verse 41 is that those who gladly embraced Peter’s preaching concerning Christ were baptized, and then the same day they were added to the church. Believer’s baptism and church membership, while distinct and separate acts, are closely associated in Scripture. There is no indication that any of those who were baptized were not also added unto the church. Scripture takes a dim view of believers not being associated with and accountable to a local assembly of believers after their baptism.

Many churches, following the precedent of Acts 2:41, also vote to take new believers into membership upon their baptism. These are two separate acts even though the church may authorize both actions in a single motion. The individual never needs to be baptized again, but may unite with several different churches throughout his lifetime as he moves from one location to another.

Salvation is a wonderful experience that results in our becoming new creatures in Christ. We gain a new confidence knowing that we are saved from the penalty of our sins, and we exhibit a willing compliance to obey God and to be identified with Christ and his followers through baptism and church membership. Nothing can top that.

Lesson # 3

Trouble in the Heartland

Scripture Text: *For that which I do I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.*
(Romans 7:15)

Hello once again and welcome back to our third session of Class 101.

The Christian life is a wonderful life. It is a life of purpose, meaning, and fulfillment. In Christ, we discover we were created to manage the environment in which we live. We were created to enjoy life's pleasures. We were created to love and be loved, and we were created to have rewarding relationships with God and those around us.

Not only that, but when we acknowledge our sinfulness to God, and put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ and his finished work on the cross, and receive him into our lives as our Lord and Savior, everything becomes new.

We become new creatures. We have a new life, a new relationship, and standing with God. We have a new destiny. We get a new family of believers. We get new values and a whole new perspective on life.

We soon discover we have a new confidence based on the Word of God that our sins are forgiven and we will go to heaven when we die. There is a new desire to obey God and to identify with his death, burial, and resurrection through baptism.

Being a Christian really is a new way of living, but it doesn't take long to discover that there are some problems in the heartland – especially in OUR hearts.

Turn in your Bibles and look at what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 7:14-20 . . . (read).

Notice in verse 15 he says . . .

*For that which I do I allow not; for what I would that do I not;
but what I hate, that do I.*

And again in verse 19 he says . . .

*For the good that I would I do not;
but the evil which I would not, that I do.*

Even though Paul was a strong Christian he soon discovered that many of the desires and habits of his former life were still present with him. At times, when he tried to do right, he did wrong. When he determined not to engage in some sinful habit, he sometimes ended up doing it any way.

Instead of his problems being over, they seemed to multiply and he found himself embroiled in an almost constant internal, and occasionally external, battle to please God and to live the new Christian life he had embraced. Sound familiar? It should because we all experience it. I call it “Trouble in the Heartland.” Let’s see what’s going on here.

The Conflict Within

The Struggle

The Christian life is a battlefield. No sooner do we accept Christ as Savior than we find ourselves embroiled in a battle with conflicting desires and wants on the inside, and new temptations to do wrong on the outside.

Behaviors, such as anger, resentfulness, lying, selfishness, impure thinking, and many other things that we thought would be gone are still with us. I want to obey and serve God, but I end up still doing things that I know displease God.

Paul said in our text in verse 18 that the *will (to do right) is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not*. Talk about frustration, he experienced the same conflicts, the same struggles, and the same problems we experience.

You can be in the middle of prayer and all of a sudden the most sinful, lustful thought will flash across your mind. You can be minding your business as you walk through a mall and suddenly your attention is drawn to scantily clad woman walking by. You can be preparing supper and without warning a hateful memory will surface out of nowhere.

Habits you thought you had conquered will resurface at the most inopportune times. No one is immune from this ongoing, relentless struggle that rages in the lives of believers.

Think about some of the conflicts and some of the old habits that you are still struggling with even though you have trusted Christ. What are some of the areas in which we struggle?

That struggle is not uncommon. As a matter of fact, it is to be expected. The Word of God talks a good deal about it and tells us how we can win this ongoing battle. The starting point is to understand the sources of our conflict.

The Source

We tend to blame everything on sin, the devil or the world for our problem. We say, *The devil made me do it*. While Satan is our enemy and is constantly looking for opportunities to trip us up, he probably gets a lot more credit than he is due.

James 1:14,15 puts the finger squarely on the source of our struggles. It says . . .

*But every man is tempted, when is drawn away of HIS OWN LUST, and enticed.
Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin;
and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

The problem isn’t sin, the world, and the devil. The problem is US and that which lies within our hearts. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us . . .

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked:
Who can know it?*

We were born with a sinful human nature. As children, we wanted to do what we wanted to do rather than what our parents, God or anyone in authority wanted us to do. We lived for self and for whatever made us feel good.

When we were born again into God’s family through faith in Christ we received a new, second nature – the divine nature of God (II Peter 1:4). In essence, we ended up with two natures – one bent on pleasing self and the other geared to pleasing God. Each seeks the mastery and control of our lives.

Our human nature is referred to in a variety of ways. It is called “the flesh,” “the old man,” “the old nature,” “the sin nature,” and the “Adamic nature.” Galatians 5:19-21 gives us a partial list of behaviors and actions motivated by this old nature referred to here as “the flesh” . . . (read)

Our new nature is also referred to by a variety of names such as “the Spirit,” “the new man,” and “the divine nature.” A partial list of its behaviors is found in verses 22,23 and include: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance or self control.

You don’t have to be a rocket scientist to see the inevitable conflict between these two competing natures. Galatians 5:17 says . . .

*For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh;
and these are CONTRARY the one to the other;
so that ye CANNOT DO THE THINGS THAT YE WOULD.*

Having two opposing natures within us results in an ongoing battle for mastery of our lives. Sometimes the old, sinful nature wins and we end up sinning in some way. At other times, the new divine nature wins and we do that which is pleasing to God.

It is a miserable situation to be in. Paul said in Romans 7:24 . . .

*O wretched man that I am!
Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

The Solution

The good news is that there is a solution. You’ll find the battle over sin will go on throughout your entire lifetime, but you can have increasing victory over the sinful desires and impulses of the past.

After asking his poignant question about deliverance in verse 24, Paul gave the answer in verse 25 when he said, *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.* He says victory is available through Christ Jesus. He goes a step further in Galatians 5:16 when he tells us . . .

Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

We can’t win the victory over sin by ourselves, but God has provided us with someone who will help us win the victory. That someone is referred to in Scripture as the “Comforter.”

The Comforter Within

The Promise of the Comforter

Shortly before he was crucified, Jesus told his followers that he would send them a “comforter” to encourage, strengthen, and help them. Look at John 14:16 . . . (read). The word translated “comforter” (paraclete) refers to a helper, a strengthener, a monitor, a guide or an advocate. It refers to someone who comes along side to help, strengthen or encourage us when we need it.

There are two words translated “another” in the Greek language. One (*heteros*) expresses a qualitative difference and denotes “another” of a different kind. The other word (*allos*) expresses a numerical difference and denotes “another” of the same kind.

A man planning to exchange his train ticket for a plane ticket might say, “I’m going to take another (*heteros*) mode of transportation,” but a man planning to replace his old car might say, “I’m going to buy another (*allos*) Ford.” In other words, he is going to purchase another car of the same make and brand he already has.

The word translated “another” in verse 16 is this second word (*allos*) and refers to “another of the same kind” - someone who would be just like Jesus in nature, power, and presence. This “comforter” is identified as the Holy Spirit of God in verse 26 . . .

*But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name,
he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance,
whatsoever I have said unto you.*

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He is co-equal with God, has all the qualities of God, and is God. When Paul spoke of “walking in the Spirit” in Galatians 5:16 he was talking about living our lives under the control of this “Comforter” sent by the Father (John 14:16) to enable us to have victory in our battle with our fleshly desires.

The Presence of the Comforter

Notice in John 14:16 that Jesus said this “Comforter” would be “WITH you for ever,” but in the next verse he goes further and says “for he dwelleth with you, and shall be IN you.”

According to Titus 3:5, when a person places his/her faith in Jesus Christ and receives him into their lives as Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit of God comes and regenerates them (makes them alive unto God by means of the new birth). At the same time, he enters into that person’s life and takes up his residence in the body of that believer. We literally become the temples or dwelling places of God. This is taught in First Corinthians 3:16 where we read . . .

*Know ye not that ye are the TEMPLE of God, and that the Spirit of God
DWELLETH IN YOU?*

It is reinforced in First Corinthians 6:19 when we are asked . . .

*What? Know ye not that your body is the TEMPLE of the Holy Ghost
Which is in you, which ye have of God,
And ye are not your own?*

The Purpose of the Comforter

The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is multi-faceted. Jesus said he would not leave us comfortless (John 14:18). Rather, he would pray to the Father to send us a Comforter (the Holy Spirit) who would be with us at all times (John 14:16). Because he dwells within us, he is available to help us whenever we need it. We are never alone.

It is the indwelling Holy Spirit that bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God (Romans 8:16). He gives us that inner peace and assurance that we are saved and on our way to heaven.

In John 14:26, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would teach us and help us understand the things Jesus said and taught. He reinforced this idea in John 16:13 when he said the Holy Spirit would guide us into all truth. As we read the Word of God, the Holy Spirit helps us understand what it says and how it applies to our lives.

