



ESSENTIALS

Foundations of the Christian Faith



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ESSENTIALS

Foundations of the Christian Faith

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Welcome

Welcome to Essentials, a ten-lesson study of the foundational beliefs of the Christian faith. The goal of this study is to see Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-10 fulfilled in your life...

For this reason we also, since the day we heard *about it*, have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Understanding and application; faith and practice; knowledge and good fruit... to have one we must have the other. The Christian life is grounded by knowledge of biblical truth, but it becomes sterile and lifeless if that truth is not lived out in daily practice. So each of these ten lessons will introduce truths and related applications that are foundational to our Christian faith. Each lesson will begin with a key verse to memorize and 1-2 thought-provoking questions to reflect on as you begin.

In the back of the study you will find an article on the reliability of the Bible. There are also scripture memory cards to cut out and keep with you so that you will be ready to share what you've learned with others.

One last word - realize that this study is just the beginning. No short study could ever come close to covering all the vital truths of Christianity. Many important truths, practices, and biblical passages had to be left out for the sake of brevity. So please do not forget that this study is simply your introduction, your starting place for a lifetime of continued understanding of the foundational truths of Christianity.

Lesson 1

Who is God?

MEMORIZE

And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR
GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH
ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment.

Matthew 22:37-38

“What higher, more and more exalted, compelling goal can there be than to know God?”

J.I. Packer

How does a biblical view of God differ from that of other religions?

Do these differences matter, or are we all simply using different language to worship the same God?

GOD IS GREAT

Each of the following six attributes describes how infinitely great our God is. For each attribute, read the definition, * look up the bold passage in your Bible (look up the extra verses if you have time), and then fill in the box entitled, “How it affects me.” To fill in this last box, spend a moment considering the following questions: Are there times in my life where this attribute has affected my attitude or actions? What would my life be like if God DID NOT have this attribute?

		How it affects me...
FREE God is not limited by anything outside Himself, nor is He dependent on anything.	Isaiah 40:12-28; 1 Chronicles 29:11-13; Acts 17:24-25; 1 Timothy 6:15-16	
ETERNAL Not created, without beginning or end, God exists outside the dimension of time and is not constrained by it, yet can choose to interact in time with His creation.	Revelation 1:8; Exodus 3:14; Psalm 90:4; 1 Timothy 1:17	
IMMUTABLE God’s nature and His sovereign plans do not change.	Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17	
OMNIPOTENT God is the all powerful, supreme Ruler of the universe, able to do anything He chooses, yet never chooses to do anything contrary to His plan or character.	Jeremiah 32:17; Psalm 135:5-6; Job 42:2; Matthew 19:26; Philippians 3:20-21	
OMNISCIENT God fully knows and understands all things past, present, and future.	Psalms 147:5; Psalm 139:1-6, 16; Isaiah 46:10; Hebrews 4:13	
OMNIPRESENT God is everywhere, always, completely present in His creation, yet is always distinct from it.	Jeremiah 23:24; 1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 139:7-12; Proverbs 15:3	

GOD IS GOOD

Each of the following five attributes describes how infinitely good our God is. For each attribute, read the definition, * look up the bold passage in your Bible (look up the extra verses if you have time), and then fill in the box entitled, “How it affects me.” To fill in this last box, spend a moment considering the following questions: Are there times in my life where this attribute has affected my attitude or actions? What would my life be like as a Christian if God DID NOT have this attribute?

How it affects me...		
HOLY & RIGHTEOUS God is absolutely separate from sin and evil, and absolutely good and pure in all He does.	Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8; 15:3-4; Deuteronomy 32:4	
JUST IN WRATH God exercises perfect justice in punishing sin.	Romans 1:18; 2:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10	
FAITHFUL & TRUE God is the standard of all truth. He is absolutely faithful to Himself, to His Word, to His promises, and to His people.	Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 33:4; John 17:17; Titus 1:2	
LOVING God is unconditionally self-giving to others. This love is most perfectly expressed within the relationships of the Trinity, yet is also directed graciously towards creation, especially toward men and women made in His image.	1 John 4:16; John 3:16; 14:31; Romans 8:37-39	
GRACIOUS & MERCIFUL God shows compassionate love freely to those who do not merit it, particularly those in need or those deserving His punishment.	Exodus 34:6; Matthew 9:27; Ephesians 2:8	

GOD IS TRINITY

In contrast to all other major religions, Christianity affirms a Triune God - “God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.”* While the Bible never uses the word “Trinity,” it clearly teaches the concept.

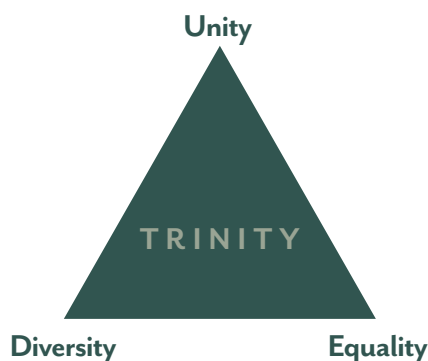
UNITY: GOD IS ONE

“Hear, Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” **Deuteronomy 6:4**

DIVERSITY: GOD IS THREE

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” **Matthew 28:19**

You may at this point be wondering, “How can one be three and three be one?” What was easy to state and scripturally defend is still incredibly difficult to grasp! There is probably no concept in all of Christianity as challenging to comprehend as the Trinity. In the end, however, we should expect our infinite God to be beyond complete understanding for finite creatures like ourselves.



THE FATHER IS GOD

Many believers suffer from a distant relationship with God because they have an inaccurate perception of who God the Father is. Often that misperception is rooted in an unhealthy relationship with a person's own father. For some, they picture God like a tyrannical and unpredictable judge whose primary concern is to punish any wrong-doing. For others, God the Father is like a kind, old grandfather who loves to bless them regardless of what they do. And still for others, God is absent and disengaged - both physically and emotionally. The Bible, however, presents a very different portrait of God the Father.

Read the following passages and write down the characteristics of God the Father that you observe in each:

Psalms 103:13-14

Matthew 6:26, 31-33

Luke 15:11-24

Hebrews 12:5-11

Galatians 4:4-7

*Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 226.

THE SON IS GOD

The Bible is clear that God the Father and God the Son are not the same person. They are two distinct persons. However, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was and is equal to God. We will explore the divine nature of the Son of God more fully in Lesson 2.

Read the following passages and write down what each one teaches about the nature of Jesus Christ:

John 1:1

Hebrews 1

Philippians 2:5-8

Colossians 2:9

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD

The Father and the Son are distinct from one another, and they are also distinct from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the third member of the Trinity, and He also is fully God.

How do each of the following passages support the belief that the Spirit is fully God?

Matthew 28:18-19

Acts 5:3-4

How do each of the following passages prove that the Holy Spirit is a person (a “He”) and not an impersonal force (an “it”)?

Acts 13:2-4

1 Corinthians 12:11

1 Corinthians 2:10-13

Ephesians 4:30

As mentioned above, no other religion affirms a Triune God, so why hold to this unusual belief? Does it have a bearing on any of the other core beliefs of Christianity? If so, what? Does the doctrine of the Trinity have any practical bearing on our lives? If so, what?

“Imagine a god who is the origin and cause of everything else. He brought everyone and everything into being. Now before he caused anything else to exist, this god was all alone...And so, for eternity this solitary god can have had nobody and nothing to love...By his very nature, therefore, this lonely, single god must be fundamentally inward-looking and not outgoingly loving.”

Michael Reeves, Delighting in the Trinity, 40

Handwriting practice area consisting of a grid of dots for tracing and writing.



Lesson 2

Who is Jesus Christ?

MEMORIZE

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

John 1:1

Do you think it matters what people personally believe about Jesus? Why or why not?

Does it matter whether Jesus is the Son of God, or simply a good, moral example for us to follow?
Why or why not?

Almost every major world religion respects Jesus Christ, but their beliefs about Him are diverse and often contradictory. Was He just a good man, a great teacher, or a revolutionary politician? Did He only appear to be human? Was He God, or was He one among many gods? Did He even exist, or was He just an idea, a representation of the best in each of us? Even in Jesus' day, people disagreed about His identity:

Now when Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some *say* John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and *still* others, Jeremiah, or one of the *other* prophets." He said to them, "But who do you yourselves say that I am?" **Matthew 16:13-15**

How would you answer Jesus' question in Matthew 16:13-15? Who is He, and on what do you base your answer?

THE DIRECT CLAIMS OF JESUS

This is a long study. If you are pressed for time, we suggest reading the bold verses first. You can go back later and read the rest of the verses.

Who did Jesus Christ claim to be?

John 10:30-33

John 14:5-10

John 8:56-59 (with Exodus 3:14)

Matthew 26:63-66

Matthew 28:19

Jesus' claims were truly remarkable. C.S. Lewis wrote the following about Christ's identity:

Liar? Lunatic? Lord? "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God."*

THE DIVINE ACTIONS OF JESUS

Jesus did things that no other person has ever done. His activities were consistent with the activities of God.

RECEIVE WORSHIP Read John 20:25-28

If Jesus Christ was not the Son of God, then how should He have responded to Thomas (Revelation 22:8-9)?

FORGIVE SINS Read Mark 2:5-11

Who has the right to forgive sins (Isaiah 43:25)?

How did Jesus Christ validate His authority to forgive sins?

GIVE ETERNAL LIFE Read John 10:27-28

What is "eternal life" (John 3:16; John 17:3)?

If Jesus Christ has the authority to give eternal life, how does this demonstrate that He is God (John 5:26)?

*Lewis, C. S., *Mere Christianity*, London: Collins, 1952, pp. 54–56

THE CLAIMS OF JESUS CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS

Jesus' early followers, many of whom claimed to have seen Him after He was raised from the dead, were so convinced that He was God's Son that they were willing to sacrifice their lives for their faith in Jesus.

