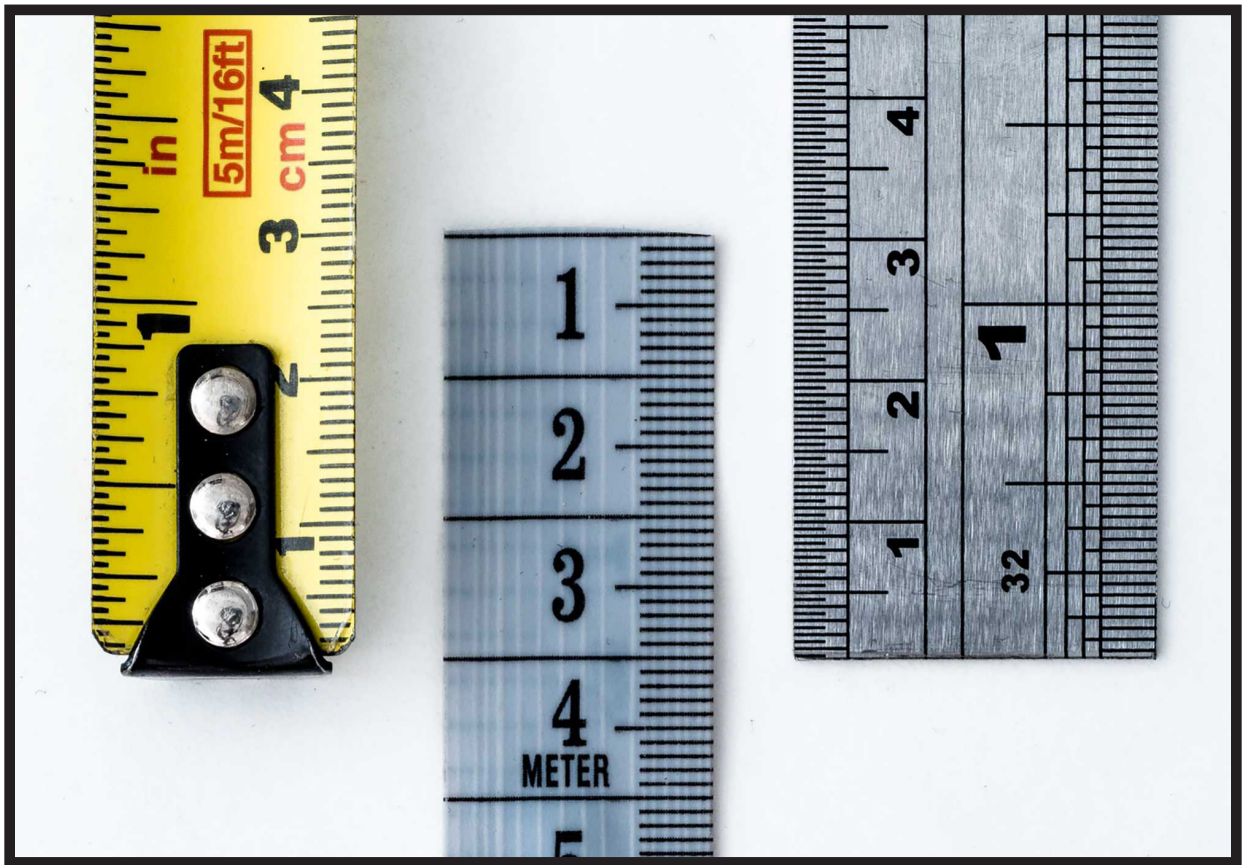


# RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH



## Growing Up In All Things

*“...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 of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ...” — Eph. 4:14, 15*

*by Steven Harper*

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# Preface

The inspired apostle Peter closed out his second letter with a warning to the disciples to watch out for “*untaught and unstable*” men who would “*twist*” Scriptures “*to their own destruction,*” and went on to tell them, “*You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2<sup>nd</sup> **Pet. 3:16-18**). Peter’s answer to the “*untaught and unstable men*” was spiritual growth! And so it is for disciples today; if we are to be able to stand against men who bring in error and who twist the Scriptures, we must also “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” that we will be able to [1] recognize/identify error, [2] refute it, and [3] correct those who are promoting it that they may know the right way and follow it, if they so choose. If they are unwilling, we must then be able to exercise disciplinary actions that the church may remain strong and pure.

The apostle Paul also gave us some words about the necessity of growth. To the Ephesians, he wrote that Christ had set within the church certain positions that would help equip saints “*for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,*” and that they might have all they need to “*grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ*” (**Eph. 4:11-15**). From this, we may logically conclude that Christ *wants* us to grow, and that we should be striving to grow more like Christ every day.

These lessons are intended to give us some important goals for our spiritual growth, though it is certainly not an exhaustive list. There are many more things we must add to our faith, and each lesson will have at least one question particularly addressing personal application. Let us begin with these that we may truly grow.

— Steven C. Harper

**2009**

## GROWING UP IN ALL THINGS

# Lesson One: Becoming The 'New Creature'

(2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:12-21)

**True Conversion.** Saul was a man who was passionate about following God. When we are first introduced to him, he is among those who are stoning Stephen to death (**Acts 7:58**) because they did not believe the message he brought and they certainly did not like the fact he had convicted them of murdering the Christ (**v. 52**). The next time we meet him, he has letters from the high priest authorizing him to arrest, bind, and bring to Jerusalem any and all who followed Christ (**9:1, 2**). But, as we see, something happened on the road to Damascus and when he finally got to Damascus, he converted and became a follower of Christ; now he was among those whom he had just days before been persecuting! His conversion was seen immediately in that he began preaching Jesus as the Christ in Damascus, and stirred up the crowds so much they were ready to kill him (**vv. 20-25**).