It is also the Holy Spirit who enables us to serve God by giving us spiritual insight, abilities, and gifts (I Corinthians 12:8-11).

Most important for our study today, it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to win the victory over our old sinful natures along with its habits and desires. Galatians 5:16 clearly states . . .

Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall NOT FULFILL the lust of the flesh.

God has given us the Holy Spirit so we can have victory over sin, the flesh, and the world. It is as we live in dependence on him that we can enjoy freedom from sin in our lives.

The Power of the Comforter

The Holy Spirit is powerful. Being God, he possesses unlimited power. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit was the creative agent in the formation of the universe. He is also the one who imparts spiritual life to those who receive Christ.

Just before Jesus returned to heaven he told his disciples to . . .

Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be ENDUED WITH POWER from on high.
(Luke 24:49)

On the day he ascended back to heaven he told them that this power would come from the Holy Spirit . . .

But ye shall receive POWER, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.
(Acts 1:8)

They would have power beyond their own strength to live godly lives, and to be bold witnesses for the Lord. That same power is available to you and me today through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Counsel from Without

We are not alone in our battle against sin and sinful desires. Not only has God given us his Holy Spirit to enable us to defeat sin and live godly lives, but he gives us godly counsel and wisdom through

his Word concerning things WE can do to win the battle of the heartland. As we study the Bible he guides us to passages that tell us how to resist sinful temptation, how to avoid compromising desires of our own hearts, and how to withstand the attacks of Satan, the world, and the flesh.

Guard Your Heart

Proverbs 4:23 tells us to “KEEP THY HEART with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” The “heart” is the emotional/volitional center of our lives. It is the control room of our beings.

We are to “keep” or “guard” our hearts at all times lest evil desires and sinful impulses rise up in it. We are to be on guard, ever alert not to allow anything to enter our hearts that might be sinful or that might lead us to sin. Whenever a thought, a desire or an evil impulse appears, we are to immediately take it captive and bring it into obedience to Christ (II Corinthians 10:5).

Hide God’s Word in Your Heart

A second thing we can do to fortify ourselves in this struggle with sin is to memorize and hide God’s Word in our hearts. Psalm 119:11 says, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” Verse 9 asks and answers the question . . .

*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed thereto according to thy word.*

Romans 12:2 tells us not to be “conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” We grow spiritually as we read, study, meditate on, and memorize the Word of God. Jesus was able to resist the sinful temptations Satan hurled at him because he had hidden God’s Word in his heart and was able to quote appropriate passages whenever sin reared its ugly head (Matthew 4:3-11).

You can do the same. Write verses out on 3x5 cards giving the reference both before and after the verse. Then read over it several times a day and repeat it to yourself section by section until it is firmly fixed in your mind. Make it your goal to memorize one or more verses each week, but be sure to review them regularly so you don’t forget them. Whenever you are tempted to sin, immediately quote several verses you have memorized that fit the occasion. You’ll find these will greatly help you win the battle with sin.

Flee Sinful Temptation

Believers often make the mistake of being in the wrong place at the right time or exposing themselves to situations and people that make it easy to lose the battle against sinful temptation. They think they are strong enough to withstand temptation only to discover too late that they are not as strong as they thought. The Bible warns, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (I Corinthians 10:12).

Paul’s council to Timothy was to “flee also youthful lusts; but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace” (II Timothy 2:22). He goes even further in First Thessalonians 5:22 and says we are to “abstain from all appearance of evil.”

As Christians we should avoid places, people, and things that arouse sinful thoughts and feelings in our hearts. In some cases, that may mean turning off the television, placing the computer in a central location where you can be observed whenever you are on it or in extreme situations changing friendships or even employment in order to avoid being tempted.

Jesus taught that “if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee” (Matthew 5:29). This is known as “radical amputation” and was spoken in the context of being attracted to a person of the opposite sex to whom you are not married. He didn’t mean to literally tear out your eye, but rather to sever the relationship completely. You cannot toy with sin without getting burned. So, don’t play with it.

Seek Godly Counsel

Proverbs 11:14 tells us that “where no counsel is, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.” We find similar wisdom a little further on in Proverbs 24:6 where we read . . .

*For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war;
and in multitude of counselors there is safety.*

When the Corinthian believers had questions about how to handle different issues of life, they wrote to the Apostle Paul and asked for his advice (I Corinthians 7:1). They wanted to know how a Christian is supposed to handle issues like lust, marriage, divorce, and eating things offered to idols. When they were unsure what they should do they sought godly counsel from a spiritually mature believer who could give them good counsel. When you are struggling or unsure what you should do in a particular area, seek out another, more mature believer and ask them for advice based on the Word of God.

Be in the House of God Regularly

Hebrews 10:25 counsels us not to forsake “the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” Even in biblical times some Christians were unfaithful in going to church on a regular basis. We’re not told why they were absent - only that they were not present when they should have been there (“as the manner of some is”).

In doing so, they missed out on one of the key provisions God has given for strengthening themselves in the battle against sin. The “assembling of ourselves together” refers to believers coming together for worship, Bible study, prayer, and mutual encouragement. They were to “exhort (or encourage) one another.” Just being with other believers is an encouragement. It reminds us that we are not alone in our battle against sin.

But in addition, it focuses our attention on God, his goodness and greatness, and his ability to help us in our battle with sin. It provides us with the opportunity to seek godly counsel from others. We can share our struggle with others and seek their prayer support. We may even receive encouragement from the fact that someone else is going through a much bigger battle than we are. Our problems don’t seem nearly so insurmountable in light of their situation.

Keep Your Heart Right with God

We all fall short and on occasion stumble and yield to sinful temptations. We do the very thing God’s Word tells us not to do in Romans 6:12,13. We obey the lusts of our bodies and yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin. We get angry. We blow up. We use hateful words. We experience impure thoughts. We covet. We are less than honest. We don’t keep our commitments. When we do these things, we sin against God and man, breaking our fellowship with both.

God doesn’t want us to sin, but he knows we will. So, he has made a double provision for us. First, he has provided us with an advocate. First John 2:1 says . . .

My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not.

*And if any man sin, we have an ADVOCATE with the Father,
Jesus Christ the righteous.*

An “advocate” is a lawyer, an intercessor, someone who represents us in a court of law. When we sin, Jesus Christ springs into action on our behalf. While the Holy Spirit is working within us to convict us of our sin, Jesus stands before his heavenly Father to plead our case. He claims us as his own and reminds the Father he has already paid the penalty for our sin on the cross.

The second aspect of God’s provision for our sin is seen in the fact he made a way to cleanse us from it. While the Savior intercedes for us before the Father, the Holy Spirit is busy prodding our conscience and convicting us of our wrongdoing. We usually know when we have sinned, but we don’t like to admit what we did was wrong. The Holy Spirit will continue to convict us until we change our minds and are ready to acknowledge and turn away from it (repentance).

First John 1:9 tells us . . .

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

When we come to God and confess our sins, he forgives us, wipes the slate clean, picks us up, dusts us off, puts our feet back on the right road, takes us by the hand, and says, “Come on. Let’s walk it together.”

In reality, we all need multiple cleansings every day as we journey through life. Don’t let sin accumulate and build a wall between you and God. Keep short accounts by keeping your heart right with God.

Keep Going and Don’t Give Up

Jesus never said life would be easy or fair. You will falter and fail on numerous occasions throughout your life. Sometimes it will seem like sin is overwhelming and that resistance is futile. Don’t give up. Proverbs 25:16 says . . .

A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.

No matter how many times you are knocked down by sin, get back up, make things right with God and man, and go on. In Romans 6:14, Paul says, “For sin shall not have dominion over you.” The battle is not over when a man is knocked down. It ends only when he refuses to get back up and deal with his sin biblically.

Hebrews 12:4 says . . .

Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

So keep going. Stay in the battle. Savor each victory. Stay in the Word. Seek help from your brothers and sisters in Christ. God has given you all the resources needed to be victorious. Learn to use them effectively to resist temptation and withstand the wiles of the devil.

*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man;
but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able;
but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.
(I Corinthians 10:13)*

The Christian life is a wonderful life, but it is not without its battles and struggles. God, however, has given us everything we need to be victorious in those battles. He's given us the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit to withstand Satan's attack and temptation's lure. He has given us wise counsel from his Word, and he has given us a host of godly friends who will support and uphold us when we need them.

Yes, there is trouble in the heartland, but nothing that we can't overcome with God's help.

Lesson # 4

Learning About My New Family

Scripture Text: *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.* (John 1:12)

Welcome back to our fourth session of Class 101.

The whole purpose of this class is to give us a broad perspective of life and what is involved in becoming a follower of Jesus Christ. Think of it as a painter drawing a silhouette on a canvas. You can see the outline of the picture, but most of the details are still missing.

Our class represents the introductory session to a whole new life of becoming the person God wants us to be.

Thus far, we have talked about God's purpose for our lives, how God makes all things new when we trust Christ as Savior, and some of the conflicts and issues that arise in our hearts as a result of turning our lives over to Christ.

