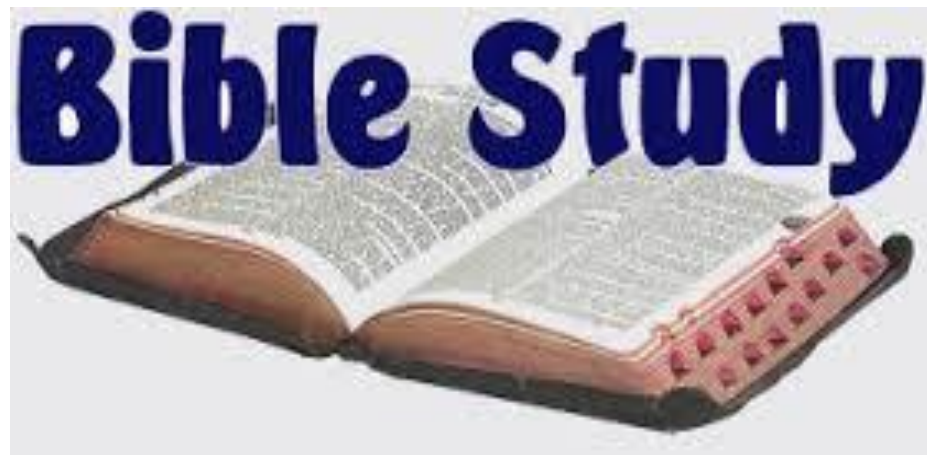


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Making the Most of Your Christian Life

*Adapted from Foundation Studies in Christian Living
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That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.

Ephesians 4:14-15

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.

John 1:12

And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life John 5:11-12

LESSON 1

GETTING STARTED

Coming to know Christ is the start of a whole new life. God's Word tells us, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). When a child is born into a family, however, he or she is expected to grow, learn and develop. Failure to do those things would indicate something is wrong. It's the same way in God's family. Having found this new life in Christ, the next important thing to do is to grow up spiritually, learning more of Him and of His purpose for your life (Ephesians 4:14,15).

Growth requires, among other things, the proper diet. The food for the Christian life is the Word of God. As we feed on His Word and learn to apply it to our daily experiences we will grow in our spiritual lives. This study is designed to help you grow in your new life in Christ through the study of God's Word.

Spiritual Birth

The Bible says that you become a part of God's family through a spiritual birth. When you received the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, God gave you a life that is eternal, and He has become your Heavenly Father (John 1:12). You become a member of God's family the very moment you receive Christ (1 John 5:11,12), but spiritual growth continues as long as you live.

Spiritual Food

Once a child is born, it must be fed. The parents at first supply milk and then later solid foods. This is true spiritually as well. We must feed on the Word of God. The apostle Peter says, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). In Hebrews we're told, "But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14).

The Quiet Time

The Scriptures are referred to as milk, food, a shield and a sword, so having an intimate knowledge of this miracle-working Word of God is obviously important. Each day we should set aside a special time to spend reading and studying the Bible. These moments alone in the Word are sometimes called a "quiet time."

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:15-16

Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Romans 8:34-35

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

John 16:13

We need to set aside this time during that part of our day when we are most alert and quick of mind. Many people find that the early morning hour is best because these moments set the heart right with God and supply strength to fight the battles of the day. A good way to start is with fifteen minutes a day. However long you spend, though, the important point is that you begin to do this on a regular basis.

Not only do you need a regular time for your quiet time, you also need a place to meet the Lord where you will not be interrupted. Perhaps it will be a chair in your bedroom or a spot at the kitchen table—the important thing is to be alone with the Lord.

In addition, you need a plan for what you are going to do. Approach your time with a prepared heart, expecting that God is going to meet your needs. But the important thing to learn now is to let the truth of what you read in the Bible begin to sink deep into your heart and life with real meaning. Begin by slowly reading a portion of Scripture, trying to understand the meaning; then, meditate on what you have read by asking yourself, “How can this be applied to my life?” Finally, pray over the things that the Lord brings to your mind, storing them in your heart.