What do you learn about the beliefs of Jesus' followers from the following verses?

John 1:1-5

Colossians 2:9

Colossians 1:15-17

John 1:9-14, 18; 20:31

Hebrews 1:1-3

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES ABOUT JESUS

Many Old Testament prophetic passages speak about a coming Messiah, God's anointed deliverer who would save His people. Each of these prophecies was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Look up the following three examples. What do each of these prophecies tell us about the expected Messiah/Deliverer?

Isaiah 9:6-7

Isaiah 53:4-6

Micah 5:2

"About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man... For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and Greeks... When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him... And the tribe of Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared."
Antiquities. Xviii.3.3., Flavius Josephus (born AD 37)

S U M M A R Y

From the biblical evidence, we can say the following about Jesus Christ:

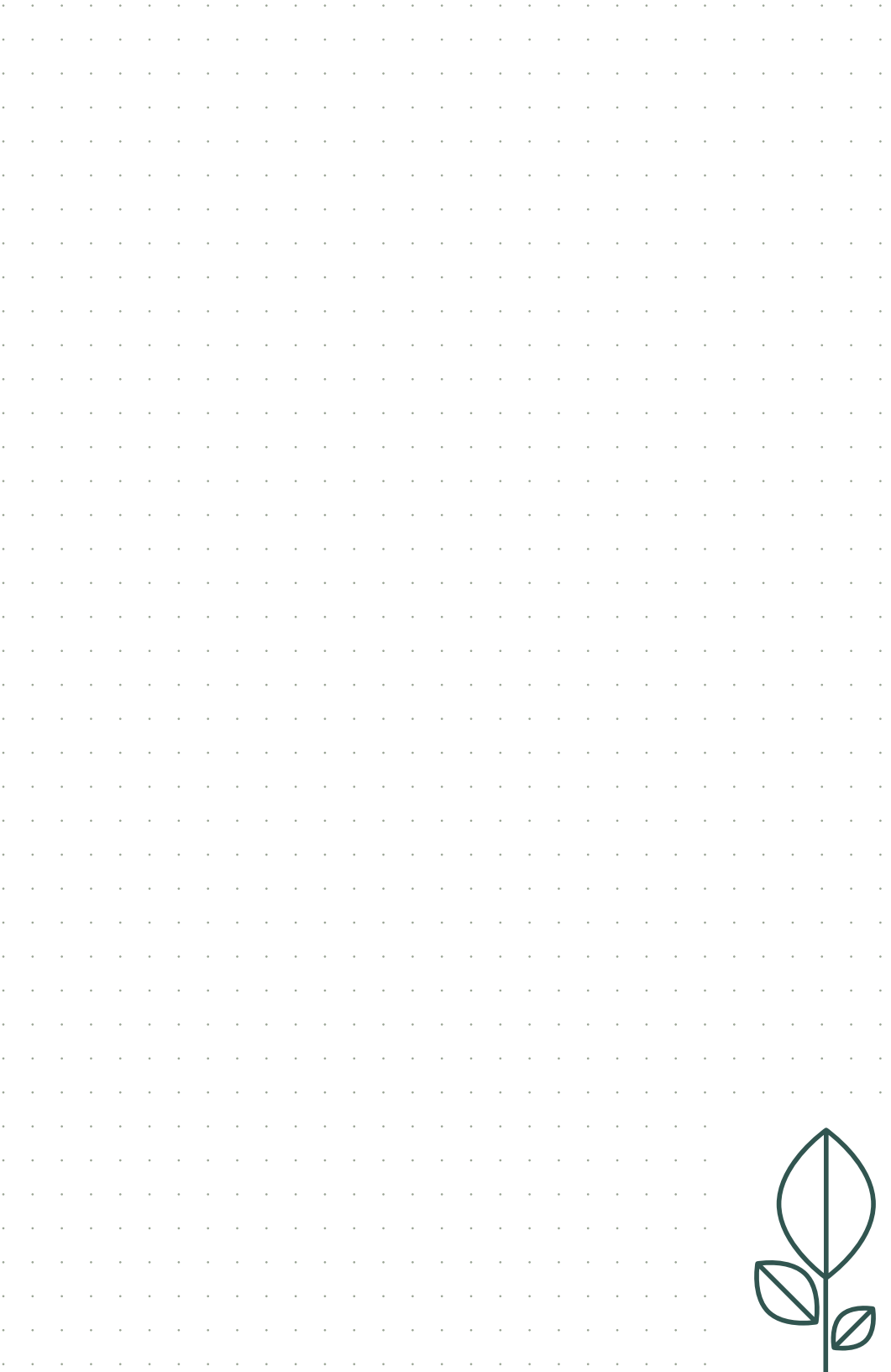
Jesus Christ is the uncreated and eternal Son of God. He is equal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit in His divine nature. He is both fully God and fully man, having been conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life and then died on the cross as the sacrificial payment for our sins. He then was raised bodily from the dead by the Father and ascended into heaven where He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father.

Why is it important that Jesus Christ was fully human (Hebrews 2:14-18)?

Why is it important that Jesus Christ was fully God (Hebrews 9:24-26)?

Having ascended into heaven, what is Jesus doing presently (John 14:2-3; Hebrews 2:18; 4:14-16; 1 John 2:1)?

What will Jesus do in the future (John 14:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Philippians 3:20-21; Revelation 11:15)?



Lesson 3

Who Am I?

YOU ARE MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

The Bible tells us that God has the authority and wisdom to define our identity and purpose.

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth.” God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God He created them, male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground.” **Genesis 1:26-28** (NET)

What does it mean to be made “in the image of God” (see also Genesis 5:3)?

Were any other creatures made in God's image?

How does the image of God affect how we ought to treat other people (see Genesis 9:6; James 3:9)?

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have set in place; What is man that You think of him, And a son of man that You are concerned about him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty! You have him rule over the works of Your hands; You have put everything under his feet, All sheep and oxen, And also the animals of the field, The birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea, Whatever passes through the paths of the seas. **Psalms 8:3-8**

What does this passage tell us about our value as bearers of God's image?

What does it mean that we are to “rule” over creation? Consider Adam and Eve's relationship with one another and with God and their responsibilities to God in the garden (Genesis 2:15-23).

YOU ARE BOTH BODY AND SPIRIT

The Bible tells us that we are not merely physical beings, but we are also spiritual. For that reason, we have the ability to personally relate to God in a way that other creatures cannot.

Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living person. **Genesis 2:7**

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born of water and *the* Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which has been born of the flesh is flesh, and that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit. **John 3:5-6**

Why does Jesus say the distinction between body and spirit is important?

We often use words such as “soul” or “spirit” to describe the non-physical aspect of our nature. Read the verses below and summarize how the Bible defines each of the following words (note that some of these words can be used in more than one way).

SOUL Read Matthew 10:28; Romans 13:1; Matthew 26:38

SPIRIT Read Matthew 26:41; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Romans 8:16

HEART Read Matthew 6:21; Romans 2:29

GOD'S IMAGE IN YOU IS DAMAGED BUT NOT DESTROYED

Adam and Eve, the first image bearers, were given bountiful resources to fulfill their vocation to cultivate the earth and to develop its potential. These resources consisted of the abundant physical world and a life-giving relationship with God and with each other. In Genesis 2:15-17 we learn that God also gave them the dignity of choice whereby they could choose to remain in a dependent relationship with Him or they could choose to live independently from Him, determining good and evil for themselves. This choice was represented in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Sadly, they chose to rebel against God and to eat from the forbidden tree. As a result, they were separated from God and banished from Eden. Since then, every person is born separated from God and burdened with the delusion that we can make our lives work independently from God. Although we are made in God's image, we are unable to reflect and represent Him in the way He intended.

Read Genesis 3:11-19 and answer the following questions.

What was the nature of the curse that God pronounced on Adam and Eve after they disobeyed Him?

How did it affect their relationship with Him?

How did it affect their relationship with one another?

“THERE IS NO RIGHTEOUS PERSON, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NO ONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NO ONE WHO SEEKS OUT GOD; THEY HAVE ALL TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME CORRUPT; THERE IS NO ONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.” **Romans 3:10-12**

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all mankind, because all sinned- **Romans 5:12**

What do those passages tell us about the consequences of sin?

Is “death” merely physical, or do you think that word also has spiritual implications?

What is the scope of sin and death? In other words, who is affected?

For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. **Romans 7:18-19**

What does Paul mean by “flesh” in these verses?

Have you experienced the internal struggle Paul describes here?

If so, are you mostly victorious or mostly defeated in your struggle to do the right thing? Why?