Today, we want to talk about the family God - what it is like, who is included, and some of the ramifications that are involved. Let's begin by looking at . . .

Our Eternal Family

Humanly speaking, we each have only one father, but the Bible teaches that as believers we have three fathers – a physical father, and two spiritual fathers.

Our father before salvation

Men and women are spiritual beings who inhabit physical bodies while we live here on earth. We are body, soul, and spirit. You can see our bodies, but you can't see the rest of us. Our bodies are temporal – they will wear out, die, and decay, but our souls and spirits will live on forever.

When an individual is born into this world he/she is alive physically, but dead spiritually. The Bible describes him as lost and separated from God. He is dead in sins and trespasses (Ephesians 2:1). Even before his birth, sin has formed a barrier between him and God so that he is cold and unresponsive to God.

Have you ever noticed that you don't have to teach children to be selfish, self-centered or disobedient? They are born that way. Left to themselves, they will end up acting like the devil and make everyone around them miserable. Why is that?

Jesus explained man's fundamental problem in John 8:44 when he told the scribes and Pharisees, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do."

Wow! Those were strong words, but they highlight a truth that most people don't like to admit – that our spiritual heritage stems from Satan rather than from God. Have you ever noticed how children tend to imitate their parents? They talk like them. They walk like them. They act like them. They are a chip off the old block.

The same thing is true spiritually. People act like the devil because the devil is their spiritual father. Jesus said, "the lusts (desires) of your father ye will do." In other words, people act like the devil because their spiritual father is the devil. They lie because he lies. They steal and cheat because he steals and cheats. They kill and murder because he kills and murders. They are hostile to the things of God because he is hostile to the things of God. They act just like the devil because they have a corrupt, sinful nature just like the devil does.

Romans 1:21-32 and Galatians 5:19-21 give us a sample list of some of the ways in which human beings imitate their spiritual father and thereby demonstrate who their father is prior to salvation. You can almost always tell what kind of tree you are looking at by examining the fruit that grows upon it.

Our father at salvation

What man needs is a new nature and a new birth. In John 3:3, Jesus said – "Except a man be BORN AGAIN, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Jesus was saying that in order to go to heaven man needs a spiritual rebirth. He needs to experience a new birth, a second birth, a spiritual rebirth. He needs to be regenerated or made spiritually alive unto God. He needs a new father. He needs to be born of God.

That is exactly what happens when people repent of their sins, believe in Jesus Christ, and receive him into their lives as their Lord and Savior. The moment a person does that, the Holy Spirit of God comes, takes up his residence in them, and regenerates them – he infuses new, spiritual life into them (Titus 3:5).

This spiritual transformation is known as the "new birth" or as being "born again." That which was dead is now made alive unto God as a change of family heritage takes place. Our parentage is transferred from Satan to God. Instead of being the children of the devil we become the children of God as a result of the new birth.

Look at John 1:12. Here we're told that those who believe God and receive Christ into their lives "become the SONS OF GOD." God authorizes them, he empowers them to be his children. The very next verse tells us that they have been born, not by human means (not by blood or by the will of men), but "OF GOD."

Second Peter 1:4 tells us that as believers we are "partakers of the divine nature." We received our sinful human nature from our birth parents. In the same way, we receive the divine nature of God when we are born again of him.

I'm a child of God because I've been born of God. I've experienced a new birth, a second birth, a spiritual birth, a rebirth. I've been made alive by the Holy Spirit of God who now resides within me. I am his child and he is my father. I am now part of the family of God, and I'm no longer a part of the family of the devil.

There are multiple verses in the Bible which teach that those who have trusted Christ as Savior are the sons or children of God. Consider the following:

1 John 3:1 – *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the SONS OF GOD: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.*

1 John 3:2 – *Beloved, now are we the SONS OF GOD, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

Philippians 2:15 – *That ye may be blameless and harmless, the SONS OF GOD, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.*

A number of other passages refer to believers as the “children of God.” For example:

Galatians 3:26 - *For ye are all the CHILDREN OF GOD by faith in Christ Jesus.*

Romans 8:16 – *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the CHILDREN OF GOD.* (also see Romans 8:14,19,21; 9:8; I John 3:10; 5:2)

Romans 8:17 goes a step further and tells us that we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. We are also called “heirs of salvation” (Hebrews 1:14) and “heirs of the kingdom” (James 2:5). Everything that belongs to the Savior belongs to us as well because God is now our father and we are part of the family of God (see Ephesians 3:15).

Our father after salvation

Before we were saved we often acted like our father, the devil. Now that we have become the children of God and he is our new father, how do you suppose we should act? How would he want us to live? What would he want us to do?

Now that we possess a new divine nature (in addition to our old, sinful nature), should we not act the way our heavenly father would act? Shouldn't our greatest desire be to please him? That's what Jesus said in John 8:29 – “For I do always those things that please him.”

The Apostle Paul expressed a similar sentiment in Galatians 1:10 when he said, “Do I now persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of God.” Paul's goal in life was to please God even if that meant displeasing other people.

In First Thessalonians 4:1 Paul taught the Thessalonian believers “how ye ought to walk and to please God” and in Second Timothy 2:4 he pointed out that a good soldier of Christ did not “entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” Pleasing God ought to be our highest priority in life, and nothing pleases him more than for us to live our lives in obedience to his commands and teachings as found in the Word of God.

A godly lifestyle is a reflection of our heavenly father's nature which he has implanted into our lives. Ephesians 4:22-32 describes some of the changes in behavior that should occur in the lives of those who have God as their father.

Lustful thinking is replaced by a renewed mind. Lying is replaced with truthfulness. Stealing and cheating are replaced with honest work and sharing. Corrupt communication is replaced with edifying speech. Bitterness, wrath, and evil speaking are replaced with kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness. A rebellious attitude is replaced with a submissive spirit. Hatred is replaced with love.

The list can go on and on. The key is remembering who we are – as a result of the new birth we are now the children of God, joint-heirs with Christ, possessing a new divine nature. We ought to act accordingly.

Our Earthly Family

God's children (those who have trusted Christ) are scattered around the world. New people are being born into God's family on a regular basis as they place their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus. Each of those new-born "babes in Christ" needs other believers to help them grow and mature into the godly persons God wants them to be.

The Organization of my earthly family

God is calling thousands of people out of the world unto himself. He puts them together into groups of various sizes which the Bible refers to as "ecclesias" or assemblies of believers. We know them today as local churches.

The first mention of the church is found in Matthew 16:18 where Jesus said, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Jesus used the future tense verb to indicate that the church wasn't yet in existence, although he had already started to gather a core group which would help launch the church publicly on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

The church is often referred to in Scripture as the "Body of Christ." The Apostle Paul used this terminology in writing to the Corinthian believers when he said, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (I Corinthians 12:27). The church belongs to Jesus Christ. He referred to it in Matthew 16:18 as "MY church." He purchased it with his own life blood when he died on the cross. It is a divine institution rather than a man-made organization.

It is only natural that Jesus Christ is the head or leader of the church since it is his Body. Colossians 1:18 is speaking about the Lord Jesus when it says, "and he is the head of the body, the church." Ephesians 1:22,23 makes a similar statement saying that God "gave him (Jesus) to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body." There are a number of other references to Christ being the head of the church (see Ephesians 4:15; Colossians 2:10,19).

Every believer should belong to a local church. In Acts 2:41, those who responded to Peter's invitation to repent and to be baptized were added to the assembly of believers that had formed in Jerusalem. Verse 47 makes it clear that this assembly was a local church when it says, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

Believers are members of the same family – the family of God. As such, they need to identify and congregate with other believers who can encourage and help them grow spiritually. Hebrews 10:25 tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but rather to "exhort" or encourage one another.

It is encouraging just to get together with other believers to sing, worship, and learn from the Word of God as it is taught. We would never think of leaving a baby to fend for itself after being born. Neither should a new-born Christian be left to fend for himself after being born again. He needs the nourishment and encouragement of other believers. Every church and church plant should have a discipleship plan in place to help new (and older) believers grow in their relationship with Christ and other believers, and to become active members of that local assembly.

New believers are to unite with a local church following their baptism. You'll recall that baptism pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3,4), but is also an act of obedience to Christ's command to disciple, baptize, and teach all those who receive him as Savior. This is to be done within the context of the local church. Believers who already have been baptized since being saved can transfer their membership from their former church or give a suitable testimony of their prior salvation and baptism when joining a new church.

The point is that the local church is the Body of Christ, and we as believers should unite with it for fellowship, worship, encouragement, and service.

The Officers of my earthly family

While Christ is the head of the church, he has given gifted men to the church to oversee and direct its affairs (Ephesians 4:11,12). Some of these leaders such as apostles and prophets were temporary in nature until the Scriptures were fully developed. The others continue until the present time. The two sets of leaders in the church today are the pastors and the deacons.

Pastors serve as the primary leaders in the church. They are referred to in Scripture as "pastors," "elders," and "bishops." They are both the spiritual and administrative leaders of the church. They have a three-fold responsibility:

1) First, they are to nourish or "feed" the church through the consistent teaching of the Word of God. First Peter 5:2 addresses the "elders" (pastors) of the church and tells them to "feed the flock of God which is among you." They are to provide spiritual nourishment to those who attend the service by explaining the Scriptures in such a way that people can easily understand it and respond to it.