Safely Guarded

As you begin your Christian experience, recognize that Satan will try to discourage you. Jesus, however, is not only our Savior, He is also our Keeper. His keeping power is illustrated in Peter’s experience. Peter was a true believer in Jesus Christ, but Satan attempted to hinder and discourage him. Jesus encouraged Peter by saying, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:31, 32). Jesus understands your failures (Hebrews 4:15-16) and constantly prays for you (Romans 8:34). Through Him you can find forgiveness and complete restoration (1 John 1:9).

Instruction in Righteous Living

As children need guidance and training by their parents, so our Heavenly Father knows that His children must be directed and instructed. In love He has provided for this. Since Jesus cannot teach us in person as He taught the disciples, He sent the Holy Spirit to abide in us, to be our Helper, Teacher and Guide (John 16:13). The Bible is the textbook which the Spirit uses to instruct us in righteous living (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Strong Christian

The well-instructed Christian becomes a strong Christian. As you spend time in the Word under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, you will

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:16

learn not only to look after your personal spiritual life but also to become a blessing to others. As a faithful and obedient child, you will experience increased blessings and privileges; and, of course, you will become a source of joy to the Lord.

Study Questions

1. What is necessary for spiritual growth? How does our spiritual growth compare to our physical growth?

2. What are some characteristics of a mature Christian? Are these characteristics reflected in your life? If not, what can you do to develop them?

3. Describe your personal plan for a quiet time. What might you do to make that time even more profitable?

(Bible reading guides are available from Back to the Bible.)

4. How long before we can stop growing spiritually? Since Jesus is not present to teach us spiritual truths, how can we learn them?

LESSON 2

OVERCOMING TEMPTATIONS

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

James 1:13

So the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Job 1:12

Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

Matthew 4:3

For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

1 Thessalonians 3:5

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

1 John 1:8,10

If you are using the King James translation, you'll find the word "temptation" is used in two ways. One is the general meaning of "being enticed to do evil;" and the other simply means "to test" or "to try." You need to carefully examine the context of each passage to determine how the word is used. Later translations such as the New King James, New American Standard or New International Version usually make that distinction for you.

God does not tempt us to do evil (James 1:13), but He does allow us to be tested so that we learn to trust Him in difficult situations (Job 1:12). Tests or trials may take a variety of forms such as illness, bereavement, false accusations or persecution. We fall into sin when we allow these experiences to result in discouragement, anger, self-pity, or complaints against God for letting such difficulties come into our lives.

Satan, on the other hand, tempts us to do evil. He desires for us to fail and displease God. His desire is not for our good but for our ruin.

A person could make no greater mistake than to assume that, since becoming a Christian, he or she will not have any more trials, or be confronted with situations where a choice must be made between right and wrong. More experienced Christians may escape from falling into some of the obvious forms of temptations, but there are subtle temptations to do evil which are constantly put in our path by the tempter (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5).

Who May Be Tempted?

The Christian is exhorted to be on the alert at all times lest he fall into temptation: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). No child of God can safely say that he has attained sinless perfection and will never be tempted (1 John 1:8, 10).

How Do Temptations Come?

Temptations, or enticements to evil, often come from within us. "But each one is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (James 1:14; see also Mark 7:21). Temptations also come from outside us. We are warned in 1 John 2:15, 16 not to love the world (the secular system apart from God) or the things of the world. If we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us. Satan, who is behind most temptations, may use the avenues of the flesh (our physical desires) and the world to tempt us. The Christian does not wrestle against flesh and blood but against wicked, spiritual forces in high places (Ephesians 6:12).

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:15-16

Then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.

2 Peter 2:9

Why Does God Permit His Children to be Tempted?

The fact that a Christian cannot altogether escape trials shows that God has some purpose in them. Temptations or tests are needed to make a strong Christian just as exercise is needed to make a strong athlete. The Bible says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:2,3). While they are necessary, yielding in a carnal way (following our sinful desires) to them is sin. A preacher illustrated the difference between testing and yielding by saying, "You can't help it if a crow flies over your head, but you don't have to let it build a nest in your hair."

How Can We Overcome Temptations?

The Bible says that God is faithful and will not permit us to be tempted or tested beyond our ability, but He will provide a way to escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Lord was tempted as we are, yet was without sin (Hebrews 4:15, 16). He constantly intercedes for us, and His grace and power are all sufficient (2 Peter 2:9).