The man named Saul made a change in his life [and even a name change] and, as the new man, he said that he had taught “*first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance*” (**Acts 26:20**). Now known as Paul, he said that he had taught all men they needed to **change** and that they needed to demonstrate to the world they had changed by the things they did; he also practiced what he preached! That is the very essence of a true conversion, which is made possible only when we truly **repent**. As someone has defined repentance, it is ‘a change of heart that leads to a change of life.’

We may not have been, as Saul was, someone who violently opposed Christ and His disciples, but before we were all obedient to the gospel message, we were all outside of Christ and we were all lost sinners. Now that we are in Christ, we must become someone different! Previously, we followed our own ways and did what we wanted to do. Maybe we **thought** we were following Christ but found out we really were not; maybe we just were not interested in spiritual matters; maybe we

were just putting it off until some point ‘later’ in life when we were ‘ready’; maybe we were even baptized previously, but only because we thought it was something someone else wanted us to do and not out of true conviction, and we really hadn’t changed after that day.

When Paul wrote to the brethren at Ephesus, he instructed them to “*put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness*” (**Eph. 4:22-24**), and then gave specific changes that needed to be made (**vv. 25-32**). In a similar letter to the Colossian brethren, Paul used stronger language, saying they should “*put to death*” the fleshly desires because they had “*put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him*” (**Col. 3:5-10**). When we “*put to death*” those fleshly desires, we eliminate them forever — not just set them aside for a later date or hide them from men. Unless we put to death the old man, how can we claim to be the new?

And in the theme passage for today’s lesson, Paul again writes that those in Christ “*should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again*” and “*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*” (**2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 5:15-17**). Part of putting to death the old man is the need to “kill” our personal, fleshly desires and start living for Christ instead of self. Paul wrote a similar message to the Romans, saying they should “*not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God*” (**Rom. 6:12, 13**). Where we once indulged in selfish fleshly desires, now [in Christ], we should be living to do the things **He**

wants us to do and using our bodies for **His** service instead of for fulfilling our fleshly pleasures and desires.

So, how do we become this “*new creature*” God says we must be? If we take all the instruction from the previous passages, we can get a good idea of what this must include. First, we must “*put to death*” the old desires and we must no longer seek the pleasures of the fleshly things. Outside of Christ, we did not answer to anyone but self and we did whatever ‘self’ wanted to do; in Christ, however, we see that we answer to Him and it is **His** desires we must pursue. That necessarily means that we also then no longer use our bodies to fulfill fleshly pleasures, since what we think eventually is demonstrated in our actions (cf. **Matt. 12:34, 35; 15:19**). As Paul said to the Corinthians, we live no longer for ourselves, but for Him who died for us and rose again — Christ. If we understand that it is our own desires that lead to sin (**Jas. 1:14, 15**), we will see the importance of putting away the desires that will lead us to sin. Instead, we must desire something else — something that does not lead us to sin. We must desire what **God** desires. Paul exhorted Timothy to “*Flee youthful lusts*” and instead “*pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart*” (**2<sup>nd</sup> Tim. 2:22**). That is what **we** must do, too!

As we say this, we must recognize that there will be, for some, a great struggle to overcome the old ways and to change everything about themselves. And, we must recognize that, for most people, this is not going to be an ‘overnight’ change. People who have come out of the world may never have known the way of true righteousness and need to be trained in that way; while they are learning, they may make some choices that are based on their worldly knowledge and not God’s will. It is then that we must be patient and longsuffering **as we correct them**. We do not overlook or dismiss their behavior, but we must do it lovingly and patiently. While they are making the change, we must emphasize they are now an example to the world and others will be looking at them and closely examining their behavior now that they claim to be a disciple of Christ to see if they have really made a change or if it was all a ruse. They

will be scrutinized and they will be tempted to go back, so we must do our part in encouraging them to stay on the path of righteousness and to make the changes as quickly as possible, which most often means making a break with friends from the old way of life who will try their hardest to bring them back.

In Christ, we **must** be that ‘new creation’ or we have not really converted at all. Changes must be seen in the way we talk, the way we dress, the things we do, the places we go, the people with whom we associate, and whether or not we give of our time and resources to serve the Lord and accomplish His work. All together, these things [and more] will demonstrate to the world that we have forsaken the old ways and now follow Christ.

### Questions and Application.

1. What things did Saul/Paul do that demonstrated he was a “*new creation*”? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What did Paul mean when he wrote that we must “*put off the old man*” and “*put to death*” the fleshly desires? How is this accomplished?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What are some ways we must visibly demonstrate to the world that, after conversion, we are not the person we used to be? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

APPLICATION
4. What changes must be made in my life to ensure I have made a true conversion? _____
_____
_____
_____



## Lesson Two: Having A Spiritual Mind

(Colossians 3:1, 2)

**A New Way of Thinking.** In the theme text for today, Paul makes a reasonable argument to those who had already obeyed the gospel: “*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*” In other words, if you are one of Christ’s, then think about where Christ is and do not set your mind here on earth! The apostle Paul also reminded the Roman brethren [and us], “*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit*” (Rom. 8:5), clearly distinguishing between the fleshly-minded man and the spiritually-minded man. But he went on to say, “*to be carnally minded is death*” (v. 6), “*the carnal mind is enmity against God*” (v. 7), and “*those who are in the flesh cannot please God*” (v. 8). These words set forth the necessity of a change that must be made in our way of thinking, our goals, and our service. No longer can we set our minds on the fleshly things and how we may please ourselves [or other men]; now, we must set our minds on God and, since God is a spirit, we must set our minds on spiritual things.