2) A second responsibility of pastors is to exercise oversight (leadership) over the church. The pastor is the helmsman that steers the ship. He serves as the under-shepherd of Christ. It is his job to clarify the purpose, mission, vision, and values of the church so the church is functioning biblically and fulfilling its God-given responsibilities. I Peter 5:2 says he is to "take the oversight" of the church, but is to be careful not to lord it over God's people. He is to lead by example as a servant leader.

3) Acts 20:28 teaches that pastors are to "take heed" or to protect the church family from harm. Just as shepherds watch over the flocks to protect them from predators, so pastors are to be on guard against false teachers, false teachings, and sinful actions that may harm the church and its members. Sometimes people resist a pastor's warning concerning questionable behavior or teaching, but he is only doing his job. Shepherds don't let their sheep wander away and are ever vigilant for any wolves that may be lurking nearby.

The deacons are the other group of leaders in the church. Their ministry is entirely different. They serve in a support and advisory role. They are there to assist the pastor in whatever ways he deems appropriate. The word "deacon" refers to a servant or to one who runs errands on the behalf of another. They are first seen in Acts 6:1-7 where they "served tables" by helping to care for the needs of the widows in the church. They took some of the ministry load off the pastors so they (the pastors) could concentrate on "prayer and the ministry of the Word." They saw to it that the widows in the church had adequate food, shelter, and clothing. Deacons serve under the supervision of the pastor and are accountable to him and to the church which elected them to their positions.

We'll study both of these ministries (pastors and deacons) in greater detail in Class 102.

My Obligations to my earthly family

Membership in God’s earthly family brings both privileges and responsibilities. Privileges include both a voice and a vote in crucial matters relating to the church. Baptist churches such as this one follow a congregational form of church government. The people get to choose who their leaders will be. They vote on important financial issues and approve candidates for membership. Membership also opens the door to various ministry opportunities and leadership roles in the church. It entitles members to the tender, loving care of the pastor and other people in the church.

Membership in any family or organization naturally comes with certain expectations. That is true in family life, marriage, sports, education, politics, business, and the church as well. There are certain expectations (often unexpressed) that accompany church membership. “If you are going to be a member of our church we expect you to do thus and so.” It is unfair not to tell people what is expected of them. They can’t possibly live up to those expectations if they don’t know what they are. For that reason we request people who unite with our church to sign a membership covenant that spells out our expectations and asks them to do four things:

1. To protect the unity of the church
 - ... By acting in love toward the other members (Romans 14:19)
 - ... By refusing to gossip (Ephesians 4:29)
 - ... By following and cooperating with the pastor and spiritual leaders of this church
(Hebrews 13:17)

2. To share the responsibility of the church
 - ... By praying for its spiritual and numerical growth (I Thessalonians 1:2)
 - ... By inviting the unchurched and others to attend its worship (Luke 14:23)
 - ... By warmly welcoming those who visit our services (Romans 15:7)

3. To serve in the ministry of the church
 - ... By discovering their spiritual gifts and talents (I Peter 4:10)
 - ... By accepting training and equipping for ministry from the pastor
(Ephesians. 4:11,12)
 - ... By serving as there is opportunity with a servant’s heart and a teachable spirit
(Philippians 2:2,4,7)

4. To support the testimony of the church
 - ... By attending its services faithfully (Hebrews 10:25)
 - ... By living a godly life (Philippians 1:27)
 - ... By giving regularly (I Corinthians 16:2)

We also encourage people to get involved in an entry-level ministry that will help them grow spiritually. God has gifted you with skills and talents and has brought you here to fulfill some ministry role for which he has designed you. We want to help you find your “niche” so you can experience the joy and sense of fulfillment that we all crave.

Our Encouraging Family

There is one more aspect of God’s family we need to discuss – and that is what we call our “encouraging family.” God created us as social beings. He said that “it is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18). We need companionship and encouragement to get through life’s daily grind. That is as true of us as Christians as it is of anyone else.

Loving the members of the family

Brothers and sisters sometimes argue and fight, but just let someone from outside the family threaten a younger sibling, and the one who “can’t stand” his little brother will be right there to defend him. Family members care about each other. They have a common heritage. Birth unites them together. The same is true of us as followers of Jesus Christ.

Biblical Christianity is about reliance, relationships and lifestyle. Jesus taught that the distinguishing characteristic of believers was to be their love for one another. He said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another” (John 13:35). God has shed his love abroad in our hearts, and that love should spill over into the lives of those around us (Romans 5:5). First Thessalonians 4:9 says God himself teaches us to love one another. Not only is “love for the brethren” natural, it is also expected. Romans 13:8 says we owe it to each other.

This issue of loving one another is so important that Jesus made it a commandment. He orders us to love each other. Listen to what he says in John 13:34 . . .

*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another;
as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*

He restates his command in John 15:12 . . .

*This is my commandment,
That ye love one another, as I have loved you.*

And again in John 15:17 . . .

These things I command you, that ye love one another.

This command is repeated at least half a dozen more times in Scripture (see 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11; 1 John 3:23; 1 John 4:7; 1 John 4:11; 1 John 4:12; 2 John 1:5)

Some people are more difficult to love than others. That doesn’t alter the Lord’s command at all. It simply means we may have to work harder at it. We may have to go out of our way a bit further to show interest and love in them. Love is demonstrated more by what we do than by what we say. That is why we find nearly fifty “one another” commands in Scripture. God gives us multiple ways in which we can show love to each other. You’ll find a list of them at the end of this lesson. Thirty-five of them are positive commands (things we should do to each other), and nineteen are negative commands (things we shouldn’t do to each other). God knows we are not perfect, but he does expect us to be growing. So, go out of your way to demonstrate love for the other members of your new spiritual family. As you do so, you’ll find people who will do the same for you.

Encouraging the members of the family

Crowds are impersonal. It is easy to get lost in them. We don’t want that to happen to anyone who attends our church. For this reason, we encourage everyone to join a small group ministry where you can connect with other believers just like yourself. Small groups are small and more personal. It is where friendships develop, burdens are shared, needs are met, and encouragement is given.

The personal touch we all crave is found in small group settings. Jesus said, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). One of the purposes for believers getting together in small groups is to “exhort” or encourage each other (Hebrews 10:25).

We all have questions about how to live the Christian life, how to overcome sinful temptations, and how to deal with issues that arise at home, in school or at work. The intimacy and caring atmosphere of a small group is conducive to sharing issues we face, and receiving the support and answers we need.

We offer a number of small group options through our church. Everything from Sunday School and Bible classes to discipleship groups such as this one to age-appropriate groups, special interest groups, and service groups. Ask the pastor or someone you have met about the groups that are available and link into one or more of them. You may want to try more than one group to find the one that best meets your needs and interests.

Having been born again, believers are now part of the same family. That's why they sometimes refer to each other as "brother" and "sister." God wants you to link arms with them, to join forces with them, to work along side of them so that you can grow spiritually, and so the work of God can expand and impact your community more than it ever has before.

The "One Another" Commands

Positive Commands

Call one another (Luke 7:32)
 Communicate one to another (Luke 24:17)
 Honor one of another (John 5:44; Romans 12:10)
 Wash the feet of one another (John 13:14)
 Love one another (John 13:34,35; 15:12,17; Romans 13:8; I Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9; II Thessalonians 1:3; I Peter 1:22; 3:8; I John 3:11; 3:23; 4:7; 4:11; 4:12; II John 1:5)
 Keep company with one another (Acts 10:28)
 Take leave of one another (Acts 21:6)
 Members one of another (Romans 12:5)
 Be kindly affectioned one to another (Romans 12:10; Ephesians 4:32)
 Prefer one another (Romans 12:10)
 Be of the same mind one toward another (Romans 12:16; 15:5)
 Edify one another (Romans 14:19; I Thessalonians 5:11)
 Receive one another (Romans 15:7)
 Admonish one another (Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16)
 Salute one another (Romans 16:16)
 Tarry one for another (I Corinthians 11:33)
 Care for one another (I Corinthians 12:25)
 Greet one another (I Corinthians 16:20; II Corinthians 13:12; I Peter 5:14)
 Serve one another (Galatians 5:13)
 Bear the burdens of one another (Galatians 6:2)
 Forbear one another (Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13)
 Speak truth to one another (Ephesians 4:25)
 Be tenderhearted one to another (Ephesians 4:32)
 Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13)
 Speak in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to one another (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16)
 Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21; I Peter 5:5)
 Teaching one another (Colossians 3:16)
 Comfort one another (I Thessalonians 4:18)

Exhort one another (Hebrews 3:13)
Consider one another (Hebrews 10:24)
Assemble with one another (Hebrews 10:25)
Confess your faults to one another (James 5:16)
Pray for one another (James 5:16)
Give hospitality to one another (I Peter 4:9)
Minister to one another (I Peter 4:10)
Be kind to one another (Ephesians 4:32)

Negative commands

Betray one another (Matthew 24:10)
Envy one another (Galatians 5:26)
Implead one another (Acts 19:38)
Lie not one to another (Colossians 3:9; Ephesians 4:25)
Accuse one another (Romans 2:15)
Hate one another (Matthew 24:10; Titus 3:3)
Excuse one another (Romans 2:15)
Speak evil of one another (James 4:11)
Judge one another (Romans 14:13)
Grudge not against one another (James 5:9)
Puffed up against one another (I Corinthians 4:6)
Kill one another (Revelation 6:4)
Bite, devour and consume one another (Galatians 5:15)
Provoke one another (Galatians 5:26)

Lesson # 5

Show and Tell Time

Scripture Text: *Return to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him. (Luke 8:39)*

This is session five of our Class 101. Welcome back. I'm delighted you have stuck with us through these formative class times. Thank you for doing that.