WE ARE NOT YET WHAT WE WILL BE

In future lessons, we will discuss in detail how God has saved us from sin and from death. For now, read the following passages and answer the questions below:

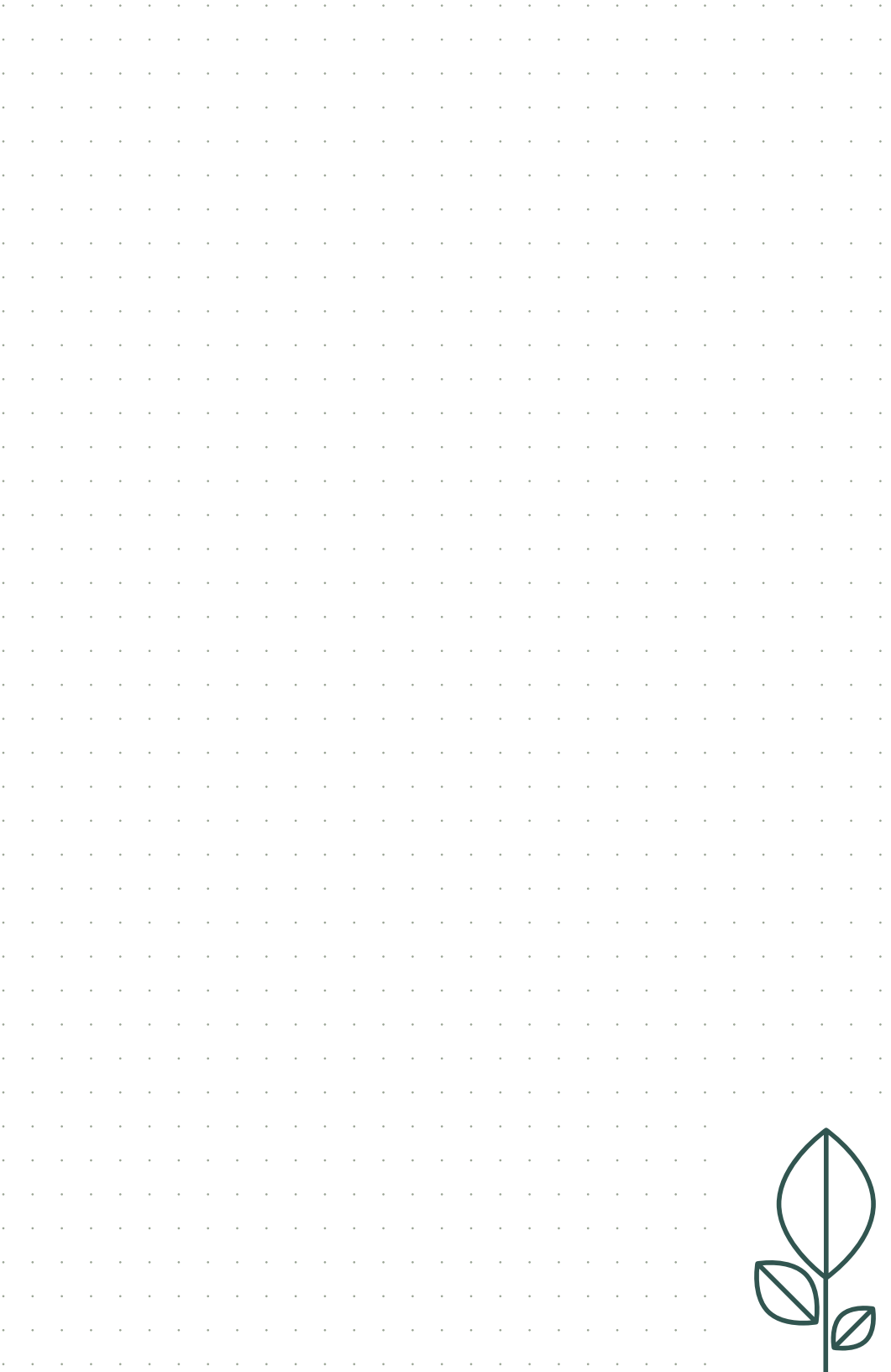
And not only *that*, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons *and daughters*, the redemption of our body. **Romans 8:23**

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our lowly condition into conformity with His glorious body, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. **Philippians 3:20-21**

Behold, I am telling you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. **1 Corinthians 15:51-53**

Is our future salvation physical or spiritual or both?

In light of Genesis 3 (the “Fall” of man) and the passages above, explain what is needed for us to once again fully reflect God’s image in every way.



Lesson 4

How Can I Have a Relationship with God?

MEMORIZE

For by grace you have been saved through faith;
and this *is* not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;
not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

What keeps people from understanding their purpose in life?

How do you think a person can come to know God personally?

God loves you and wants a relationship with you. In fact, the Bible tells us that God has revealed Himself in many beautiful and varied ways just so that we can come to know Him and enjoy a relationship with Him. He has revealed Himself in:

CREATION

The heavens tell of the glory of God; And their expanse declares the work of His hands. **Psalm 19:1**

OUR CONSCIENCE

...in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience testifying and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, **Romans 2:15**

JESUS

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in *His* Son, **Hebrews 1:1–2a**

But there is a barrier between us and God.

THE BAD NEWS*

YOU ARE A SINNER

What do each of the following verses tell us about sin?

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **Romans 3:23**

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. **1 John 1:8**

Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. **James 4:17**

From these passages, how would you define the word “sin?” What does it include?

“Sin” is not a word we use in everyday conversation, but it is an important word in the Bible. The primary words for “sin” in both the Old and New Testaments were originally used in the practice of marksmanship and meant “to miss the mark or target.” What is the mark that God has set? Himself! He Himself is the standard because He made us to reflect His image, to be like Him. But as we have seen in Lesson 3, humanity chose to rebel (sin) against God and to reject His design for life dependent on Him. We “fall short” no matter how hard we try. Here’s an illustration. Suppose you and I were standing on a beach on the Atlantic coast and I say to you, “Let’s see which of us can swim from here to Europe.” You might get farther than I would, or I might get farther than you, but neither of us would come anywhere close to crossing the ocean. Both of us would fall short.

SIN LEADS TO DEATH

Romans 6:23a tells us that, “the wages of sin is death.” What exactly is the result that our sin earns us? What does the Bible mean by “death?”

Answer the questions above by looking up these passages:

Romans 5:12-14

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9

Isaiah 59:2.

Why does our sin naturally result in our separation from God (Isaiah 6:1-5; Psalm 5:4)? This question ties back to what you learned in Lesson 1 about God’s attributes.

THE GOOD NEWS

If we can't earn our way to God, then what hope do we have? The Bible tells us the answer is the "gospel," a word that simply means "good news." This good news is described in the following two points:

JESUS CHRIST DIED FOR YOU AND THEN HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD

Read the following passages and write down what each says regarding the "good news" about what Christ has done for us.

Romans 5:8

1 Peter 3:18

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

The essence of the "good news" is Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. God the Son lived a perfect, sinless life and then died on the cross in our place for our sins (1 Peter 2:22-24). Imagine you were standing before a perfect judge, convicted of a terrible crime. Being a just judge, he has to condemn you for your crime; punishment is what the law demands. But this judge also genuinely loves and cares for you. So having sentenced you for your crime, he steps down from his bench, places his hands behind his back, and orders the bailiff to escort him to prison in your place. By taking your punishment upon himself, he frees you from the condemnation you deserve. This is exactly what God has done for us! Jesus took all of our sins upon Himself and died as our substitute. But praise God, death couldn't hold Him down! Three days after He died, God the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

Why is it important that Jesus Christ rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:13-22)?

YOU CAN BE SAVED THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. **Ephesians 2:8-10**

According to this passage, what is the basis of our salvation?

Our salvation is received through faith. How would you define the word “faith”? See also John 1:12 and Romans 4:4-5.

According to this passage, how do our good works relate to our salvation?

APPLICATION

SHARE YOUR STORY

Your story is the most effective tool you have to share the gospel with someone. People might argue theology with you, but no one can argue with what God has done in your life. Keep in mind, of course, that not everyone is ready to sit through the epic version of your life. So try to prepare a short version (3-4 minutes) of your story that communicates the gospel clearly. Explain clearly how you came to know Jesus, and how your friend can believe in Him also. Here are a few tips on how to communicate your story effectively:

Think back on the period of time leading up to your belief in Jesus Christ for eternal life. What were the primary influences that caused you to begin to move toward faith in Jesus? Were they intellectual, circumstantial, relational?

Move quickly to the main point, the gospel, and make it clear. Share a couple key Bible verses to clarify the main points of the gospel (such as John 3:16, Romans 3:23, 6:23, or Ephesians 2:8-9).

Avoid Christian jargon (e.g. “justified,” “atonement”) and negative statements about other Christian denominations or groups.

Tailor your testimony to the needs of each listener. Is he an atheist, a person of another faith, a person who calls himself a “Christian” just because they go to church on Sundays? Adjust what you say based on what the person needs to hear to grasp the gospel message clearly.

Now take a few minutes to write a short version of your testimony (3-4 minutes). Share it with one person this week.

Lesson 5

Can I Know For Sure?

MEMORIZE

My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;
and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch
them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all;
and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand.

John 10: 27-29

Do you think it is possible for people to know for sure that they have eternal life? Is it arrogant to believe so?

How is our relationship with Jesus impacted when we are unsure of our standing before him?

ETERNAL SECURITY

In the previous lesson we learned how a person can have a relationship with God (eternal life) through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. But what happens when you begin to doubt your salvation? Perhaps doubt is brought on by a renewed struggle with sin. Or perhaps the doubt arises from a prolonged period of personal suffering or spiritual dryness, when God feels very distant. Could this sin or suffering mean that you've lost your salvation, or that you never had it to begin with? This important question touches on two crucial issues - eternal security and assurance of salvation.

Eternal security is an objective fact; it's true whether we believe it or not and whether we feel it or not. Eternal security simply means that once you are saved, you are forever and always saved. Once a person accepts Jesus as his savior, he receives eternal life that can never be lost regardless of what he does or doesn't do in later life. This truth is revealed in the following passages which can be grouped into three sections, each section providing a distinct basis for eternal security.

Look up each passage and record what it teaches you about your eternal security.

I am eternally secure because of ...

THE NATURE OF MY SALVATION

Titus 3:3-7

Ephesians 1:4

Ephesians 2:8-9

Hebrews 10:10-14

Colossians 2:13-14

THE NATURE OF MY NEW IDENTITY

2 Corinthians 5:17

Ephesians 1:13-14

Galatians 3:26

1 Peter 1:3

THE NATURE OF MY SAVIOR

Hebrews 7:24-25

John 10:27-29

John 6:37-40

Romans 8:35-39

Using what you learned from the passages above, how would you answer someone who says the following?

“I am sure I have eternal life because ...

...I go to church, pray daily, and genuinely try to do what is right.”

...I was baptized in the church.”

...I believe God exists and He loves me.”

...I believe Jesus Christ died for my sins and rose from the dead.”