But how can we know if we are spiritually-minded? The simple answer is to ask ourselves what we spend most of our time thinking about — What interests us most? What do we value most? And if we put it in the terms Jesus used, where is our treasure (cf. Matt. 6:19-21)? Consider the following contrasts that contrast spiritually-minded thinking *versus* earthly- or materially-minded thinking:

***Serving God vs. Serving Sin. (Rom. 6:16-22)***

The man who has set his mind on the things above has a greater concern for getting into heaven than fulfilling his own fleshly desires — not that he no longer has a desire for fleshly pleasures, but that he has such a desire to be where Christ is he has subordinated and conformed his desires to remain within God’s boundaries so he might serve God. There is indeed a war going on between flesh and spirit, as the apostle Paul so described in Gal.

5:16-17, but the **spiritually-minded** man has chosen to walk in the Spirit that he would not fulfill the lust [desire] of the flesh.

***Pleasing God vs. Pleasing Men. (Gal. 1:10)***

While the mind is set on things of this earth, men will be influenced more by what other men think than what God demands. As in all other areas, we cannot please both God and man, for the two are in conflict with each other’s goal. James said friendship with the world is enmity with God (Jas. 4:4), and Paul agreed, saying that the mind set on the flesh **cannot** please God (Rom. 8:8), and even including himself in the mix, he told the Galatians that if he sought to please man, he would not be a servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10). If we are motivated by the approval of man, we may even be led to turn away from what we know to be true and right in the sight of God (cf. John 12:42, 43).

***Desiring God vs. Desiring Material Things.***

(Matt. 6:24) Jesus laid forth the choices we face in our worldly existence: either God or greed. And this is the one thing that seems to be the master of so many in our nation more than ever. We have such affluence in this country that what were once luxuries are now considered necessities. Poverty, as defined in this country, is set on a level far above what many other nations see as wealthy. And what has it done? It has made us believe in ourselves instead of God, look to our government instead of to our Creator, and it has caused many to be, like Martha, distracted and worried and troubled about many things except the one thing which we need.

Our service to materialism may not be quite so evident as the rich young ruler, but it will result in the same end if we do not acknowledge its hold on us. Servitude to materialism will be seen in the order of our priorities, the goals we seek, and the importance we place on our material possessions. A heart set on the things of this earth will seek to ‘keep up with the Joneses,’ will spend a majority of time involved in the affairs of this world and how to make it more physically comfortable, or even base their choice for political leaders on how much they believe

they will personally [materially or financially] benefit, with no consideration for how they may be affected in their spiritual lives.

The simple answer to the problem of worldly-mindedness is to become spiritually-minded, but that does not really explain how that is possible. First, we must do exactly as Paul said and set our minds “*on things above, not on things on the earth.*” Instead of allowing the advertising world to direct our minds to the latest and greatest product from far away places or allowing our peers to influence us to join them as they seek to “keep up with the Joneses” or even allowing ourselves to get caught up in the endless circle of “instant gratification” through material possessions, we must make the spiritual things our focus. Study God’s word more than we watch TV; spend time teaching others the gospel instead of discussing the weather or last night’s ball game; talk about eternity rather than retirement; invite friends and family to come hear God’s word or to study with you instead of just having them over for dinner or for parties. These things and more will demonstrate to the world our true focus is on spiritual matters and will either run some off or will cause some to cultivate an interest in knowing what we know and doing what we do.

A fleshly mind is not just a danger outside the worship assembly or our spiritual service to God, either. Sometimes, we may allow the fleshly mind to creep into our lives without realizing what we are doing or who we have become. Consider the following questions to see which mind set is closer to yours:

- Do I think more about how well the song was sung in worship, or what the words said?
- Do I think more about how long the preacher droned on or whether or not the message was true, according to God’s word, and how it applies to me?
- Do I think about others and their spiritual condition when I pray, or do I just say the same prayer I’ve always said, without much forethought?
- Do I set aside time each week to study in order to prepare for class, or is it done only when [and if] I have time after doing everything else?

Of course, this is not an exhaustive list, but these few questions will help us to see if we have a spiritual or a worldly mind set. Let us do our best to have a spiritual mind, which is pleasing to God.

### Questions and Application.

1. Why is it impossible for a faithful disciple to continue having a worldly mind set? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What are some obvious [visible] ways we demonstrate either a spiritual or fleshly mind set? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. With a spiritual mind set, what will be the faithful disciple’s basis for making all decisions and before doing any deed or speaking? \_\_\_\_\_

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### APPLICATION

4. List some things **I** can do to help myself become more spiritually-minded. [And share it with others in class, if it would help others.] \_\_\_\_\_

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## Lesson Three: Knowing Your Bible

(2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:15)

**The Means of Divine Approval.** If we want to know what someone likes, what better way than simply asking them, right? And if we cannot ask them directly or cannot get a direct answer, wouldn't their written words be the next best thing? If the One whose approval we seek had given us a written record of all He wants us to do and what pleases Him, wouldn't it be wise to diligently study that written record that we might learn the things that He wants us to do and the things that are pleasing to Him? That would be a logical conclusion, of course, but it is also what God has clearly said we *must* do to obtain His approval. In the words of the apostle Paul to the young evangelist Timothy, we are told to “*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*” In those words are some important points about what we must all be doing, but let us first understand one small point before getting into this lesson.