If you've had small children in school, you are aware that sooner or later they will have a "Show and Tell" time when they are supposed to bring something from home and tell the class about it. It may be a toy, a small pet like a turtle or hamster or some item they especially like.

Most kids love their "Show and Tell" times because it gives them the opportunity to tell about something they enjoy. It also helps them interact with other kids while developing their social and communication skills.

In the same way, God wants us to grow spiritually in our relationship with him, with other believers, and with those who do not yet know Christ as Savior. He wants us to "Show and Tell" the world about him and our relationship with him.

Our class today is designed to explore what that involves and provides us with some tools to help us develop our communication skills so we can share "our story" with the people we rub shoulders with every day.

There are three things we want to learn today. They all begin with the letter "s". Here's the first one:

God wants me to SHOW my Faith

Faith plays an important role in our relationship with God. First of all, our relationship with him is established through faith. Ephesians 2:8 tells us, "For by grace are ye saved THROUGH FAITH." We are born again into the family God when we recognize our sinfulness and our inability to measure up to God's standings, and turn to him in faith. We expect him to keep his promise to save us when we confess our sin to him and ask Christ to come into our lives.

Secondly, it is impossible to please God without faith. Hebrews 11:6 tells us as much when it says ...

*Without faith it is impossible to please him;
for he that cometh to God must believe that he is,
and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

Our Number One goal in life should be to please God, and one of the ways you do that is by putting your faith on display for others to see.

To be real, faith must be seen. A faith that is not active, a faith that is not visible is not faith at all. It is non-existent. It is nothing more than an empty shell with no substance. To be real, faith must be active and it must be seen. The question is, “How do you do that? How do you show that you have faith?”

Genuine faith is demonstrated through our Compliance

In John 14:15 Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” He reiterated this in John 15:10 when he said, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love.” Love for God and the Lord Jesus Christ is an evident token of genuine faith in Christ. Unsaved people seldom love God. They are often afraid of him and don’t want anything to do with him. Genuine believers, on the other hand, have a deep love for God.

Love, however, is like faith in that it must be demonstrated in order to be genuine. To say we love a person is of little value unless our words are backed up by our actions. While my wife likes to hear me say “I love you,” she wants me to demonstrate it through the hugs, kisses, and kindnesses I show toward her. Words without actions have no meaning.

The same is true in our relationship with God. We can say we love him and are trusting in him for salvation, but unless our words are backed up by our actions, they have no meaning. Genuine love cannot be hid. It cannot be kept silent. By its very nature it must express itself, not only in the things we say, but in the things we do.

That is why Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” Real love is shown by doing what Jesus says. Obedience is a loving act. Doing the things he said we ought to do demonstrates that our love is authentic, and not just a hallow profession.

In Luke 6:46 Jesus asked the question, “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” He went on to say that a person who hears his words, but does not do what he says is like a man building his house on the sand. He has a faulty foundation.

Just before returning to heaven, Jesus instructed his disciples to “make disciples” from among all nations, and to teach them to “observe” all things that he taught. The word “observe” has changed its meaning over the years. Today, it means “to watch,” “to look upon” or “to see” something without any particular action or response being required. It carries the idea of being a spectator. When originally translated it meant to “take special note of,” “to put into practice” or “to implement.” To “observe” something was to do it. For example, to “observe” a traffic sign or the speed limit means that we comply with whatever the sign says. If the speed limit is posted as thirty-five, then we are to drive thirty-five miles an hour. It doesn’t mean that we just look at the sign as we sail past it at sixty-five miles an hour. In the same way, to “observe” all that Christ commanded means that we are to do whatever he said we should or should not do. We show our faith by lovingly complying with his commandments.

Genuine faith is demonstrated through our Communication

Words are important. What we say and how we say it speak volumes about what is in our hearts. In Matthew 12:34 Jesus said, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” In other words, our mouths and the words we speak will eventually reveal what is in our hearts. The words we use and the tenor of our speech should show that we belong to Jesus Christ and that our faith in him is genuine. If he has truly changed our hearts, then our communication will reflect that change. After all, “a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (Matthew 7:18).

The Bible has a great deal to say about the kind of language that should and should not be used by Christians. For example, Ephesians 4:29 says we are to “let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying.” The phrase “corrupt communication” refers to words that tare down, that slash or cut, and that inflict injury. We could translate it as “derogatory speech.” It refers to anything that is intended to hurt another person or to cause others to think less of that person. Instead, we are to speak words that edify and minister grace to people. These are kind words, encouraging words – words that build the other person up. It is to speak well of a person.

The Apostle goes on in verse 31 and says we are to “put away” bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking, and malice along with the words that express those emotions. We are to replace them with words of kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness.

Ephesians 5:4 tells us that filthy speech, foolish talking, and coarse jesting (joking) should “not be once named among you as becometh saints.” It is talking about using obscenities, dirty stories, and sexual innuendo.

In contrast, the speech of believers should be pure, truthful, and loving (Ephesians 4:15). Our hearts should be filled with joy and thanksgiving which spills over into our communication with each other. Jesus has commanded us to love one another (John 13:34). You can’t do that without using loving words and loving tones. Too often, however, we are like the man in James 3:10 of whom he said, “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.” Can people tell that you are a Christian by the words you speak and the tones you use? That is one way you can show your faith is genuine.

Genuine faith is demonstrated through our Conduct

Actions speak louder than words. You have undoubtedly heard the saying, “What you do speaks so loudly I can’t hear what you say.” You can’t say you love a person and then treat them in an unloving manner, and expect them to believe you. Nor can you claim to be a believer and act like an unbeliever, and expect people to accept what you say. Our words must be backed up by our actions.

Second Corinthians 5:17 tells us that “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; and behold, all things are become new.” A changed life and changed behavior are the greatest evidence of salvation there is. When a person gets saved, transformation starts. Values change. Viewpoints change. Relationships change. Speech, behavior, and habits all start changing.

Some of these changes are instantaneous and automatic. Others are gradual and require effort and determination on our part. In Ephesians 4:17, the Apostle Paul admonished the believers of his day to “henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind.” They were not to “walk” or behave or engage in the sinful activities that were typical of the “Gentiles” (unbelievers). They had a choice in the matter. They could choose to continue living the way they did before they were saved or they could choose to replace those behaviors with new ones that were pleasing to God. We have the same choice today.

Notice in verse 22 that we are to “put off concerning the former conversation the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.” The words “put off” convey the idea of taking off a coat or undressing and laying the clothes aside. The word “conversation” refers to one’s walk rather than one’s talk. It is talking about lifestyle behavior that was typical of us in former times before we were saved. The “old man” refers to habits and influences of our sinful nature – the “flesh.”

We are to take the habits and sinful activities that characterized our lives before we were saved and lay them aside like an old tattered garment. They no longer “fit” the new us. In their place we are to “put

on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (v. 24). Just as we are to lay aside the habits of our former lifestyle, we are to “put on” new habits and new ways of behaving that reflect righteousness and holiness.

In Level Two of our discipleship paradigm, you’ll learn to develop several new habits that will help you grow spiritually and to mature into the godly person God wants you to be. But even now you can begin to show your faith by giving up habits you know are wrong. Some habits may be more difficult to break than others, but you can do it with God’s help through prayer and by seeking help from other believers. The first step is to make the choice to do so.

God wants me to SERVE my Faith

Someone once described a football game as 80,000 people who desperately need to exercise sitting in the stands watching twelve guys who desperately need to rest run up and down the field. Christianity and the church are a little bit like that. Too many people sit on the sidelines watching while a handful of individuals seek to carry on the work of the ministry.

Gifted for Ministry

Every believer is a gifted person. God, in his wisdom, has given you gifts, talents, and skills. Some of these are natural talents and abilities that you have developed over time. Others are special endowments of God’s grace that enable you to see particular areas of need and motivate you to do something to address those needs.

I’ve heard people say, “I’m not a gifted person. I can’t do anything because I don’t have any gifts or skills.” That simply is not true. Everyone here has skills that enable them to do things. Most of us can read and write. We can drive a car, talk on the telephone or type at a computer. Some know how to bake, how to clean, how to organize, and how to wash dishes. Some have teaching ability. Others are good at keeping figures. Still others just love working with kids and babies. Guys can fix cars, do carpentry and masonry work, and teach kids to play ball. A few have musical skills. They can sing, play a musical instrument or lead music. We have all kinds of skills in this class that God wants to use.