Is it possible for a genuine believer to live a consistently sinful life? In other words, even though he or she SHOULD obey God and SHOULD grow in spiritual maturity, is it POSSIBLE to disobey and remain spiritually immature (see 1 Corinthians 3:1-3)? What are some of the results of remaining spiritually immature (see 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and Hebrews 12:9-11)?

Are there any sins that a believer could commit that could cause him to lose his salvation (e.g. immorality, murder, suicide)?

What if a believer decides that he no longer believes in the gospel? If someone rejects his faith (often called apostasy) does that cause him to lose his salvation? Or does it prove that he was never a believer to begin with? Why or why not?

Can you think of any illustrations from the Bible of believers who stopped believing in God or who did not live obediently?

Having answered the previous theologically oriented questions, how would you practically counsel someone who struggles with sin?

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

As stated earlier, there are two important biblical issues to address in this lesson. The first issue, eternal security, is objective – if you have believed in Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life, then you in fact do have eternal life whether you “feel saved” or not. The second issue, your assurance of my salvation, is subjective. Assurance of salvation describes your subjective confidence that your sins are forgiven and that you have eternal life. Whether or not you presently feel confident and assured of your salvation does not change the objective reality that you are, in fact, eternally secure. However, God desires that each and every one of His children would live with confidence and assurance in their salvation.

And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The one who has the Son has the life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. **1John 5:11-13**

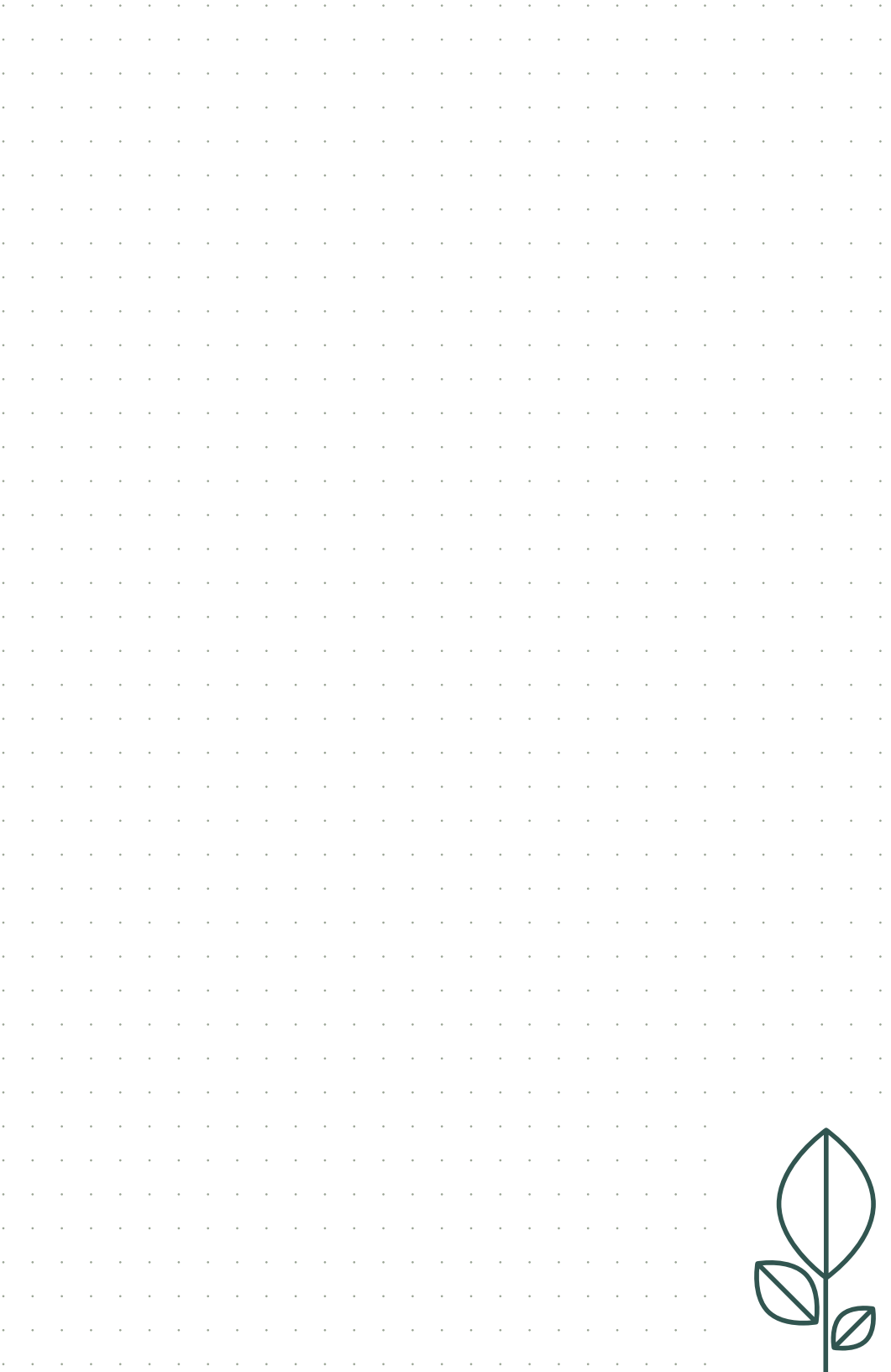
What does this passage say about assurance of your salvation?

Why would God want you to be confident that you have eternal life? Why is this assurance of your salvation important in your daily life?

How would your life be affected if you did not have assurance of your salvation?

Do you have assurance of your salvation? Why or why not?

**"You are saved, not because of what you do,
but because of what Christ did. "**
Max Lucado



Lesson 6

How Can I Faithfully Follow Jesus?

MEMORIZE

But the fruit of the Spirit is love,
joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;
against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23

Why do some believers in Jesus struggle to follow Him?

God has provided us with three resources to enable us to follow Jesus faithfully - the word of God (Lesson 7), the people of God (Lesson 8) and the Spirit of God (this lesson).

THE HOLY SPIRIT

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ROLE IN OUR LIVES?

"These things I have spoken to you while remaining with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and remind you of all that I said to you." **John 14:25-26**

What role does the Holy Spirit have in relation to believers in Jesus?

Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus revealed a radical new ministry of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit would temporarily empower a person to serve God. However, after Christ's ascension, God sent the Holy Spirit to permanently live inside of every Christian (Romans 8:9-11).

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT'S GOAL FOR OUR LIVES?

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is freedom. But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. **2 Corinthians 3:17-18**

Restate Paul's description of the Spirit's goal in your own words.

Read Galatians 4:19 and Colossians 1:28. How does Paul describe the Spirit's goal in these verses?

HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT HELP US OVERCOME TEMPTATION AND SIN AND BECOME MORE LIKE JESUS?

Read the following three passages. Underline key words or ideas, and answer the questions that follow.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit as well. **Galatians 5:16, 22-25**

According to this passage, how do believers overcome temptation and sin? Is this victory in any way dependent upon us (in other words, is there anything we must do in order to experience victory)?

What does victory look like in the Christian life according to this passage? Is it simply the absence of immorality?

So then, be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, in which there is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your hearts to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to our God and Father; and subject yourselves to one another in the fear of Christ. **Ephesians 5:15-21**

Using the context, what does Paul mean by "be filled with the Spirit?" Why does he compare it to getting "drunk?"

What would be the opposite of being filled with the Spirit?

What is the result of being filled with the Spirit?

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an *offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who are in accord with the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are in accord with the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, **Romans 8:3-6;**

What does “walk by the Spirit” mean? What do you learn about “walking by the Spirit” in this passage? Why does Paul use this particular metaphor for the spiritual life?

What is the outcome of walking by the Spirit in this passage?

HOW TO WALK

Let’s get practical. How do we “walk by the Spirit?” How do we allow Him to continually empower us and guide us?

THROUGH DEPENDENT FAITH

Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself but must remain in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. **John 15:4-5**

What is the significance of the comparison between “abiding” in Jesus and a vine bearing fruit?

THROUGH CONSISTENT SPIRITUAL HABITS

The Bible describes a variety of spiritually transforming practices. Some are habits of engagement (like reading the Bible, worship, generosity and prayer) and some are habits of abstinence (like fasting and solitude). Spiritual habits and practices don't make us more mature, and they don't make God love us more. They simply put us in a position before God where His Spirit can transform our attitudes, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.

Read the following verses. What do they say about the value of these spiritual practices?

Psalm 1:1-3

Colossians 3:16

THROUGH CONSISTENT OBEDIENCE

People seek to obey God for a variety of reasons. Some try to obey God, but it makes them feel miserable and trapped because they are trying to earn God's love and approval. In 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 and Philippians 2:12-13 Paul encourages obedience, but from a different motivation.

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose on their behalf. **2 Corinthians 5:14-15**

So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence, for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort—for the sake of his good pleasure—is God. **Philippians 2:12-13 (NET)**

What is the motivation driving obedience in each of these passages? How does our motivation for obedience affect our enjoyment of our relationship with God?

In the Bible, “salvation” can refer to our past (being rescued from the penalty of sin by trusting in Jesus), or it can refer to our future (when we will share heaven with Jesus). In Philippians 2:12-13 “salvation” refers to our present, ongoing victory over sin (this is sometimes called “sanctification,” or the process of becoming more like Jesus).

According to these verses, what is our responsibility in sanctification, and what is the work of God?

THROUGH PROMPT CONFESSION

While our goal should be consistent obedience, all believers will struggle with sin throughout this life.

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:30

How does our disobedience affect the Holy Spirit’s work in us?

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **1 John 1:9**

What does it mean to “confess our sins”? What happens as a result of confession? How is our relationship affected if we choose not to confess?

APPLICATION

Prayer is one of the most important ways we can walk with God more closely, and it's the Holy Spirit who makes prayer possible. In the simplest terms, prayer is communicating with God. In prayer, we talk to Him and we also listen to Him. The Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit helps us when we pray.