The word translated into our English language as “*Be diligent*” is the Greek word σπουδάζω [spoudazo, *spoo-dad'-zo*], which, according to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, has meaning of using speed, diligence, and study. Implied within this one word is the need for *urgency, diligence, and study!* [It is also the source for our English word *speed*.] In other words, obtaining God's approval is something we should seek with urgency, with great diligence, and we should be studying [His word] to know what He approves. Let us also note from this passage that this requires that we properly handle His word for that to happen; twisting His words, misunderstanding them, misinterpreting them, or misapplying them will not make us approved.

That said, there are some important factors in being able to properly handle God's word; one of the most important things we must understand before we begin our study is the matter of *context*. If we go to God's word and study it without recognizing the context in which the words are found, it is likely we will err in

either interpretation or application — or both. To understand each part in its proper context demands we *at the minimum* know [1] who is speaking, [2] to whom he is speaking, and [3] what the situation is when this is being spoken. But we must also know something about each book or letter in the Bible to properly use or understand them, too. The *style* in which a book or letter — or even parts of the book — is written [poetic, figurative language, etc.], the *purpose* of the writing [personal address, to a church, biographical record, etc.], and the *type* of writing [historical, prophecy, personal letter, etc.] will also make a difference in whether or not we properly understand and/or use the texts.

We most likely have already heard or learned that the Bible is basically a collection of books. Those books include, in the Old Testament, books of law [Genesis through Deuteronomy], history [Joshua through Esther], poetry and wisdom [Job through Song of Solomon] and prophecy [Isaiah through Malachi]; in the New Testament, we have biographical/historical books [Matthew through John], historical books [Acts], letters to churches [1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians through 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians], personal letters [1<sup>st</sup> Timothy through Philemon], general letters written to multiple audiences [Hebrews through 3<sup>rd</sup> John], and a prophetic book [Revelation]. To properly understand the things written in any and all of these books, we must first understand the kind of book each one is because without considering that, we may take a figurative, poetic meaning and try to interpret it literally and will not see its true meaning. The same would be true if we tried to make something literal into something figurative.

Once we understand the type of book or letter we are reading, the style of its writing, and the context in which it was written, we may then begin to study with purpose [to understand and apply]. When we are studying, we must take into consideration [1] the immediate context of verses before and after the one we read, [2] the context

of the book or letter in which we read this, and [3] the context of the Bible, as a whole; many errors have arisen because men do not consider one or all of these things. If we fail to consider the immediate context, we may fail to see that the words were directed at certain individuals and not just anyone (cf. **John 16:13**), that the situation in which the words were spoken limits its application (cf. **Deut. 5:1-3**), or that the text may be speaking of events that happened within the lifetime of the intended audience and is not still to come (cf. **Rev. 1:1-3**). If we fail to consider texts where they are found in the Bible, we may try to apply the words to us when they are not effective [authoritative] today, such as the Old Testament and/or the Ten Commandments (cf. **Gal. 5:1-4**). If we fail to understand the difference between figurative and literal language, we may try to insert meanings that were never intended (**Psa. 51:5; Rev. 12:3, 4**).

The reality is, though, men have erred in interpreting and applying Scripture almost from the beginning. Some had taken the words of God that pointed to the need to remember a certain command (**Exod. 13:9, 16**) and turned it into a traditional practice that was supposed to make them look more righteous (cf. **Matt. 23:5**). Some today take *portions* of Scripture and manufacture doctrines based on its erroneous interpretation or application [Ex. Premillennialism] that become popular among the people because many are unwilling to put forth the effort to investigate it and test it against its immediate context or harmonize it with other passages. Many times, it is simply spiritual laziness that leads men into error because audiences simply accept the words of mere men without ever taking the time to open up their Bibles and read it for themselves.

Since this is true, let us “*Be diligent*” to make sure we are not one of those who does not put forth the effort to discover the truth by diligent study of God’s word. Some passages may indeed be “*hard to understand*” (**2<sup>nd</sup> Pet. 3:16**), but nothing we **need** to understand is going to be **impossible** to understand. Let us take the time to study, and give ourselves enough time to study it effectively so we may gain a deeper understanding of the Scriptures. If we have learned the basics, it is time to start digging deeper that we may grow spiritually.