James 4:7 tells us what we must first do to overcome Satan's temptations: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Paul wrote to Timothy: "Flee these things; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:11, 12; see also 2 Timothy 2:22). There is both a turning from evil and a turning to righteous living. Both are absolutely essential. By the shed blood of Jesus, Satan's power has been broken (Hebrews 2:14), so that the tempter is actually a defeated foe. We should act toward him accordingly to that fact.

Second, we are told to overcome temptation by turning to God's Word. The psalmist asked many hundreds of years ago: "How can a young man cleanse his way?" Then he answered, "By taking heed according to your word" (Psalm 119:9). The Bible teaches that the basic means for victory is the Word of God. An outstanding example of this is the way Jesus Christ used the Word when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness. Three times Satan tried Him, using three different appeals, and three times the Lord met the test by quoting the Word, saying, "It is written" (Matthew 4:4,6,10). The Lord could have easily displayed His authority over Satan, but He chose to use a method that each one who follows Christ can also use. Today the same enemy tests us, and we also may depend upon the same sure Word of God to defeat him.

The Word is described as the "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17). This is the only offensive weapon of the Christian. The Spirit of God, who lives in us, uses the Word of God to bring the victory that we are promised. Our responsibility is to have the Word ready so that the Holy Spirit can help us use it in driving off Satan's temptations to do evil. The best way to have the Word ready for instant use is to have it memorized.

The psalmist acknowledged the importance of having it memorized when he wrote, “Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Psalm 119:11). We can’t always have the Word with us in printed form; but when it’s stored in our hearts it’s ready to be used, day or night, under any circumstances. This is the means God provides so that we can resist Satan and cause him to flee.

The Results of Overcoming Temptations

The Bible says, “Blessed is the man who endures temptation [test-in]; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him” (James 1: 12). Job climaxed his great time of testing by this positive testimony: “But He knows the way that I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

Study Questions

1. Explain the two definitions of temptation discussed in this lesson. How can you determine what kind of temptation you are facing so you know how to deal with it?

2. The lesson mentions both temptations that come from within and temptations that come from without. To which are you most susceptible? What can you do to become stronger in resisting these temptations?

3. Describe a recent situation in which you were successful in overcoming temptation. What did you do to resist? How did you feel about it afterward? What did you learn from that experience to help you deal with future temptations?

Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?

Amos 3:3

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 13:20-21

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

1 John 2:2

LESSON 3

MAINTAINING FELLOWSHIP THROUGH FORGIVENESS

One of God's wonderful purposes in our salvation is that we might have fellowship with Him and His Son, Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit (1 John 1:3, 3:24). Before Adam and Eve sinned, they had fellowship with God. But with the entrance of sin, that fellowship was broken (Genesis 3:24). Now, however, those who trust Christ are brought into a new relationship with God that makes fellowship with Him possible again.

Sphere of Fellowship

God is perfectly and unchangeably holy, and since two cannot walk together or fellowship unless they are agreed (Amos 3:3), we must fellowship with Him according to His standards. He walks "in the light" and requires that we also "walk in the light" (1 John 1:7). This means that the believer's life must be characterized by purity and uprightness, made possible through the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23).

How Fellowship is Maintained

The key to a life of fellowship with God is obedience to His revealed will. By His Word and the privilege of prayer, God makes possible our continual fellowship with Him and makes His will known to us. Furthermore, Christ indwells us through the Holy Spirit to work in us that which pleases God (Hebrews 13:20, 21).

How Fellowship is Broken

We just learned that fellowship is maintained through obedience to the revealed will of God. When God's will is not obeyed, fellowship is broken. Sin, no matter how small, will break fellowship, since fellowship hangs on the slender thread of obedience. When a Christian sins, he opens the door for more sin. Coldness develops in the heart toward God and the Bible. Unless restoration is speedily made, the habits of the old life soon take over, to the distress of the believer and the dishonor of God. If we persist in sin, God may have to use strenuous measures to restore the believer to Himself (Hebrews 12:3-15). If the Christian persists in sin, God's dealings must be drastic and severe (1 Corinthians 11:28-32).