Now in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God*. **Romans 8:26-27**

Martin Luther once said, "I have so much to do today, I must spend the first three hours in prayer." Most of us would have a very hard time relating to that statement! When things are busy and stressful, prayer gets pushed to the bottom of our list of priorities until a crisis forces us back to our knees in frantic pleas for God's help. Here are some practical suggestions to keep prayer central in your life this week. Choose one or two and start praying!

USE A PRAYER JOURNAL.

Record for whom and for what you are praying. As God answers specific prayers, record this also in your journal. Few things are as motivating to look back at as specific and concrete examples of God's faithfulness!

CREATE A WEEKLY OR MONTHLY PRAYER LIST.

This list can include everything you want to pray for (family, friends, co-workers, your church, ministries, missionaries, unbelievers, government, etc.) assigned to particular days. That will keep you consistent while making each day more manageable.

PRAY WITH FRIENDS.

This will help hold you accountable to pray and you'll also learn more about how to pray from the examples of others.

SET APPOINTMENTS WITH GOD.

Don't consign prayer to the left-over minutes of your schedule – it's far too important! Budget some of your best time of the day to prayer.

USE SCRIPTURE TO GUIDE YOUR PRAYERS

Examples of prayer from Paul: Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12; Philemon 4-6; 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

Examples of prayer from the Psalms: 27:4; 63:1-3; 84:8-12

WHEN YOU PRAY, USE THIS ACRONYM: ACTS

Adoration

Worshiping God for who He is. Psalm 19:1; 33:5; 90:1-2; 119:142; 139:1-4; Isaiah 6:1-4; 40:12-14; 43:13; Jeremiah 23:23-24; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Daniel 4:34; 2 Peter 3:9

Confession

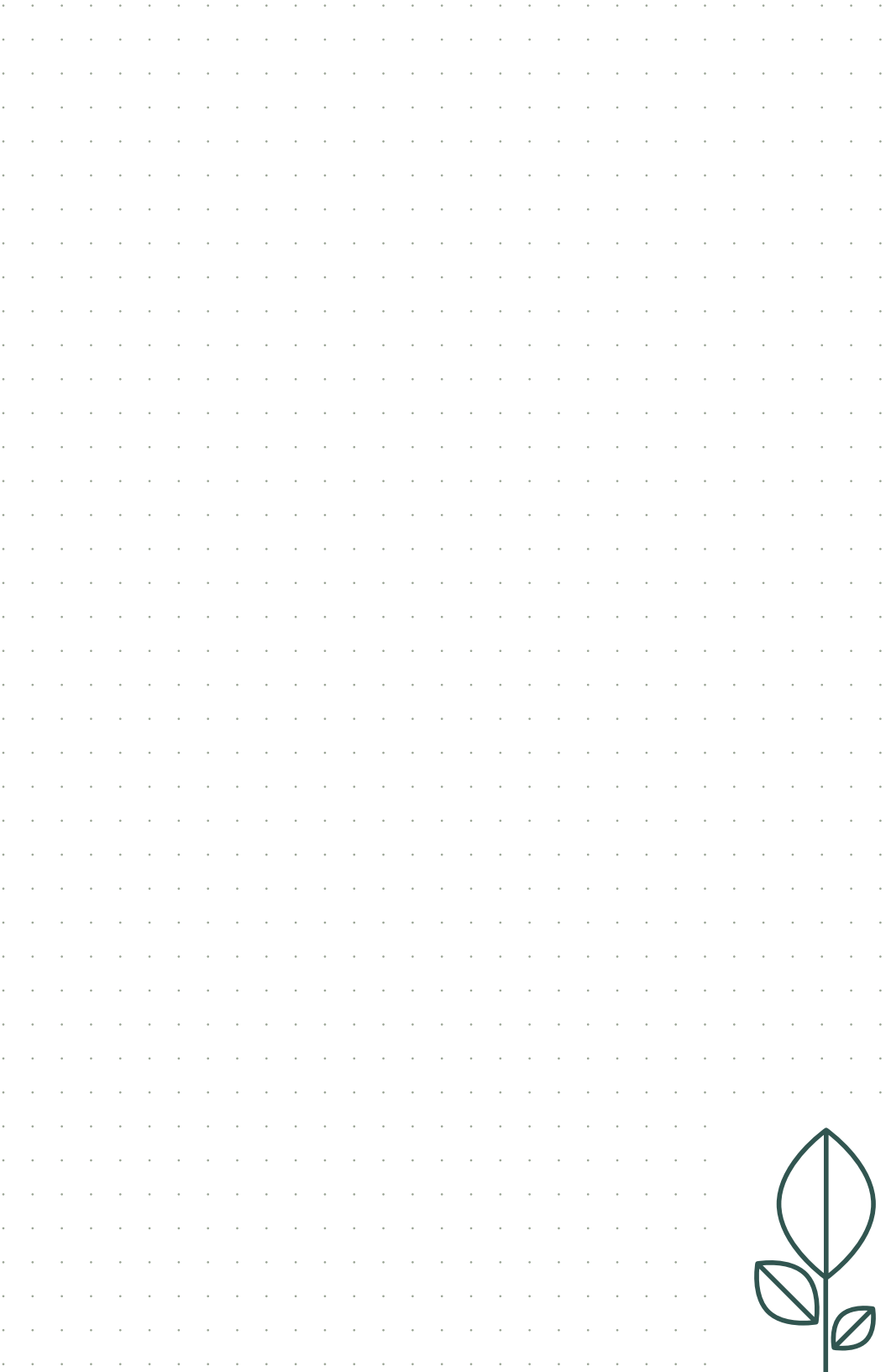
Acknowledging to God that you have sinned and asking His forgiveness. Psalm 32:1-6; 51:2-4; 86:5; 103:11-12; 139:23-24; 1 John 1:8-10; 2 Corinthians 7:9; Joel 2:12-13

Thanksgiving

Thanking God for all the good gifts He has given to you – spiritual, material, relational, physical, etc.
Psalm 69:30; 95:1-6; 100:1-5; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Colossians 4:2; Revelation 7:12

Supplication

Asking God to supply the needs and desires of your friends, your family, yourself, your nation, your world. 1 Timothy 2:1; 1 Samuel 12:23; Matthew 9:37-38



Lesson 7

Why Do I Need the Bible?

MEMORIZE

All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching,
for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man
or woman of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Why is reading and studying the Bible such a necessary part of the Christian life?

Why can it be challenging to interact with the Bible?

In this lesson, we will learn how to develop a life changing love for God's Word. God's Word is the second of three powerful resources that help us become more like Jesus - the Spirit of God, the Word of God and the people of God. We need God's Word in order to experience the fullness of joy and spiritual growth that God desires for us.

We provide you with a lot of verses in this lesson because, after all, we are studying the Bible! This is a long study. If you are pressed for time, we suggest reading the bold verses first. You can go back later and read the rest of the verses.

WHY IS THE BIBLE A UNIQUE BOOK?

What do you learn about the nature of the Bible from each of the following?

2 Timothy 3:14-17

2 Peter 1:20-21

Matthew 5:17-18

Luke 1:1-4

Isaiah 40:8

Luke 24:44-47

Acts 3:18

According to these passages, who wrote the Bible?

What do these passages teach about the reliability of scripture?

The Bible teaches that God guided the human authors of scripture so that, using their own individual literary styles, they perfectly composed and recorded God's revelation to man. Because God guided the process, the Bible, in its original manuscripts, is without error or contradiction. When accurately understood, the Bible is our final authority in all areas of life.

“The Bible is the Word of God in such a way that when the Bible speaks, God speaks.”
B.B. Warfield

WHY SHOULD I READ MY BIBLE?

Read **Hebrews 4:12** and Isaiah 55:10-11. What sort of power does the Word of God have? How should this reality affect our view of scripture?

Read **Psalms 119:9-11** and Philippians 4:8-9. How does our knowledge of God’s Word enable us to ward off the attacks of the world, the devil, and the flesh?

Read Psalm 1:1-3, **Romans 15:4**, 1 Peter 2:2, and **2 Timothy 3:16-17**. What other reasons for investing consistent time in scripture do you learn from these verses?

So, why should we spend our time studying the Bible? Because we need God’s Word to grow in our faith and to help other people follow Jesus.

HOW CAN I GET THE MOST OUT OF READING MY BIBLE?

Many Christians believe that spending time in God's Word is essential, yet they rarely read their Bibles because they don't know how. Here are three basic strategies for digging into God's Word in a meaningful way.

READ GOD'S WORD

Start and end with prayer, since understanding God's Word requires His guidance (1 Corinthians 2:10-13). Ask God to speak directly to you through His Word.

Start with the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and the Psalms.

Sign up for a reading plan with a friend, and talk about what you are reading once a week. For example, YouVersion has hundreds of reading plans that provide structure and accountability for your reading. You can also go to biblereadingplangenerator.com to create a personalized reading plan of your own.

Alternate between different types of scripture. Perhaps spend one day in Psalms and another in the gospel of John. When you finish one book, choose a different type of book to keep you fresh and engaged.

MEMORIZE GOD'S WORD

Memorizing scripture is immeasurably helpful in our battle against sin. Read Matthew 4:1-11 and note how Jesus used scripture that he had memorized to defend Himself against Satan's lies. You can memorize verses from any translation of scripture, but it's helpful to stick with one. Work on your memory verses regularly and review those you've completed. You will find verses referenced in Essentials at the back of the study. You can cut these out and carry them around for easy reference. Finally, it's often helpful to ask a friend to check your progress and hold you accountable.

STUDY GOD'S WORD

In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul encourages Timothy to, "be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." We are all called to follow Timothy's example by becoming competent students of God's Word.