In addition, every one of you who are saved have been given spiritual gifts by God. God has gifted you for ministry. First Corinthians 12:7 tells us “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to EVERY man to profit withal.” Verse 11 uses the same phrase when it says, “And the selfsame Spirit, dividing to EVERY man severally as he will.” The word “severally” means uniquely or individually designed. In other words, the Holy Spirit not only gives every believer a spiritual gift, but he uniquely tailors that gift to fit each individual believer. So, you are a gifted person, even if you don’t know it yet.

The word “gift” comes from the Greek word “charismaton.” We get our English words, “charisma” and “charismatic” from it. The root word is “charis” which means “grace.”

A “spiritual gift” then is a special gift of God’s grace or a “grace gift” bestowed on the believer by the Holy Spirit to enable him/her to see specific needs in the lives of others and to motivate and empower him/her to meet those needs effectively and efficiently.

You may not know right now what your spiritual gifts are, but you do have them. We will devote a lot of time on Level Three of our discipleship paradigm to discussing, discovering, and developing your spiritual gifts.

Grafted for Ministry

First Corinthians 12 uses the metaphor of a body to describe the church. The human body is made up of many different parts – eyes, ears, hands, feet, arms, legs, nose, heart, lungs, stomach, liver, muscles, blood vessels, etc. Every part is designed and placed in the body for a particular function. The eyes don't hear, and the ears don't see, although sometimes our noses run and our feet smell. Our bodies function well when all of our body parts do what they were designed to do.

My hand had no choice in where it went. My feet were placed on the end of my legs where they would do the most good. My head was given a set of eyes and was set on a swivel on my shoulders so it could see in various directions to guide the rest of the body. Verse 18 tells us that it was God who “set the members every one of them in the body as it hath pleased him.” There are many different parts, but they all work together to form one functioning body.

The same is true of the church. Notice in verse 13 that we are all “baptized into one body” and verse 27 says, “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” So, each believer is special. He or she is an individual believer with special skills, talents, and gifts that enable him or her to perform certain functions within the body of Christ – the church. God has brought you here to this church because he wants to plug you into some ministry for which he has gifted you. He has grafted you into this body so you can fulfill some ministry function or role. You may not know what it is and I may not know what it is right now, but it will become clear as you grow spiritually and begin to develop the gifts he has given you.

Given a Ministry

One of the best ways to find out how God has gifted you is to get involved in ministry as soon as possible. Experimentation is a great teacher. Trying your hand at different ministries allows you to find the niche for which God has designed and gifted you. In many cases, it takes time to grow into those ministries. Just as we would not expect a small child to cook supper, so we could not expect someone new to fulfill leadership roles in the church.

Jesus taught that “he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much” (Luke 16:10). In the Parable of the Talents, the master commended the servant that faithfully carried out his assigned task and then rewarded him by saying, “Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.”

Our goal is to help you discover how God has gifted you for ministry. Then we want to help you develop those gifts so you can use them efficiently and effectively. Finally, we want to plug you into a ministry depending on how God has shaped you. We start people out in entry-level ministries that will allow them to get their feet wet, and to gain some ministry experience. Most of these are fairly simple assignments and don't require a lot of time and effort, but they are important in helping our body of believers function well.

Entry-level ministries are usually temporary in nature and will be passed on to other people who will come along after you as you progress on to other ministries. Some people will progress faster than others. That's o.k. While we would love to see this group move through the various levels of discipleship together, we recognize that some will require longer than others. That's fine, because we're committed to helping you become the person God wants you to be, but it starts here on this primary level.

We'll be providing you with a list of entry-level ministries you can evaluate and from which you can choose. The pastor or someone will be sitting down to go over the list with you and will discuss what is involved in each area. We'll even provide you with an accountability partner or team leader to coach you

and to help you along the way. We won't leave you in the wilderness to fend for yourself. We want to see you growing and functioning in the role for which God designed you.

God wants me to SHARE my Faith

I don't know about you, but I love stories. I love to read them. I love to hear them, and I love to watch them. I don't care much for fiction, but give me a good biography or autobiography and I'll devour it in short order. Most of the entertainment and advertising industries are made up of story-telling.

The Power of your Story

The sharing of personal testimonies (stories) is the most powerful and the most persuasive form of communication available today. That is why Madison Avenue uses personal testimonies to sell its products. You see them on television all the time.

They use the testimonies of all kinds of people including celebrities, beautiful women, kids, and even "Red Necks" to communicate the same message:

I tried this and you should try it too!

Why do they do that? Simply because a story is the most powerful form of communication there is. Nothing beats a personal story. People spend hundreds of millions of dollars to watch, hear or read other people's stories. They are fascinated by stories because stories are powerful and motivating.

Each one of us has a story to tell. Each story is unique and different. Each one is personal, interesting, and compelling. No one else in the whole world has a story exactly like yours.

Think about it. Your story is personal. It happened to you. It didn't happen to someone else. That makes you an authority on it. People can't very well argue with your story because you were there and they weren't.

You don't have to be a theologian or know a lot about the Bible to tell your story. You don't even have to memorize a lot of verses. People will sit and listen to your story more readily than they will a sermon or a Bible lesson.

Personal stories are easier to understand than principles, facts, and figures. People can relate to what you are saying. They may have been through similar situations, and even if they haven't, they still like to hear what happened to you. Stories build relational bridges that make it easier to share our faith with other people.

Your faith story simply says, "This is what I was like before I became a Christian" . . . "This is what happened that brought me to Christ" . . . "This is how I trusted Christ" . . . and "This is how my life has changed." When you do that, people say, "Oh, I see what you mean." They see themselves in you and your struggles.

The most powerful tool you have in your soul-winning kit is your own personal testimony of how you were saved and how God has changed your life.

The Priority of your Story

God wants you to tell your story. He wants you to share with other people how you came to Christ and were saved, and the difference it has made in your life. That is part of his purpose for putting you here on earth. Look at some of the passages in which he tells us to share our story with others.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus said, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me.”

In Mark 5:19 Jesus told the demoniac of Gadara, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee." He was to share his story with his friends of how he was saved.

Psalm 107:2 says, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy.”

First Peter 3:15 tells us we are to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.”

The man born blind said, "Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not; one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25).

Although she had only been saved an hour or so, the woman at the well in John 4:39 shared her story with the men in town and as a result "many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman which testified."

There are many other Scriptures in which God tells us we are to share our story of salvation with people. That is should be one of the priorities in our lives. He wants us to witness and to share our testimonies with friends, relatives, neighbors, business associates, and anyone else we meet.

A lot of Christians fail to do that because they are afraid. They don't know what to say. How do you condense your life's story down to a three or five minute presentation? What do you leave out? What do you put in?

Without knowing the answers to those questions, they simply don't tell the fascinating story of their lives and how they became followers of Christ. So, I'm going to help you put your story together today.

The Parts of your Story

Your story has four critical elements to it:

- a. What your life was like before you were saved.

Relate circumstances that unbelievers can identify with. What attitudes did you have that unbelievers can identify with also? What was most important to you when you were an unbeliever? What substitutes did you have for God in your life (sports, success, work, marriage, sex, money, drugs, popularity, having fun, hobbies, etc.)? What were some of the problems with which you struggled?

- b. What happened that caused you to realize you needed to be saved.

What significant steps led up to your conversion? What needs, hurts or problems made

you dissatisfied with the way you were living without God? How did God get your attention? What motivated you? What Scripture truths had you learned and applied to your life?

- c. How you committed your life to Christ.

What specifically did you do? Where did it happen? What did you say in your prayer? Be specific. Emphasize that you invited Christ into your life and surrendered control to him.

- d. The difference being saved has made in your life.

What benefits have you experienced from being saved? What problems have been resolved? How has your life changed for the better? How has it helped your relationships? Give a current example.

You want to spend the least amount of time on part #1 (what your life was like before you were saved) and the most time on part #4 (the difference being saved has made in your life).

The Preparation of your Story

Here are some suggestions for preparing your testimony:

Pray and ask God to give you the right words to use. Then write it out on paper and ask your pastor or another mature Christian to review it for you and to make suggestions for improving it. Keep it short and to the point. It should only be ONE page long and should take no more than two to three minutes to relate.

Use words like “I,” “me,” and “my” instead of “you.” This is your story. It is about you and not your listeners.

Refer to experiences most people have in common. Share a slice of your life they can identify with, but don't get tangled in meaningless details. Don't dwell on your pre-conversion sins and don't exaggerate them either. Be honest about your continuing struggles. Don't imply all your problems ended at conversion because they didn't.

Don't quote a lot of Scripture (no more than one verse) as this may scare people away. Emphasize the benefits of knowing Christ including the peace of mind you received from knowing where you will spend eternity.

Give concrete examples of the changes that have occurred in your life since your were saved. The more specific you are, the more dynamic it will be, but avoid dates, names, and ages which are of no significance to your listeners.