Basis of Restoration

Some people believe they need to be saved again when they drift from God, but the Bible doesn't teach that. Through Christ's work as

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 1:7

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

3 John 1:4

Mediator, the relationship between God and His sinning child is maintained. “My little children,” we are told, “these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). The reason He can be successful in His advocacy for us is that when we sin, the case He pleads before God is not our case but His own—that He has already paid the price of our redemption for sin (1 John 2:2).

Means of Restoration

Fellowship is restored by confession. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The word “confess” means “to agree with.” The only sins God can’t forgive are the ones we refuse to admit as sins. However, the moment we confess and repent of or turn away from the sins that have come between us and Him, we are brought back into complete fellowship. Forgiveness is assured; we must believe that God will provide it. Christ’s blood was shed for all sin, which includes the present, and therefore is for continual cleansing (1 John 1:7).

Scriptural Example

David is an example of one who sinned, lost his fellowship (not his salvation) and then was restored. When brought face to face with what he had done wrong, David broke down before God and cried out, “Have mercy upon me, O God. . . . Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity.... Restore to me the joy of Your salvation; and uphold me with Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways; and sinners shall be converted to You” (Ps. 51:1, 2, 12, 13).

Learn this lesson early in your Christian life. When something comes between you and God, confess it (acknowledge it) to Him immediately and specifically, whatever it may be. Remember, Satan did not want you to be saved in the first place. Since he has failed in that, he will try to keep you from fellowshiping with the Lord. Satan knows that “for without Me [Christ] you can do nothing” (John 15:5). When you are not in fellowship with the Lord you do not grow spiritually and you are not able to serve Him as His witness. Trust the Lord, however, to give you grace to defeat the enemy and thus bring joy to the heart of God through walking with Him “in truth” (3 John 4).

Study Questions

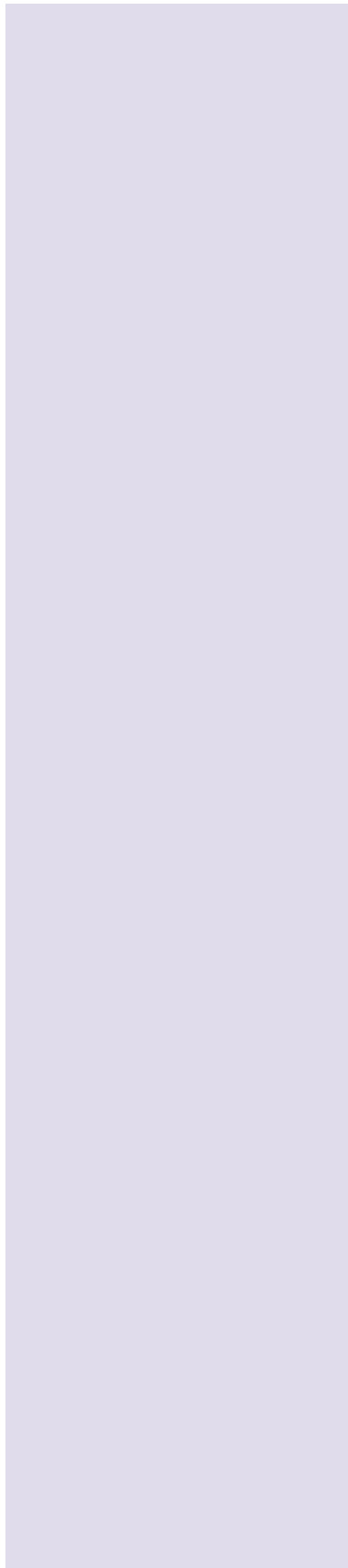
1. Why does sin break our fellowship with God? What has God done to make it possible for fellowship to be restored?

2. What does it mean to confess your sins? On what basis are you sure that your sins will be forgiven when you confess them to God?

3. How can a life of broken fellowship with God actually be pleasing to Satan?

4. Describe an example from the Bible of a sinner who was restored to fellowship with God through confession.

5. Do you find it difficult to confess your sins openly and honestly to God? If so, why? What will you do to develop a more open relationship between you and God?



LESSON 4

CLAIMING GOD'S RESOURCES

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

1 John 5:14-15

By a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh.

Hebrews 10:20

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.