Here is a method for digging deeper into the verses you are reading and memorizing. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What does this passage teach about God?
2. What does this passage teach about people or myself?
3. What stands out most in this passage?
4. Since God's word is true, how should I change as a result? What will I do in response to this passage?

Consider the following:

Is there an example for me to follow? Is there a sin for me to avoid?

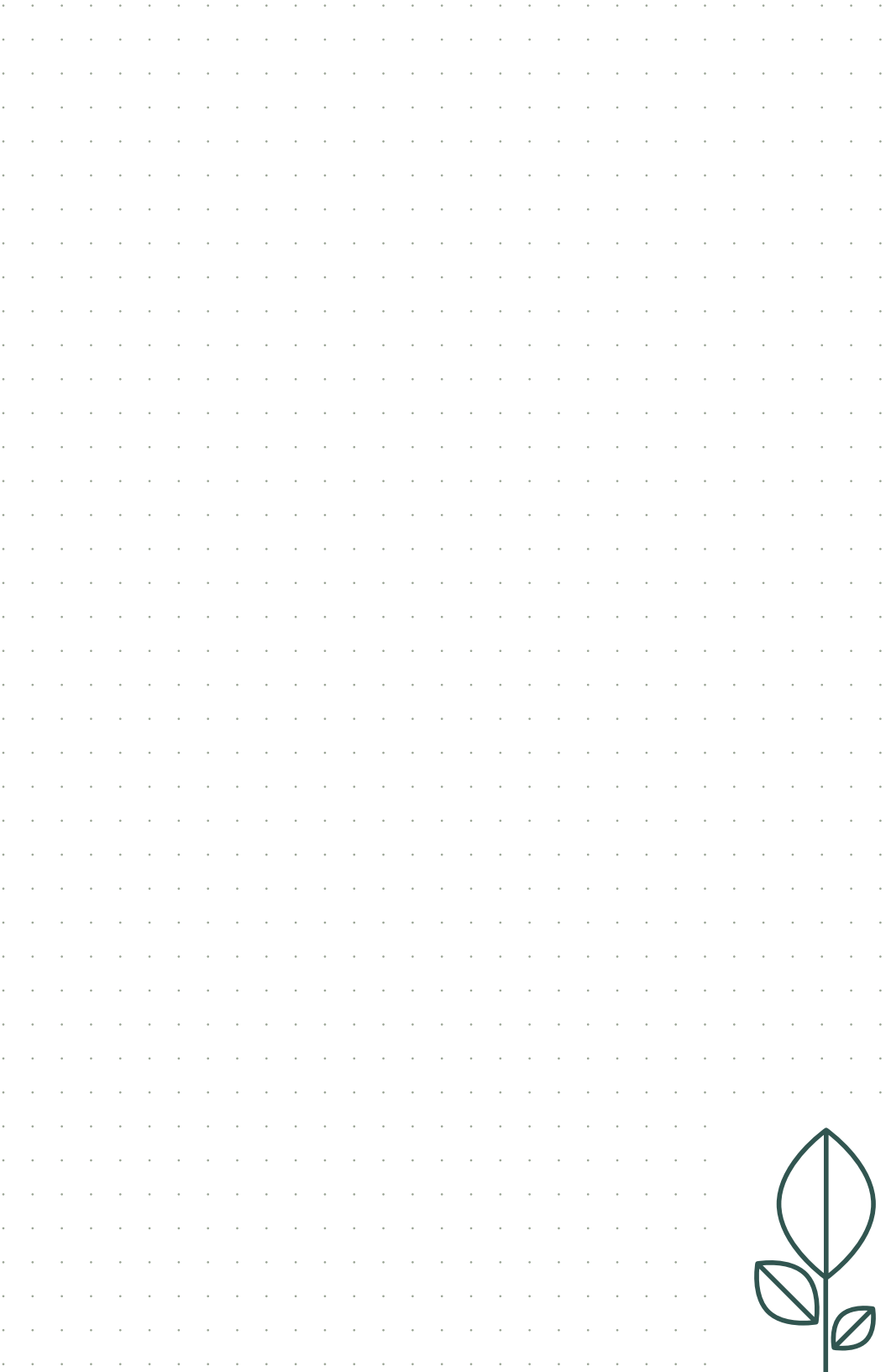
Is there a command for me to obey? Is there a promise for me to claim?

Is there a challenge for me to face?

5. Who can I tell about this passage and what God is teaching me?

If you would like to learn more about studying your Bible, check out our Grace Bible Church studies on 2 Timothy or Philippians found here: www.grace-bible.org/resources.

Living by the Book by Howard G. Hendricks is also a great resource.



Lesson 8

Why Do I Need the Church?

MEMORIZE

...and let's consider how to encourage one another in love and good deeds,
not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some people, but
encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Hebrews 10:24–25

What has been your experience attending a church?

Why is walking with a community of believers so vital to a personal relationship with Jesus?

During this lesson we learn about a third powerful resource God has given us to overcome sin and become more like Jesus – His people, the church. Our goal is to define what the church is, what the church is designed by God to do, and how we can grow through active participation in the church.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

In the Bible, the word “church” is commonly used in two ways. First, it can refer to the Universal Church - every believer from the day of Pentecost (when the Church was “born”; Acts 2) until the day of the Rapture (when Jesus brings His Church from the earth to heaven to be with Him; see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). The Universal Church includes all genuine Christians of any denomination and any geographic location. Second, the word “church” can refer to a local church, a single congregation of Christians in a specific location, such as Grace Bible Church in College Station, Texas.

The Bible presents a number of illustrations or analogies for the church. Look up the following examples. What do you learn about the identity and/or the purpose of the church from each analogy?

John 10:11-16, 27-30

John 15:5

1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27

Ephesians 2:19-22

Ephesians 5:25-33

Revelation 19:7-8

1 Peter 2:4-5

1 Peter 2:9-10

WHY DOES THE CHURCH EXIST?

The Church is unlike any other organization, club, or team that exists in the world! Our purpose is unique and necessary in the world! Jesus describes the mission of the Church in the following two passages from Matthew's gospel.

“THE GREAT COMMANDMENT”

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ Upon these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets.” **Matthew 22:36-40**

Why does the Church exist according to these verses?

What does it mean to “love God”?

Why did Jesus add the threefold modifier, “with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind”?

Jesus was only asked about the greatest commandment of the Law. So why do you think He included a second commandment?

“THE GREAT COMMISSION”

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” **Matthew 28:18-20**

Why does the Church exist according to these verses?

What is a disciple?

What does a mature disciple look like (cf. Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 1:28-29)?

How can you “make” a disciple (cf. Colossians 3:16; Philippians 3:17; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:2)?

What is the relationship between making a disciple and “baptizing” and “teaching”?

What resources are available to you for this task (cf. Acts 1:8)?

What is the scope of our responsibility?

HOW DO I FIT IN?

...but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *that is*, Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. **Ephesians 4:15-16**

Living an abundant Christian life requires that you find your place in a local church. God has made each and every one of us unique, gifted, and necessary for the Church. That means that the church is incomplete without you and you are incomplete without the church.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27 AND 1 PETER 4:10-11

How can you contribute to the spiritual growth and mission of the Church?

In what ways do you need other Christians in order to know and follow Jesus?

APPLICATION

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another. **John 13:35**

The defining characteristic of followers of Jesus is love. What are some practical ways you and I can demonstrate love to our fellow Christians within the church? Write the answer given by each of these “one-another” passages:

Romans 15:7

Galatians 5:13

Ephesians 4:32

Philippians 2:3-8

Hebrews 3:13

James 5:9

James 5:16

Write down one very practical way in which you can show love to someone in your church this week (e.g. bring a meal to someone who is grieving, help set up chairs for an event, pray with a struggling friend, etc.).

JOIN THE MISSION

We saw above that the mission of every local church is the same: to obey the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Jesus has given each of us a unique role to play in making disciples among all the nations.

Identify 2-3 people. Begin praying for opportunities to share the gospel with them, or to help them grow in their walk with Christ.

For more information about how to make disciples, check out our Become a Disciple Maker resources at www.grace-bible.org/disciplemaker. Also consider reading *The Lost Art of Disciple-Making* by Leroy Eims.



Lesson 9

Why Do I Struggle to Follow Jesus?

MEMORIZE

No temptation has overtaken you except *something* common to mankind; and God is faithful, so He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

In what areas of your life do you struggle to follow Jesus?

How can believers encourage one another when we become discouraged due to our continued struggle with sin?

THREE POWERFUL ENEMIES

In previous weeks, you learned that you are no longer who you used to be. Through faith you have become a new creation in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), a child of God (Romans 8:15-16), freed from slavery to sin (Romans 6:2-6) and transferred into the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13). So then, why do you still struggle with sin? You know that sin is destructive and desperately desire to avoid it. Yet you still find yourself powerfully tempted by it, and worse, still give in to it. What's going on?!

The answer is straightforward - the instant you believed in Jesus you began to battle three powerful enemies: the world, the devil, and the flesh. Before you trusted in Jesus, you were unaware of their destructive influence in your life and unknowingly followed their every lead. Now that you belong to Jesus Christ, you are no longer enslaved to any of them; yet all three still exert great power to lead you into sin.

So where do you begin? Think of it like this. When a sports team wants to achieve victory over a tough opponent, they study films of that opponent's games and then adjust their strategies accordingly. This lesson is like a game film on our spiritual enemies – Who is Satan? How does he attempt to influence me? What are the world and the flesh? How do the world and the flesh exert pressure on me to sin?

THE WORLD

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God continues to *live* forever. **1 John 2:15-17**

What does John mean by “world” here? Does he mean simply the created earth (see Psalm 24:1) or something else?

How does the world influence us toward sin? In other words, what strategies or techniques are employed by this enemy to lead us away from God?

Read John 17:14-18 and Romans 12:2. How does God want His people to relate to the world? What should this look like in day-to-day life?