**Questions and Application.**

1. What are the different categories of the books of the Bible? How can these differences affect the way each one is interpreted? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
2. What troubles and erroneous interpretations have arisen because men fail to recognize the difference between the Old and New Testaments? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
3. How important is the consideration of a text’s immediate context? How it fits within the context of the Bible, as a whole? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

APPLICATION
4. How much time do I spend each week studying the Bible as compared to reading other writings or watching television? Can I improve? _____ _____ _____ _____

## GROWING UP IN ALL THINGS

# Lesson Four: Effective Bible Study

(Nehemiah 8:1-12; Acts 17:11)

**Not Just for the Sake of Knowledge.** Have you ever thought about *why* you study the Bible? If I were to ask you right now, what would you say? Would you say you were doing it so you can answer the questions in this workbook [or another]? Are you studying because you don't feel like you know enough or don't know all the answers to the questions your friends ask? Are you studying it so you can remember certain Bible passages so you will then be able to quote them later? If any of these are our reasons for studying, I want us to note that we are actually studying for *someone else* and not necessarily for our own spiritual benefit. If I know God's word well enough to teach someone else and they are converted, that is good, but what if I never obey it myself?

Being able to answer questions in a workbook does not mean we learn what God wants us to learn; I remember when I was younger, there were a few times I zipped through the workbook without ever cracking open my Bible; I knew all the answers when class time rolled around, but I can't say that I actually *learned* anything by doing it that way. Other times, I opened my Bible only long enough to find the answers to those fill-in-the-blank questions; once they were found, the Bible was set aside. This, friends and brethren, is *not* effective Bible study! Unfortunately, I am not the first person who ever "studied" the Bible in that way and probably won't be the last one, either. We need to *approach* our Bible study in a way that will benefit us most, *study* in the way that will benefit us most, and then *apply* it in the way that will benefit us most. Anything less than the best will not do, will it? With this in mind, then, let us consider how we can make our Bible study most effective.

**Before We Study.** Preparation is the key to an effective Bible study. If you know you have a class coming, don't wait until the proverbial "last minute" to start studying; you will likely be mentally rushed and will not see all there is to see. Give yourself plenty of time to study. Then, make sure you have the right attitude as you prepare; if you see your study as a drudgery, your mind

will not be sharp and important texts may be overlooked. The psalmist's attitude is one to be emulated (**Psa. 119:97, 148**). Remember, this is *God's word* we are studying! Then, make sure you are studying at a time and place where you will not be distracted. Again, give yourself plenty of time, and do your study in a place where you can read without interruption, and then consider what you've read without interruption, too. Finally, make sure you enter into the study with the goal of [1] learning what God would have you to do, [2] learning God's word so you may be able to teach others, and [3] being able to discern between truth and error.

**Making Our Study Effective.** Once we enter into the study, it is not time to ease up in our efforts. When we begin, we must do so with a willing heart if it is to be effective. Let us not forget these words are for our good (cf. **Deut. 6:24**) and for us to keep (cf. **Deut. 29:29**), so it should be approached with that in mind. A great difference in what we get *out* of our study will depend on what we have put *in* it, and how much we desire it. Consider the Ethiopian eunuch had already traveled 1300 miles [one way] to Jerusalem to serve God, and yet he as he headed home, he was taking the time to search the word to know it better (**Acts 8:26ff**). The Bereans, of course, exemplify the proper mind set when hearing God's word; the same should be carried over to our personal study! Once we begin, we must make every effort to be as accurate as possible in our observations. Remember how Paul made a distinction between the words 'Seed' and 'seeds' in **Galatians 3:16**? Did you notice how Jesus corrected the erroneous view of the Sadducees with just one word out of the text He quoted to them (cf. **Matt. 22:31, 32**)? [The word "*am.*"] Such distinctions may seem, to many, as trivial and nit-picky, but not to God. It is not that we are being legalistic about God's word; we just want to make sure we are doing what He wants! And let us read the texts as they were meant to be read to truly

grasp what is intended (cf. **Psalm 119:97-104** or **Luke 18:11-13**).

And as we study, there will inevitably be times when we seem to come to a point where we just can't get anymore out of the text, or just cannot see what the text means. Don't give up! Take a break and then come back again later. A refreshed mind will see a lot more than a tired one, and it just may be that when you come back, the answer "jumps" out at you this time. And surely all of us recognize that Bible study is a lifetime endeavor! That being true, why would we expect to learn all there ever is to learn from a passage in just one study — especially when we only give ourselves 15 minutes to do it? Be realistic, but also be determined. Consult your brethren if you come to a difficult passage; consult a trusted commentary [*after* you have looked at the text first]; look at other Bible passages that record the same event or address the same topic. I am a firm believer that the Bible is often its own best commentary.

**Correctly Interpreting.** Once we have studied God's word, it is then time to ask, "What does it mean?" If we don't ask that question each time we study, then our time has not been used most effectively. Now, it is time to answer those three questions regarding content [paragraph 3, p. 7] and the context in which we read it. I must emphasize that when we ignore any part of these things, we will likely misinterpret the text. Don't force your thoughts into the text, don't "read into" it what is not there, and don't try to read between the lines or search for some hidden "Bible code"; they aren't there! Instead, consider the setting in which the books or letters were written [consider the letter to the Philippians was written from jail], or try to put yourself in the place of the writer to fully understand what he saw or heard (cf. **Rev. 4 & 5**). And if you come across unfamiliar terms, take the time to find out what they mean; but make sure you recognize that some terms have different meanings, depending on how they are used.

**Application Time!** Once we have studied a passage or a book or letter, it is time then to stop and ask one more question: "How does this apply to *me*?" Again, if that is not our goal in study, we are most likely not gaining any benefits from it. Note that it does not necessarily take a long time from understanding to conviction to obedience (cf.