Psalms 66:18

Prayer and the reading of God's Word are two subjects that appear repeatedly in these lessons. There is good reason for this. As you carefully read the Bible, you begin to know the mind of God. When you pray according to His Word, you will discover God accomplishing things in and through you. Admittedly, your early efforts in prayer may not be as polished as you might like. But that's okay. God looks at the heart. As you learn to make prayer a part of your life, you will come to fill a real place in God's program and see more and more answers to petitions which He has laid on your heart (1 John 5:14,15).

Basis of Prayer

We have no merits of our own which give us the right to come to God. The way into His presence is through Christ Jesus, who was crucified and raised again from the dead for us (Hebrews 10:20). That is why we pray in Jesus' name.

Prerequisites to Answered Prayer

Peter tells us: "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1 Peter 3:12). The Psalmist says God will not hear us if we harbor sin in our lives (Psalm 66:18). Sin breaks fellowship between God and us. The Christian who has not confessed his or her wrongdoing and repented of this sin, hinders God from answering that person's prayers.

Paul raises God's standard in these words: "Therefore I desire that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1 Timothy 2:8). A person must "ask in faith, with no doubting" (James 1:6). James continues: "For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double minded [fickle] man, unstable in all his ways" (James 1:7,8). A believing heart is a necessity for answered prayer. God will not honor unbelief.

Purpose in Prayer

The Christian's life should be motivated by one great purpose—the glory of God. "And whatever you ask in my name," the Lord said, "that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13). God is glorified as we pray according to His will. He desires to guide our prayer through His Word and through the Holy Spirit. That means we need to keep His Word always before us in our thinking and praying, so we will not miss His plan. "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us: and if we know

My soul, wait silently
for God alone, for my
expectation is from
Him.

Psalm 62:5

Evening and morning
and at noon I will pray,
and cry aloud, and He
shall hear my voice.

Psalm 55:17

Now when Daniel
knew that the writing
was signed, he went
home. And in his
upper room, with his
windows open toward
Jerusalem, he knelt
down on his knees
three times that day,
and prayed and gave
thanks before his God,
as was his custom since
early days.

Daniel 6:10

Finally, brethren, pray
for us, that the word
of the Lord may have
free course and be glo-
rified, just as it is with
you, and that we may
be delivered from
unreasonable and
wicked men; for not all
have faith.

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2

that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:14, 15).

Practice of Prayer

As discussed in Lesson 1, the Christian’s quiet time should be an important part of the day. Although we need to pray often with others, our prayer life will mature most as we faithfully maintain our own personal time before the Lord. Because we are likely to neglect something if we don’t make specific plans, a place and a definite time should be set aside for prayer. We should come with a heart prepared and an expectancy that God will meet us (Psalm 62:5). David set aside special times of the day for prayer (Psalm 55:17). Daniel did also (Daniel 6: 10). The best time for many people is the early morning.

True fellowship is God talking to us through His Word and our talking to Him through prayer. The best way to begin your time is to read a portion of the Word and then pause to pray over the truths that you could apply. Prayer during your quiet time might follow along the thoughts outlined in the next two paragraphs.

Elements of Prayer

There are several elements in prayer. Some people find it helpful to follow the acronym: ACTS. “A” stands for adoration. This is a time to focus on the character of God (who He is). It is a time to express your recognition of His awesome power, His holy purity, His unfathomable wisdom, etc. “C” stands for confession. You need to admit those things that you have done that are displeasing to the Lord. Confession is important early in your prayer so that anything blocking your communication with God can be removed. “T” reminds us to be thankful. Give thanks to God for all He has done in your life. “S” is for supplication. You have the tremendous privilege of bringing the needs of others before the Lord and requesting His help for them.

This acronym is not something to be followed slavishly. Depending on the situation, certain of these elements might be more important than others. For example, praise and petition are predominant in such Bible prayers as Colossians 1:9-14 and the model prayer given by our Lord in Matthew 6:9-13. In Psalm 51, on the other hand, confession takes up a greater part of the prayer, showing us that we should pray according to our need and as the Lord leads us. In all of these prayers dependence is the keynote; the requests themselves indicate that neither the person praying nor the person prayed for is able to meet the needs expressed.

Outreach of Prayer

Intercessory prayer (praying for the needs of others) is the believer’s opportunity for an outreach that is worldwide. Intercession should include God’s servants (2 Thessalonians 3:1, 2), all who are in authority (1 Timothy 2:2),

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

1 Timothy 2:1-2

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.