Avoid making negative remarks about other religions or people, and don't use biblical terminology which non-Christians are unlikely to understand (ex. “propitiation,” “justified,” “salvation,” “praise the Lord,” etc.)

Once you have your story (testimony) written out and refined, practice it over and over. Rehearse it until it feels and sounds natural. Read it out loud and change it until it sounds conversational. Speak casually and informally, using a matter-of-fact tone.

You can become an effective witness by sharing your story with others. Ask the Lord to give you the opportunities and the boldness to share it with others. As you do so, people will listen with interest

because the focus will be on you rather than on them, but at the same time they will be relating what you say to their own lives.

Some of those people will be interested enough in your story to allow you to share the plan of salvation with them, and you may have the joy of leading them to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lesson # 6

Where to from Here?

Scripture Text – *Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision; for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.* (Joel 3:14)

Welcome back! This is our sixth and final session of Class 101. You are to be commended. You folks have hung in there and made it all the way through this six-part introductory discipleship series. This is where everything begins in our church regardless of whether you are transferring in from another church, a new believer starting out or someone who is just beginning to explore the claims of Christ, the Bible, and the church.

We are delighted you are here. We've thrown a lot at you in these five weeks. I'm sure at times that it was a little overwhelming and may have seemed like you were drinking from a fire hydrant.

In Matthew 28:18, Jesus commanded his followers to “teach” or “make disciples” from among all people groups including the one in which you live. The goal is to help people become fully functioning followers of the Savior.

To that end, we have developed a four-level discipleship program designed to assist people in their spiritual journey from faith and conversion to spiritual maturity and ministry fulfillment. Class 101 is the ground level of our discipleship ministry.

Life is a Journey

Life is like a journey with hills and valleys, twists and turns. Sometime we encounter seemingly insurmountable obstacles. At times we fall in a ditch and need help getting back up. At other times we come to a crossroad where we must make a decision to go one way or the other.

The Old Testament prophet Joel envisioned the nation of Israel marred in a deep, dark valley at just such a crossroad. Should they go right? Left? Straight ahead? Or should they reverse course? They were in a valley of decision in which they needed to make a choice that would have life-changing consequences.

In some ways, that is where our class stands today – at a crossroad in a valley of decision where we must make some choices about where we will go from here. What are the next steps? What does God want us to do? What options do we have? Should we go left, right, forward, backward or just stand still?

Decisions should rarely be made until we have time to gather the pertinent facts and evaluate them. Good decisions require good information. Inadequate and inaccurate info often leads to bad decisions. So, let's stop, look around, and find out where we have been, where we are, and what options are available to us today.

A Panoramic Look

Have you ever stood on a mountain and just took in the vista all around you? It helps us get our bearings if we can see the landscape we have traversed. So, we're going to take a few moments to review the things we've covered thus far in our classes.

Our First Look

Lesson #1 explored God's purpose for your life. We learned that God had four reasons for creating us and placing us here on earth.

We were created to manage and rule over his creation;
We were created for enjoyment and to live happy, fulfilling lives;
We were created to love and to be loved; and
We were created for relationships both with God and our fellow human beings.

We also learned that man has a problem – he chose to do things his own way rather than God's way. He has become incredibly selfish and self-centered. He doesn't want anyone else telling him how to live his life. This rebellious attitude is called sin and infects us all with devastating results. Not only does sin isolate us from each other, but from God as well in a Christless eternal place of torment called hell.

God, however, made provision for us by sending his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to take our place, to bear our punishment, and to pay our penalty by dying for our sin on the cross of Calvary. God offers to forgive and to restore anyone who will acknowledge their sinfulness to God, and accept Jesus Christ into their lives as their Lord, Master, and Savior. When we place our faith in him God saves or rescues us from the penalty of our sins, he regenerates us and makes us spiritually alive unto himself, and we are born anew. God becomes our loving Father.

All we have to do is admit our sinfulness to God, truly believe in our hearts that Christ died for our sins and rose back to life victorious over sin, death, and the grave, accept God's offer of salvation as a free gift, and invite Christ to come in to take control of our lives.

Some of you have done this. You trusted Christ a long time ago. Others of you did so recently, perhaps at the conclusion of that first class. Others of you may still be in that valley of decision trying to decide whether or not to trust Christ.

Our Second Look

Lesson #2 explored how God turns people into new creations with a new confidence that results in a new compliance. When an individual trusts Christ as Savior he undergoes a spiritual rebirth. He becomes a new person with new priorities, and new practices. He doesn't enjoy doing the things he used to do. His values and his habits begin to change. Things he used to enjoy no longer hold the attraction they once did. Things he avoided (like going to church or reading the Bible) become sources of great enjoyment.

He has a new peace, an inner confidence that things are right between him and God. There is a quiet assurance that his sins have been forgiven and that he will spend eternity in heaven in the presence of God. Scripture and the Holy Spirit bear witness with his spirit that he has truly been born again. The old doubts and fears are gone.

There is a new willingness to do whatever the Lord wants him to do. There is a new found desire to please God, especially in the area of identifying with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. He now understands that baptism pictures these three aspects of Christ's life. He wants other people to know that he is now a follower of Christ, and so he submits himself to water baptism and identifies himself with Christ and his followers.

Our Third Look

Lesson #3 explored the inner struggle we all experience with sin, even after we trust Christ as our Savior. The Bible tells us the human heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. Having accepted Christ as Savior, we want to please God, and yet our old sinful nature and fleshly desires keep tugging at our hearts. We often experience an ongoing, inner battle between doing what we want to do (sin), and what we know God wants us to do.

God, however, has provided us with someone to help us – namely, his Holy Spirit. He is called the Comforter. He comes and takes up his residence in our lives when we trust Christ as Savior, convicts us when we sin, and empowers us to resist sinful temptation. We can resist sinful temptation and be victorious in our battle with sin as we learn to guard our hearts by memorizing Scripture, avoiding places and people we know will tempt us to sin, seeking godly counsel from other believers, regularly attending the house of God, and keeping our hearts right with God.

Our Fourth Look

Lesson #4 dealt with our new family as believers. We were born spiritually dead and isolated from God. The Bible says Satan was our father. But when we trust Christ as Savior there is a new birth – a second, spiritual birth whereby we receive a new nature and a new father. God becomes our heavenly father.

Not only do we become part of God's family in heaven when we are born again, but we also get a whole new earthly family as well. God's family on earth is known as the "Body of Christ" and is composed of local assemblies of believers known as "churches." Believers come together on a regular basis to study, to worship, and to serve each other.

God raises up spiritually mature, godly leaders known as pastors and deacons to teach, help, and minister to those who make up each particular assembly of believers. Each member of the church family is expected to protect the unity of the church, share in the responsibilities of the church, and serve in the ministry of the church.

Our Fifth Look

Lesson #5 focused on the fact that God wants us to demonstrate our faith by obeying Christ's commands as found in the Bible. He expects us to live the way he said we should live rather than the way we may want to live. Our faith is also seen in the words we speak and the attitudes we display. It is seen in our conduct, the things we do, the places we go, the way we dress, and the behavior we display around others.

God not only wants us to show our faith, but he wants us to serve by faith. God has gifted us for ministry. He has made us sensitive to particular needs in the church and in the lives of people, and has empowered us to meet those needs. He has placed us in a body of believers where we can utilize our gifts, skills, and talents to help and encourage others in need. He has given us people who will help us discover, develop, and deploy the gifts God has bestowed upon us.

But that's not all, God also wants us to share our faith by telling people our stories of how God has changed our lives. Stories are powerful things. Each of our stories is unique and compelling. People can't argue with your story and will often listen to it. Your story basically has four parts to it;

- What your life was like before you were saved.
- What happened that caused you to realize you needed to be saved.
- How you committed your life to Christ.
- The difference being saved has made in your life.

Each of us can have a powerful impact on other people by sharing our story with them. Jesus wants us to be witnesses for him and to bring others to the place where they put their faith and trust in him as their Savior. He wants to use your story to do that.

That is a quick overview of where we have been in the past five weeks. It gives us a panoramic view of what we have covered, and provides us with needed information in deciding where we go from here.

A Personal Look

Joshua and the nation of Israel stood at a crossroads. They had been in the Promised Land for several decades. The enemy had been subdued, much of the land had been conquered and divided, and now they had some choices to make.

Would they go on to serve the Lord and live in obedience to him or would they revert back to living the way they used to live? Before his death, Joshua gathered the people together and challenged them to "choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15). Each of them had to make a personal, individual choice between doing what God said they should do or doing what they wanted to do.

As we draw this introductory series of classes to a close, each of us has a similar choice to make. Will we do what God wants us to do or will we do what we want to do? Here are some of the choices that may lie in front of you.

What will I do with Jesus Christ?

The most important decision people can make is to repent of their sin, place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ, and receive him into their lives as Lord and Master. It is a simple, yet profoundly difficult decision to make. It requires a significant shift in our thinking, our values, and our views.

It requires us to come to the place where we stop trusting in ourselves and our own goodness, and to start trusting in God and his goodness. It requires us to acknowledge to ourselves and to God that we do not measure up to his standard of righteousness and cannot earn his favor nor merit heaven on our own. We have to admit our sinfulness and trust in his sacrifice. It is an acknowledgement of our hopelessness and our helplessness apart from Christ.