**Acts 2**). Where our study ends, application begins. Let us use all of these things in our studies that we might truly grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Questions and Application.**

1. For what reason[s] do we study God's word? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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2. What are some factors that will hinder us from effectively studying our Bibles? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. What can we learn about our Bible study from the example in **Nehemiah 8:1-12**? \_\_\_\_\_  
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APPLICATION
4. How has my Bible study affected my spiritual growth through the years? Is there anything I could do better in this area? _____ _____ _____



## Lesson Five: Learning More About God (Jeremiah 2:4-8)

**We Can't Love Him if We Don't Know Him.** Jesus once said that the greatest commandment was to “*love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*” (Matt. 22:37). But how can we love Him that way unless we know Him intimately? This reality is demonstrated in the history of the Israelites, particularly during the time when they were going into captivity. We find that they had continuously followed after the idols of the nations around them and did not know the Lord who had brought them out of Egyptian captivity, into the land of promise, and blessed them with provision and protection. Somewhere along the line, though, they got so far away from God that even those who handled the law did not know Him! Unfortunately, they would have to learn about God the hard way: by being taken from their land and held as captives for seventy years.

But we must learn from their example since we are supposed to be God's people today. We will be no better if we do not know God, and it is certain we will go into *spiritual* captivity (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim. 2:26) if we do not know Him. We must realize, too, that when we love the world and the things in it (1<sup>st</sup> John 2:15, 16) we cannot love God, no matter what we may say, because He demands all of our love. But to be able to say we love Him with our all, we must know Him well enough to be able to honestly say that. Are we going to love someone with our all if we do not *know* them? Are we going to love someone with our all if we only know them *casually*? Of course, we understand that if we are to love the Lord in this way, we must know Him intimately; this, then, should be the goal of every disciple. If we seek to be in heaven with Him eternally, we would be wise to learn as much about Him *now* as we can, but not just for the sake of knowing; we should be learning more about God because we seek to become more like Him. This should be one of the motivations for our Bible study: to learn more about God!

I cannot help but think of the times I have had people ask me how they can enjoy their Bible

study more, or how they can grow closer to God. The answers are closely related! The best I can answer those questions is to tell them to get to know God better. That means they need to study more. Once they study more, they will get to know God more intimately and, as a result, they will learn to love God more. Once they love God more, they will, as a result, love to study His word more. And once they love to study, they will learn more about God and love Him more — and on and on it goes. It does not matter where you begin on this circle of spiritual growth and increased appreciation for God, but you *do* need to start.

Let us not forget that God commanded His people to teach His word to their children diligently, and to talk of His word in every part of their daily lives (Deut. 6:6-9). He still wants us to learn more of His word because it is there that we learn about Him. Jesus wants us to learn of Him (Matt. 11:29) and He even directed some to “*go and learn*” what certain Scriptures meant (Matt. 9:13) because God wants us to know Him and His will. We can certainly know *something* about God by His creation (cf. Rom. 1:18-20; Acts 14:17), but we cannot know the most important characteristics of God or all of what He has done for us by examining His creation; for that, we must go to the Bible.

Consider the fact Jesus commanded us, “*Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect*” (Matt. 5:48), and, “*Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful*” (Luke 6:36). Consider also that God said to His people, “*You shall be holy; for I am holy*” (Lev. 11:44) and this was reiterated to His people in the New Testament, too (1<sup>st</sup> Pet. 1:15, 16). Finally, consider that John said, “*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love*” (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:7, 8). From just these few verses, we learn much about God and — if we are to be like Him — the kind of people we must become. Let's consider just a few of the attributes of God

that we may learn more about Him and become more like Him.

**His mercy.** One of the great characteristics of God must certainly be His mercy. Within God’s word we are told, “*His mercy is everlasting*” (**Psa. 100:5**), and, “*as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him*” (**Psa. 103:11**), and is a mercy that goes much farther than any man would dare think, much less offer (cf. **Isa. 55:6-9**). Knowing His mercy, benefiting from it, and appreciating it can only be achieved through knowing Him.

**His love.** Obviously, since God *is* love (**1<sup>st</sup> John 4:8**), we would expect Him to be a God of love, and we would be right. We all know the familiar passage that speaks of God’s love (**John 3:16**), and even lesser-known passages (**Rom. 5:8**), but we would not know this unless we read His revealed word, and it is because of what we learn about His love that moves us to love Him and to love one another (**1<sup>st</sup> John 4:19**). It was that love, after all, that allowed us to be called His children (**1<sup>st</sup> John 3:1**)!

**The surety of His word.** And if the extension of His mercy and love towards us was not enough to cause us to want to serve Him, then the surety of His word must certainly be the final, convincing attribute. The God of whom we speak “*cannot lie*” (**Titus 1:2**) — it is impossible (**Heb. 6:18**)! And we can look back at the Bible record and find that when God promised something to the people, “*not one thing...failed of all the good things which the LORD...God spoke*” (**Josh. 23:14**). Solomon declared, “*There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses*” (**1<sup>st</sup> Kings 8:56**).

**His justice.** Elihu summed it up well when he said to Job and his friends, “*Surely God will never do wickedly, nor will the Almighty pervert justice*” (**Job 34:12**). We would do well to learn that God “*will render to each one according to his deeds*” (**Rom. 2:6**), whether good or evil. Knowing we face a certain judgment, every disciple should strive to his or her best ability to know the most about God as they can, for those who do not know God face a certain, terrible and eternal punishment (**2<sup>nd</sup> Thess. 1:8-10**).