Matthew 5:44

and a lost world (1 Timothy 2:1) which includes those who hate God's people and injure them (Matthew 5:44). One characteristic of a Christian is that he or she has a heart-felt burden for the world like God does.

Study Questions

1. What is prayer? Why is it important in the life of the believer?

If we talk to God through prayer, how does He talk to us?

2. List the four elements of prayer discussed in the lesson. Why is confession an important part of prayer?

3. In your own personal prayer life, which elements of prayer receive most of your time and attention? Does this emphasis on one or two elements reflect your present needs? If not, what can you do to develop a more balanced prayer life?

4. This lesson mentions several prerequisites for answered prayer. If your prayers seem to go unanswered, what might be interfering with your prayer life? What can you do about it?

5. If you do not have a regularly established prayer time, what steps will you take toward developing a consistent prayer life?

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

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

Romans 12:1

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.

John 14:21

LESSON 5

Obeying His Will

One of God's greatest desires is to heap good things upon His children, but He can do so only for those who are obedient to Him. Though He is a loving Father, He cannot allow Himself to prosper the one who has received His salvation and yet tries to follow the dictates of his own will.

God does not make His will difficult to discern in most cases. His Word clearly states how Christians should live their lives. When His will is not clear, it may be because He wants you to wait or He simply wants you to trust Him for the outcome. He also gives His Holy Spirit to help you understand how the Bible applies to your life.

In Isaiah 48:18, God reveals His desire to greatly bless those who obey Him: "Oh, that you had heeded my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river." Deuteronomy 5:29 says, "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" The thought of John 13:17 runs throughout the Scriptures: "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them."

Why Obey God?

Salvation brings a new allegiance. You are no longer your own, for you have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). Obedience characterizes your life when Christ lives in and through you. Our obedience to God is prompted by our trust in Him and our love for Him. The better you come to know the Lord, the more you will love and trust Him and want to please Him. Before He gave Peter a command, Jesus asked him three times: "Do you love me?" In each case it was not until Peter answered "Yes" that Christ gave His order (John 21:15-17). Only obedience motivated by love for the Lord is real.

Obedience is Rewarding

God promises much to the one who puts Him first. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). The path that God has marked out for you to follow is for your greatest good: "As for God, His way is perfect" (Psalm 18:30). And He never asks or expects too much (1 Corinthians 10:13). Romans 12:1 instructs you to present yourself completely to God. It is a "reasonable" request, and, when you respond to it, you will find that His will is good, acceptable, perfect and abundantly rewarding. The special joy of more personal fellowship with Christ is in store for those who walk in obedience to His will (John 14:21, 15:10).

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

John 15:10

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. "If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. "But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

Daniel 3:16-18

Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

Ecclesiastes 8:11

Obedience May Cost

Sometimes the will of God, even in the smallest matter, may seem hard to understand. At such times you must remember that the Lord expects you to put Him first: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself . . . and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). Though it may sometimes seem costly to put God first, it actually costs more to disobey. Doing what you know is God's will for you may cost you time or convenience or even provoke misunderstanding and persecution, yet disobedience leads to tragic consequences. You must prepare your heart to be true to the Lord, regardless of what it appears to cost. The three Hebrew young men had to face possible death in a fiery furnace in order to obey God's command to worship no other god (Daniel 3:16-18).

Obedience to God's commands is possible for any believer. John says, "His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). It is not simply incorporating a number of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" but finding the will of God and doing it from the heart. Ephesians 5:17 says, "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." This will be possible as you continue to spend time in prayer and in His Word—hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, and thinking upon it as it applies to your everyday circumstances.

Obedience Should Be Consistent and Immediate

This fact is evident in the example set by Christ. In Mark's Gospel, where Jesus is presented as the perfect Servant, the word "immediately" characterizes His actions. David said, "I thought about my ways, and turned my feet unto Your testimonies. I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments" (Psalm 119:59, 60). Our desire to follow Christ is often reflected by the promptness with which we obey Him. As you study and memorize God's Word, or as you read it during your daily quiet time, try to apply at the earliest possible moment the truths which He impresses on you. Resolve also to judge and deal with sin in your life immediately (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

Obedience is not limited to a single act, but it's a constant attitude of faithfulness and watchfulness. Putting Christ first is more than a series of crisis decisions; it is following through in daily obedience to Him in all things. Just as a guard on sentry duty must never sleep, so the Christian must be alert at all times to know and do God's will. Our directions come from a Commander who makes no mistakes!