THE DEVIL

The Bible reveals the existence of a race of immortal creatures, angels, non-physical/spiritual beings of incredible power and intelligence (2 Chronicles 32:21; Psalm 148:2,5; Luke 20:36; Ephesians 6:12). Some of these creatures chose to rebel against God long ago. These fallen angels are called demons. The most powerful of all fallen angelic beings, Satan, led their rebellion. Their intention is to destroy the lives of men and women (1 Peter 5:8), the pinnacle of God's creation, who are made in His image (see Lesson 3; Genesis 1:26-28). Satan, whose very name means "adversary," employs specific strategies, or "schemes" (2 Corinthians 2:11), to lead us away from God and into sin.

What strategies of Satan can you identify in each of the following passages?

Genesis 3:1-6 (note: the serpent was possessed by Satan, Revelation 12:9)

John 8:44

2 Corinthians 11:14-15

1 Peter 5:8-9

Having studied Satan's tactics, can you think of some specific examples where he used any of these against you in the past? What factors caused you either to experience victory or to fail?

"Satan does not care if we turn out to be extremely wicked people or fairly "good" people, so long as we are not involved in loving God and laboring for his kingdom."

Brian Fisher

THE FLESH

In the Bible, the word "flesh" is sometimes used to refer simply to our mortal, physical bodies (as in 1 Corinthians 15:39). At other times it refers to our sinful desire to live independently of God, apart from His good plan for our lives. In contrast to the external attacks of the world and Satan, the flesh is the Christian's "traitor within". The flesh influences the way we think, feel, and act. Paul describes this intense battle with the flesh in Romans 7 and Galatians 5.

Read Romans 7:14-25 and Galatians 5:13-21.

What do you learn about the "flesh" from these passages?

What does a lifestyle surrendered to the flesh look like?

What other power dwells within Paul that causes him to desire to obey God (see also Romans 8:2-6)?

APPLICATION

When you received Jesus as your Savior, you were born again (1 Peter 1:3), indwelt by His Spirit (Ephesians 1:13), and freed from slavery to sin (Romans 6:2-6). Yet at that same moment, you also began to battle three powerful enemies: the world, the devil, and the flesh. That means that although you are truly a new creation in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), you are also still a sinner, betrayed by your sinful flesh and constantly vulnerable to the coordinated attacks of the world and the devil.

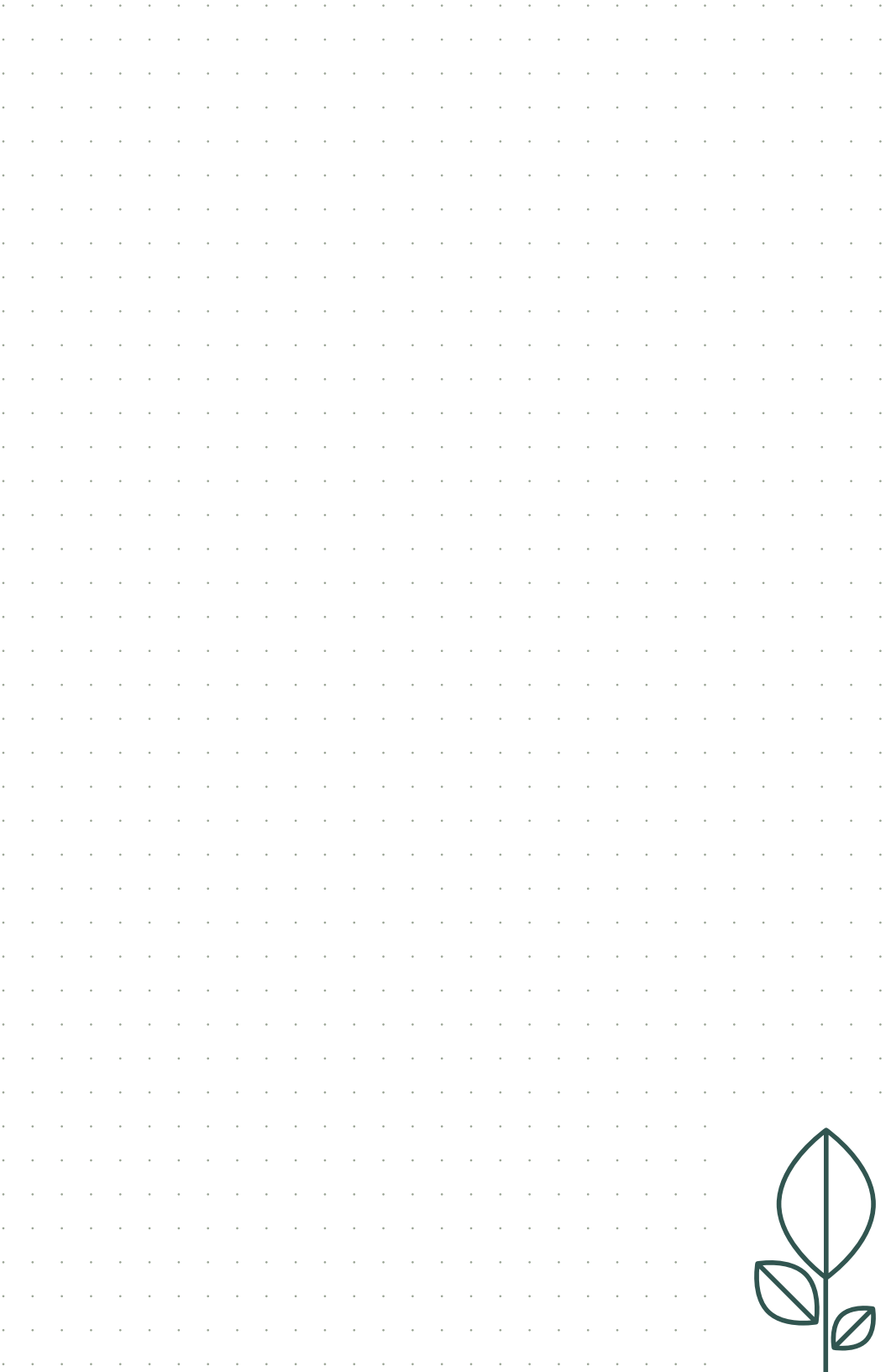
So what hope do we have against such powerful and pervasive enemies? Fortunately, we have great hope! As our memory verse this week declares, God promises to help us overcome any temptation our enemies can throw at us. Let's take a few moments to understand ourselves more deeply.

1. Satan's primary strategy is to deceive us into believing lies about God, ourselves, our family and friends, our circumstances, our past and our future, etc.. You name it - he lies about it. What specific lies are you most vulnerable to believe, and what are the primary sources of those lies (for example, a friend or family member, the internet, a traumatic memory)?

2. What circumstances cause you to be most vulnerable to these lies (for example, when you are hungry or tired, when you are with specific people or when you are alone)?

3. While these circumstances are sometimes unavoidable, often we can wisely avoid the things that make us most vulnerable to attack. The Apostle Paul exhorted the Roman Christians to “...make no provision for the flesh to arouse its desires” (Romans 13:14, NET). For example, if surfing social media causes you to struggle with discontentment or lust, you can delete the app or block the website. What settings can you change or avoid to guard yourself from temptation?

4. Spend some time prayerfully asking God for wisdom to help you better identify and avoid the lies and temptations Satan and the world bombard you with. What specifically is the Lord leading you to change this week?



Lesson 10

Why Follow Jesus for a Lifetime?

MEMORIZE

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness,
and all these things will be provided to you.

Matthew 6:33

If someone were to ask you why you follow Jesus, what would you say?

The majority of the human race believes that “the good life” can be found primarily in satisfying our own desires through such things as pleasure, possessions, money, comfort, and fame. On the other hand, the Bible describes these empty pursuits as idols.

Read the following quote from Timothy Keller and answer the questions below:

“In Ezekiel 14:3, God says about the elders of Israel, ‘These men have set up their idols in their hearts.’ Like us, the elders must have responded... ‘Idols? What idols? I don’t see any idols.’ God was saying that the human heart takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions, even family, and turns them into ultimate things. Our hearts deify them as the center of our lives, because, we think, they can give us significance and security, safety and fulfillment, if we attain them.”* *Timothy Keller*

How would you summarize Keller’s point about the nature of idols? Why do we worship them?

What “good things” in your life are you tempted to make into “ultimate things,” instead of giving your love and allegiance to God?

Jesus is better than the idols we set up in our hearts! God wants what is truly best for us and He knows where we can find it: in Jesus! We experience God’s best when we consistently say “yes” to Him. And we say “yes” not to earn His love and approval, but because we already have His love and approval! How incredibly freeing is this truth! So, what are a few of the benefits of faithfully following Jesus for a lifetime?

*Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters*, Reprint edition (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), xvi.

FAITHFULLY FOLLOWING JESUS PRODUCES TRUE JOY

READ JOHN 15:9-11

How does our experience of joy relate to abiding (remaining) in Christ?

What does Jesus mean by “joy?” What does it look like to experience true joy in this life? (see also Hebrews 12:1-3)

READ PHILIPPIANS 4:6-9

According to this passage, what are the steps to finding true peace?

READ JOHN 10:10

What does Jesus mean by “abundance” here?

How does Jesus’s definition of abundance differ from the world’s definition?

FAITHFULLY FOLLOWING JESUS PROTECTS US FROM SIN'S CONSEQUENCES

What painful consequences of sin do you observe in the following passages?

Romans 6:15-16

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

1 Corinthians 11:29-32

1 John 4:16-19

FAITHFULLY FOLLOWING JESUS WILL BE REWARDED WHEN JESUS RETURNS

What do the following passages tell us about heavenly rewards?

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

2 Timothy 4:7-8

Revelation 2:26-27

Luke 19:11-27

How can we reconcile the concept of heavenly rewards with the idea that our salvation is a free gift for everyone who believes in Jesus?