### Questions and Application.

1. How is *knowing* God related to whether or not we love or obey Him? How does the extent to which we know Him affect the depth of our love and the limits of our obedience? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What can we learn about God from His creation, and what can we learn about Him from the Bible? How does one differ from the other? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Why is it important we know as much as we can about God? \_\_\_\_\_

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### APPLICATION

4. How well do I know God, and how does this affect my daily life? \_\_\_\_\_

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## GROWING UP IN ALL THINGS

# Lesson Six: Spiritual Exercise

(1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4:7, 8)

**Building Up Our Spiritual Body.** The apostle Paul urged Timothy, “*Exercise yourself toward godliness*” because, as he went on to say, “*bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.*” From these words, disciples should see that there should be a clear emphasis on spiritual strengthening, rather than on the physical strengthening. While our physical bodies will certainly benefit from exercise, the benefits of **spiritual** exercise far outweigh the physical in the short term **and** the long term. If we are truly spiritually-minded people, we will quickly see that our focus should be on the spiritual matters, rather than the physical, and here is one area where this should be most evident.

Consider, for a minute, the words of the apostle John to Gaius, which we may have skimmed over without much thought: “*Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers*” (3<sup>rd</sup> John 1:2). Have you ever thought about those words and what John might mean? What if someone wished your physical health was doing as well as your spiritual health? Would you say “Thank you,” or would the idea frighten you? As much time as we think about the shape and condition of our physical bodies [which, in itself, is not a bad thing], how much time should we spend in consideration of our spiritual health and in strengthening the spirit? Let us never forget that our attention to — or neglect of — the spiritual side has everlasting consequences!

For today’s lesson, let’s consider some parallels between the physical and spiritual exercises that do us good. The following points are from a weight training guide and cover a method for increased physical strength; we will follow that with the spiritual exercises we must accomplish if we seek spiritual strengthening, according to Scripture. Since weight lifting is basically a matter of exerting resistance [you lift the weights, resisting gravity], we can see the parallel to our spiritual life, where we must

also practice resistance to increase our spiritual strength.

**Overload.** In physical weight training, this simply means you must lift weights that are more than what your body is used to. This sets your body up for the next point: increased resistance, or progression.

In the spiritual sense, we start out our spiritual walk as babes in Christ, but we cannot remain a babe! Somewhere along the line, we must start doing more than simply what we have always done. Our unused physical muscles deteriorate due to atrophy; should we think our spiritual “muscles” will do any better if we are not using them? The writer to the Hebrews reminded them, “*Everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 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*” (Heb. 5:13, 14). When we never attempt to do more than what we have done in the past [spiritually], it is certain we will not grow stronger. Let us resolve to spend more time in becoming more godly, and seeking after true godliness, rather than trying to look more like the world and pursuing the things they pursue.

**Progression.** As hinted at earlier, the overload sets your body up to slowly increase the amount of weight you lift, thus strengthening the body and allowing it to do more and more over time and to not reach and/or get stuck on a “plateau” of physical stagnation.

In the spiritual sense, we must grow spiritually or we fail to achieve what God expects of us. Remember, the writer of Hebrews chastised the disciples in the fact they should have been teachers at the time he wrote to them, but they had need of someone teaching them the basic principles of their faith (Heb. 5:12)! If we never seek to get spiritually stronger, then we must admit to satisfaction with **mediocrity**. Even if we are doing well, we can still do more (1<sup>st</sup> Thess. 4:1, 9-10)! When it comes to our pursuit of a greater degree of godliness, can we honestly ever say we have attained to the supreme measure of our Lord and

Savior? If not, then we must keep moving toward that goal.

**Specificity.** In weight training, this simply means we must target certain muscles we need to strengthen, and to not overlook or overburden any one muscle or set of muscles.

In our spiritual life, this is an extremely wise decision. One great mark of leaders is that they know their strengths — *and* their weaknesses. And then they seek to eliminate the weaknesses! Now is not the time to start getting “generic” by telling ourselves, “Someday I’m going to do something about my spiritual condition.” Here, we must be brutally and completely honest with ourselves — and be specific. If we have a weakness in one part of our lives, we must be willing to admit it (cf. **Luke 17:3-5**; **1st John 1:9**) and then we must do our utmost to strengthen ourselves in that. If we lack true godliness in some aspect of our lives, then we must *specifically* address that weakness and learn what we must do to become stronger in it. Seek the answer from God (cf. **Jas. 1:5-7**).

**Rest & Recovery.** In weight training, we gain strength faster when we actually take a break from the training and allow our muscles to rest and to grow. [They grow only during the rest periods.] This may be as little as **30 seconds** in between reps, but it can be *days* for other weight training exercises.

In our spiritual life, we may also benefit from “rest and recovery” in between efforts to grow. This does not mean we take a break from trying become more godly, however! If we have been striving to grow spiritually and have attempted to do more and weightier godly exercises, it will be necessary after these efforts to stop and see if we have actually grown in spiritual strength before trying again or moving on to something even weightier. What if we find out during our attempts at greater spiritual strength that we just were not ready for that situation? Well, as in weightlifting, you don’t want to find out you tried too much in the middle of the lift!

Do we seek spiritual strength? If so, we must exercise ourselves in godliness and not in worldliness, materialism, and the desires of the flesh. As Peter said, “*Resist the devil and he will*

*flee from you*” (**Jas. 4:7**). If we exercise this way regularly, God guarantees we will gain spiritual strength.