Study Questions

1. How can we know what God wants us to do? Why is obedience to God important? What prompts us to obey Him?

2. Does God ever ask us to do more than we are able to do? How do we know?

3. What does it mean to put God first? Does your life demonstrate that God has first place? If not, what will you do to change the situation?

4. Describe a situation in your life where obedience proved costly. (If you can't think of a personal example, share an example from someone else's life.) What would have been the possible consequences if you had disobeyed? Why, in that instance, did you choose to obey?

Making the Most of Your Christian Life

Answer Sheet

LESSON 1

1. You need a proper diet. This diet especially includes a daily helping of God's Word, the Bible.

If we don't grow physically, it's an indication that something is wrong. The same is true if we don't grow spiritually.

2. He or she is a person who spends time regularly with the Lord. Not only does he or she look after his/her own personal spiritual life, but is also a blessing to others.

The presence of these characteristics is a personal evaluation. If, however, you feel these characteristics are not present, the following suggestions will help: 1) make sure you've experienced a spiritual birth 2) commit yourself to a daily time in the Word 3) pray that God will teach you through His Holy Spirit the truths you need to apply to your life.

3. This is a personal response but your quiet time plan might include a Bible reading plan, a set time to meet with the Lord and a quiet place where you can do so with the least possible interruptions.

4. Spiritual growth is a life time process.

The Holy Spirit will help teach you the truths you need to know.

LESSON 2

1. One meaning of temptation is "to test." This can come in the form of illness, false accusations, persecutions, etc. God allows these tests to cause us to grow spiritually strong. They are ultimately for our good. The other implies a temptation to do evil. This is not from God but from Satan. His desire is for us to fail and do that which displeases God.

If it is a temptation to do wrong, it is from Satan. If it is simply a difficult circumstance, it is a test permitted by God.

2. This is a personal answer.

To overcome these temptations, we must learn to resist Satan and turn to God's Word.

3. This is a personal answer.

LESSON 3

1. God is perfect and always walks in the light. To walk with Him (have fellowship), we also must walk (live) in the light. Two cannot walk together unless they are agreed (Amos 3:3). When we sin we are walking in darkness.

Christ's death on the cross pays for our sins both past and present.

2. Literally it means to "agree" with God. I agree with God that something I did, said or

thought was sin, and I need to be forgiven for it. When I admit that I've sinned, God is able to forgive me for that sin based on what Christ did on the cross.

God's Word promises it (1 John 1:9) and Jesus is my advocate (1 John 2:1).

3. When my fellowship with God is broken, I do not grow spiritually and I cannot serve God by being His witness.

4. There are several to select from: David (who committed adultery) and Peter (who denied the Lord) are two common ones. They were restored when they confessed their sins (for David see Psalm 51, Peter's confession is implied in Luke 22:62).

5. Personal response. One thing you might do is to remind yourself that God knows already. Furthermore, you might set aside some time at the end of the day and ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of anything you've done that was displeasing to the Lord. Then, confess it.

LESSON 4

1. Prayer is my talking to God. It is important because it is the way that I can enter into God's purpose and plans.

God talks to me through His Word.

2. The four elements of prayer are adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication (ACTS).

Confession is important because it clears up any sin that might be interfering with our fellowship with the Lord.

3. Personal response. A more balanced prayer life can be gained by following the ACTS acronym.

4. Personal response.

5. Personal response.

LESSON 5

1. By reading His Word and being sensitive to the guiding of His Holy Spirit who will help me understand how to apply the Bible to my life.

Because I lose my fellowship with the Father when I'm disobedient, and He can't give me the blessings He wants to give me.

Love and trust prompt me to obey Him.

2. No, God doesn't ask me to do more than I am able.

God's Word tells me so (1 Corinthians 10:13).

3. Putting Him first is following through in daily obedience to Him in all things.

Personal response.

4. Personal response.