The above list of three reasons to follow Christ is by no means comprehensive. What other reasons can you think of for following Christ rather than pursuing sin? Can you think of scripture to go with each?

APPLICATION

THANK GOD FOR MAKING YOU NEW IN CHRIST JESUS

You are no longer who you used to be. Therefore, you are no longer obligated to obey the voice of sin. Jesus has set you free from sin's reign in your life. Although we face a daily battle with the presence of temptation and sin in our lives, we can be confident that the war has been won through Christ's death and resurrection.

Read Romans 8:10-13 and 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Thank God for your new identity and your new ability to obey Him.

PRAY FOR THE STRENGTH TO TURN AWAY FROM YOUR HEART'S IDOLS

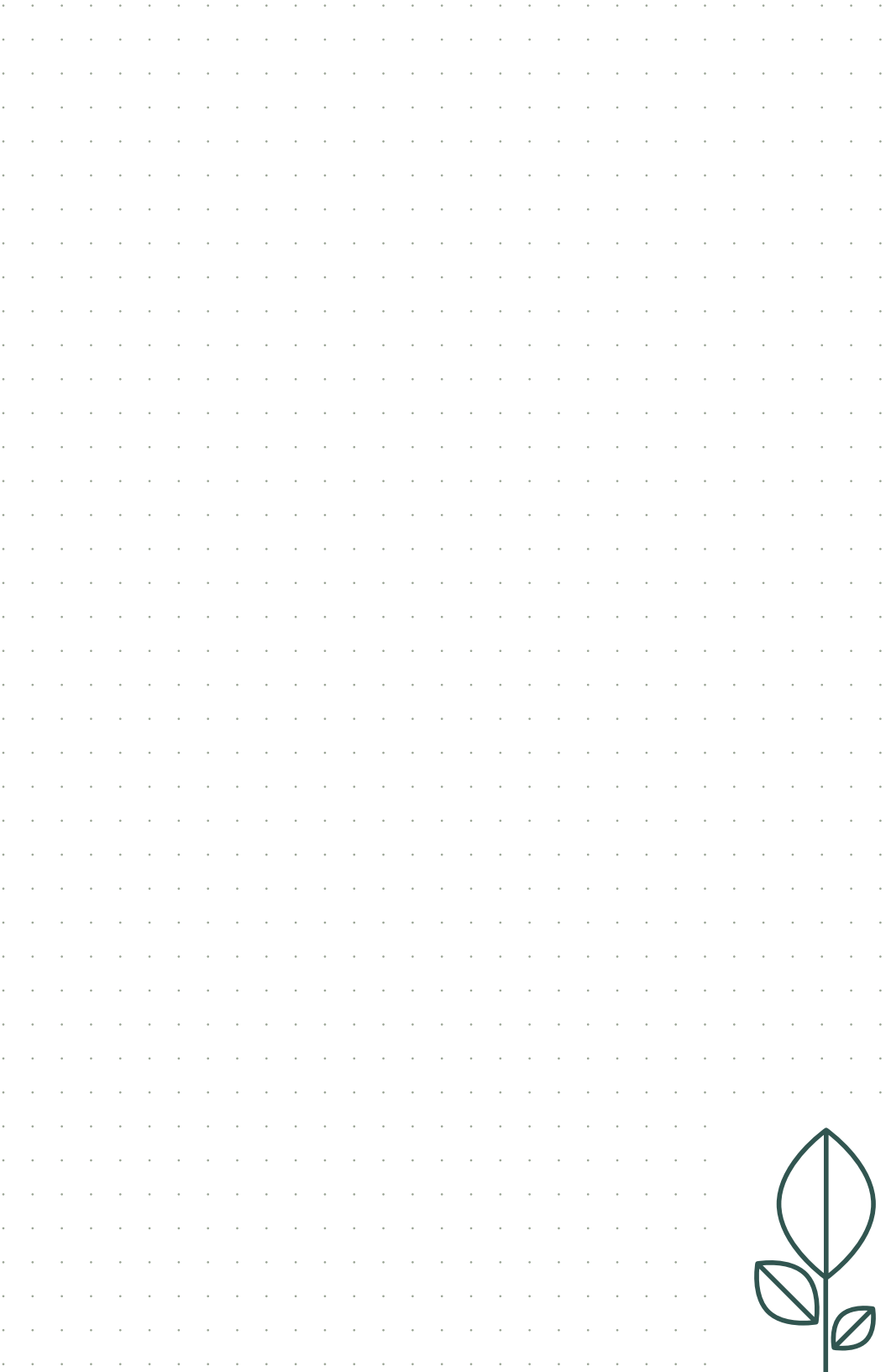
Read and underline any key words or ideas in the following verses.

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them *mere* rubbish, so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; if somehow I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already grasped *it all* or have already become perfect, but I press on if I may also take hold of that for which I was even taken hold of by Christ Jesus. Brothers *and sisters*, I do not regard myself as having taken hold of *it yet*; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. **Philippians 3:8-14**

What “idols” have you pursued for security and significance?

Pray for the Holy Spirit to make you aware of when you are turning a good thing into an ultimate thing and for the ability to turn away from your heart's idols in order to follow Jesus faithfully.



Appendix

Is the Bible Reliable?

IS THIS REASONABLE TO BELIEVE?

Having established what the Bible claims about itself, that it is the authoritative Word of God without error or contradiction, a skeptical reader may wonder, “Is it reasonable to believe these claims?” The short answer is, “Absolutely!” Unbiased literary analysis, historical research, and archeology all provide strong evidence in favor of the reliability of scripture. We don’t have room to list all the evidence, but here are three strong arguments in favor of the reliability of scripture:

INTERNAL EVIDENCE

For a book written over many centuries by many authors in many places, the Bible demonstrates remarkable unity in theme and theology. Notice how the enemy introduced in Genesis 3 becomes the enemy vanquished in Revelation 12:9. Also, it includes an astounding amount of historically fulfilled prophesy (Psalm 22:14-18 fulfilled in Matthew 27:35; Isaiah 53 fulfilled perfectly in the life of Christ; Micah 5:2 fulfilled in Matthew 2:1-6). Finally, contrary to almost all other ancient works of literature, the Bible is shocking in its faithfulness to record embarrassing truths and events without distortion, such as disorder in the churches (1 Corinthians 3:1-3) and sins of the apostles (Romans 7; Gal 2:11).

MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT

When we read the New Testament today, are we reading a book that has been heavily distorted over the last 2000 years or a reliable witness to the original text? Ancient manuscripts clearly demonstrate that the latter is true – our text today is over 99% accurate and the minor discrepancies affect no major doctrinal issues. Evidence for all other ancient literature pales in comparison to the overwhelming body of ancient manuscript evidence for the New Testament, as the following chart demonstrates:

WORK	DATE WRITTEN	EARLIEST COPY FRAGMENT	TIME SPAN	NUMBER OF COPIES	ACCURACY OF THE COPIES
Plato	427-347BC	900AD	1200 years	7	---
Aristotle	384-322BC	1100AD	1400 years	49	---
Sophocles	496-406BC	1000AD	1400 years	193	---
Homer (Iliad)	9th Cent. BC	400BC	500 years	643	95%
New Testament	40-100AD	125AD	*25 years	**24,000+	99+%

*to earliest manuscript fragment of book of John; ~ 100 years to large NT texts; 250 years to single; complete NT (Codex Sinaiticus)
** 5,300 Greek texts, 10,000 Latin Vulgate translations, 9,300 other early translations

HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

As a last line of evidence, we can compare the people, places, and events recorded in the Bible with historical and archeological evidence from the same periods. What do we find? As the prominent Australian archeologist Clifford Wilson wrote,

“Those who know the facts now recognize that the New Testament must be accepted as a remarkably accurate source book.”

Rocks, Relics and Biblical Reliability, 120

Take Luke for example, the careful historian who wrote Luke and Acts (see Luke 1:1-4). In Luke 3:1, he refers to Lysanias as tetrarch of Abilene in 27 AD, which seemed to contradict historical evidence until the discovery of an inscription written between 14 and 37 AD that confirmed Luke's statement. Acts 17:6 refers to “politarchs” in Thessalonica, thought for years to be a historical mistake until confirmed by numerous inscriptions found in the excavation of Thessalonica and dating from the first century. In fact, not a single archeological discovery contradicts Luke's references to 32 countries, 54 cities, and 9 islands! Such data should not surprise us because the biblical authors were typically very near in time, place, and participation to the events they recorded. Even secular historians note that the nearer an author was to the events he recorded, the more reliable his account would be.

And He said to him,
“YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR
GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH
ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’
This is the great and foremost commandment.

MATTHEW 22:37-38

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

JOHN 1:1

*But we all, with unveiled faces,
looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord,
are being transformed into the same image
from glory to glory, just as from
the Lord, the Spirit.*

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

For by grace you have been saved through faith;
and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;
not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

EPHESIANS 2:8-9

My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them,
and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life,
and they will never perish; and no one will snatch
them out of My hand. My Father, who has given
them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able
to snatch *them* out of the Father’s hand.

JOHN 10:27-29

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,
peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against
such things there is no law.

GALATIANS 5:22-23

All Scripture is inspired by God and
beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction,
for training in righteousness; so that the man or
woman of God may be fully capable, equipped
for every good work.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

...and let’s consider how to encourage
one another in love and good deeds, not
abandoning our own meeting together,
as is the habit of some people, but encouraging
one another; and all the more as you see the
day drawing near.

HEBREWS 10:24-25

No temptation has overtaken you
except *something* common to mankind; and
God is faithful, so He will not allow you to be
tempted beyond what you are able, but with
the temptation will provide the way of escape
also, so that you will be able to endure it.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:13

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness,
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MATTHEW 6:33



ESSENTIALS



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