Salvation is a simple act of faith whereby we place our trust in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on our behalf on the cross as outlined in his Word, the Bible. Some of you, perhaps most of you, have made that decision and have been born again into the family of God. Others of you still need to make that decision. You have to decide what you will do with Jesus Christ. Will you receive him as your personal Savior or will you put him off still longer by not opening your heart and life to him? Doing so is in essence a rejection of him. Either way, your decision will affect the rest of your life, both here on earth and throughout eternity. I would urge you, if you have never trusted Christ as your Savior, do so today. I'd be happy to help you do that if you just speak to me about it.

What will I do with the first step of obedience?

The second decision that some of you may face involves the first step of obedience. It is called “baptism.” Baptism identifies us with Jesus Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. It says to the world, “Jesus died for me. He was buried for me. And he rose again to give me new life.” In his Great Commission command, Jesus instructed those who would be his followers to be baptized – to publicly identify with him through this graphic portrayal of his suffering on our behalf. You cannot be an obedient Christian without being immersed in the waters of baptism.

If you have accepted Christ as your Savior, then you need to be baptized. If you were baptized prior to trusting Christ, you need to be baptized biblically because baptism always follows salvation. If you were baptized by another method other than immersion, you too need to be baptized using the biblical method. If you have not been scripturally baptized, then the question facing you is, “What will I do with the first step of obedience?” Will you take that first step of obedience?

What will I do about uniting with this body of believers?

In Scripture, believers not only congregated together, they bonded together. They united forces with each other. They became part of local fellowships and local assemblies of believers known as “churches.” Acts 2:41 tells us those who believed Peter’s preaching and trusted Christ as Savior were first baptized (the first step of obedience), and “were added unto them” (the local body of believers in their town). Acts 2:47 tells us the “Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” The New Testament principle is for believers to unite with other believers in a local assembly of believers where they could receive instruction, encouragement, be held accountable, and have opportunity to use their gifts, skills, and talents in service to each other.

If you are not a member of a good Bible-teaching church, you should be. Not all churches are alike. Some do not teach the Word of God. Others have beliefs or engage in practices that are unbiblical. You need to seek out and unite with a church where people love God and each other, where the Word of God is faithfully taught, where people are disciplined and given opportunity to serve, and where you can grow into the person God wants you to be. That is exactly the kind of church we are seeking to develop right here. We would love to have you as part of our church, but each of you will have to make the decision about what you are going to do about uniting with this or some other body of believers.

What will I do with the gifts, talents, and skills God has given me?

If you are a believer, God has gifted you for ministry. He has given you spiritual gifts, talents, and skills he wants you to use in service to others. You may think that you can’t possibly fill a ministry role, but you can with the training and encouragement provided by our church. We want to see you functioning in the ministry role for which God shaped you. We’ll help you discover and develop your gifts and skills, and we’ll give you the opportunity to exercise those gifts in ministry. Our goal is to help each of you find the slot God has designed for you, but first, you’ll have to decide what you will do with the gifts, talents, and skills God has given you. Will you use them for his glory or for your own purposes?

What will I do to enhance my worship of God?

Worship is an extremely important part of our relationship with God. While we can worship God in the privacy of our homes and hearts, God has prescribed that his people congregate together on a regular basis to worship him. Believers assembled on a daily basis in some cases for worship, but weekly gatherings soon became the norm. Hebrews 10:25 admonishes us not to forsake “the assembling of ourselves together,” but to come together regularly to encourage and strengthen one another. Just as a hot

coal in the fire grows cold when it is separated from the other embers in the fire, so believers become cold and distant from the Lord when they fail to meet together in worship.

Work schedules and other responsibilities may interfere with church attendance on occasion, but believers should make every effort to be present whenever the church assembles together for worship, teaching, training, and fellowship. We would encourage you to be in the house of God every time the doors are open for regular services as well as special opportunities that may arise. Each of us will have to decide what we are going to do to enhance our worship of God. Will we assemble with other believers and let God warm our hearts or will we be infrequent participants whose hearts grow cold to the things of God?

What will I do to strengthen and encourage others?

Small groups are a key to growing spiritually. They provide a more intimate and less intimidating setting in which we can ask questions, develop friendships, and have opportunity to serve others. It may take the form of a Sunday School class, a home Bible study, a ministry team or a discipleship group. Much of our lay ministry is done through small groups. People learn to care for each other. They grow together as they explore Scripture and reach out to other members of the group. You can be a source of great blessing to others in a small group and they can be a great blessing to you, but for that to happen you need to link up with one. We'll be happy to facilitate that process, but first you have to decide whether you will take that step of growth by joining one of the many groups we are developing in our church.

What will I do to overcome my bad habits?

We all have sinful habits and behaviors when we get saved. Some are more obvious than others. Most of us know when we are doing something we shouldn't be doing. The Holy Spirit convicts us when we engage in a behavior displeasing to God. We know when we use bad language, when we exhibit wrong attitudes, when our motives are wrong, when we are acting selfishly. As believers, we are new creatures in Christ and we now have the Holy Spirit living within us to help us break our sinful habits and to replace them with godly habits. In some cases, we may need help in breaking some of those behaviors. That is why God gave us godly pastors and Christian friends who can counsel us, pray with us, and encourage us. God wants to change us into the image of his Son, but we must also be actively involved in changing our lives. It all starts by asking ourselves the question, "What will I do to overcome my bad (sinful) habits?"

What will I do with my story?

You have a unique, powerful story God has given you. No one else in the whole world has a story just like yours. It may be a story of heartache and struggle or it may be an account of a wonderful life that is even better now that you know Christ. God wants you to share your story with others. He has told us we are to be witnesses unto him (Acts 1:8).

The story of how you came to Christ needs to be told over and over. There are people in this town that need to hear your story. They are hurting and their lives are empty and meaningless. They need to know there is a God in heaven who loves them and who can change their lives just like he changed your life. They will never know what God has done for you unless you tell them. So, you have to answer the question, "What will I do with my story? Will I tell it or will I keep quiet?"

Those are some of the questions that come to mind when we take a personal look within our own hearts and minds. I cannot answer them for you. You must answer them for yourself. I'd be glad to talk to you about them, but you'll still have to answer them personally.

So far, we have taken a panoramic look back at the material we have covered in the past few weeks. We have also taken a personal look within at some of the questions we must answer as a result of our time together. Now, let's take a look forward into the future at what lies ahead. This is a . . .

A Promising Look

This sixth and final lesson in our 101 Classes is entitled “Where to from Here?” It is designed as an entry point into an ongoing discipleship process that will help you to grow into the person God wants you to become.

There are four levels to our discipleship paradigm. Each one is built on the previous one. Thus, they are progressive in nature much like a college or university program. Each level has one or more series of classes associated with it. These are usually designated as 100, 200, 300, and 400 classes. This class is the 101 class because it is the introductory course we teach to everyone who comes to our church. It is followed by a 102 Class called “Catch the Vision.” These two classes together form the first level of our discipleship ministry.

Class 102 is designed for people who have recently joined our church or who are considering joining our church or who just want to know more about our church. It is exactly what the title suggests – an inside look at our church, what it believes, and how it functions. It basically lays out our philosophy of ministry.

We believe informed people make better decisions and are more supportive if they know what is happening and what is expected of them. We understand that some people may decide not to unite with us once they go through the 102 Class. That's fine. We do believe, however, that once people learn more about our church, many of them will agree with our ministry philosophy and will become active, supportive participants of our ministry.

The 102 Class is a little longer than this one. It lasts eight weeks and covers the following topics:

A Look Inside (Exploring our Philosophy of Ministry)
Enabler or Equipper? (Our View of the Pastoral Ministry)
Men with Servant Hearts (Our View of the Deacon Ministry)
The Heart-Beat of God (Our View of Outreach and Discipleship)
This We Believe (Our View of Bible Doctrine and Baptist Distinctives)
God's Gifted People (Our View of Spiritual Gifts)
The Work of the Ministry (Our View of Ministry)
Partnering Together (Our View of Church Membership)

You'll learn more about our church in this class in eight weeks than you'll learn about most churches in eight years. We are committed to being transparent and open with people. We want you to know who we are and what we are trying to accomplish for the glory of God. You may not agree with everything, but that's o.k. because we think you are more likely to buy into the process if you know what is going on than if we keep you in the dark.

The Christian life is exactly that – a life that is ongoing through ups and downs, through periods of growth and stagnation. Sometimes you'll take three steps forward and one backward. Other times you'll take two steps backward and only one forward. We want to be there to help you in those difficult times as well as the good times.

Life is sometimes described as a race, but we must remember that it is a marathon and not a sprint.

We want you to be in it for the long run. We want you to finish your course and to experience the joy of hearing your Lord say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Thank you for allowing me to be your teacher for these few weeks. I hope you’ll join me next week as we host the first session of Class 102 and start to “Catch the Vision” of what God is doing here in our church.

Let’s close our time in prayer.

Prayer