### Questions and Application.

1. How does training towards godliness help us in our spiritual life? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What effects do *too little* or *too weighty* efforts in spiritual matters have on us? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What does James say about the necessity of “godly exercise” (**Jas. 2:14-26**)? \_\_\_\_\_

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### APPLICATION

4. What are some spiritual exercises I can do to help me grow stronger? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Lesson Seven: Regular Spiritual Checkups (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 13:5)

**Personal Evaluation Time.** As the apostle Paul closed out the second letter to the Corinthian brethren, he exhorted them, “*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you are disqualified.*” Within this exhortation and command we find an important responsibility of every disciple: self-examination. It must be understood, though, that this self-examination is based on the word of God and not on our own opinions or the standards set by men. Just as doctors today use the medical standards to diagnose and treat illnesses and do their examinations and tests, so we must use the *spiritual* standard to test and examine ourselves. That standard is, of course, the word of God — the Bible. And while the medical standards may be revised frequently, based on the knowledge of men, the spiritual standard comes from the God of perfect knowledge and needs no revisions.

In the physical world, we are encouraged to get annual checkups to make sure we are in good health and that no diseases, viruses, hidden injuries, unexplainable pains, abnormal body functions, or other problems have infected the body or are affecting any part of the body. During the examination, the physician asks certain questions that are aimed at discovering any problems and, if any are found, narrowing down the problem as much as possible to know how it must be treated. Our spiritual testing should follow those same procedures: ask the right questions that will help us to discover any spiritual problems and, if found, ask more specific questions so we may know how to correct the problem. Once again, it must be emphasized that the word of God must be the standard by which problems are identified (cf. **Rom. 7:7**), but it is also the means by which the problems must be corrected that we may be restored to our spiritual good health (**2<sup>nd</sup> Tim. 3:16, 17**).

So, let’s ask a few questions aimed at helping us check our own spiritual condition. [Remember this is a *self*-examination; we are not here to see how we might answer these questions for anyone else, and we are not here to give our opinions of how things should be.] And, as you would with the physician, you must be completely honest in answering the questions for it to do any good.

***Am I growing as I should be?*** In the physical world, we would not think anything was wrong if a three-month-old was only about 30 inches tall and weighed about 13 pounds; but what if, three years later, that same toddler was still 30 inches tall and 13 pounds? Wouldn’t you be wondering what was wrong? Why don’t we think that way spiritually? Once again, we must point out that spiritual growth is expected of every disciple (cf. **2<sup>nd</sup> Pet. 3:18; 1<sup>st</sup> Pet. 2:2**). In our self-examination, what do we find when considering our spiritual growth? Do we understand God’s word better than we did when first converted? Do we focus more on spiritual things now? Is our faith stronger? If you have truly grown, that is good; but if you haven’t, what will you do about it?

***What kind of ‘food’ do I eat?*** Any doctor worth his medical opinion will tell you that the things you consume will affect your health. Any disciple who understands God’s word will also tell you that the kind of spiritual ‘food’ you partake of will also affect you, but in the spirit. Are we still drinking milk or have we moved up to the meat (cf. **1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12-14**)? And are the things we meditate on good for us (cf. **Phlp. 4:8**)? If we find that our diet consists of a lot of spiritual ‘junk’ and nothing that is good for our spiritual health, will we be willing to change our diet?

***Do I get enough exercise?*** More than ever, physicians are concerned with how much exercise we are getting because we understand better than ever its effect on our long-term health. But without repeating too much from the last lesson, let us not forget that it is *spiritual* exercise, not the physical, that benefits us most; Are we getting enough spiritual exercise? Do we get *any* spiritual

exercise? Now is not the time to be “fudging” on the answer, either; showing up for the worship assembly, mouthing the words to the songs, mindlessly partaking of the Lord’s Supper, and running out the door until next Sunday morning is about as much “exercise” as lifting the remote to change channels. Genuine spiritual exercise is that which may cause temporary pains and be difficult, but also that which pushes us onto greater spiritual strength and gives us the ability to endure through even the toughest trials and greatest temptations. If we are honest with ourselves and find that we are not getting enough spiritual exercise [or none at all] what will we do?

***Are there any recurring/persistent problems?*** When we go to the doctor, he or she will often ask if we have any persistent pains or problems, hoping to root out some hidden problem. Sometimes, those hidden problems are extremely serious and some to the point of being fatal, if not treated. In the spiritual sense, it may be that we have some recurring or persistent problems that also affect our spiritual health that can lead to spiritual death, if not corrected and eliminated. Paul said we must put to death our fleshly desires as disciples (**Col. 3:5-10**), but if not remedied, they can lead to our spiritual death (cf. **Jas. 1:13-15**). We are only fooling ourselves if we think “that won’t happen to me”; the end result is the same for every man. If, in our self-examination, we find recurring problems, will we treat it in such a way as to seek its elimination, or will we keep it hidden from others though it will inevitably lead to our spiritual death? What will we do?

***Do I participate in behavior that endangers my health?*** Sometimes, physicians ask about our social and recreational behavior in an effort to be able to give us sound advice that will help us to stay healthy. If they know we like riding motocross, they will tell us to wear a helmet; if they know we like bull riding, they may ask us to seek mental counseling! [Just kidding, folks.] On a much more serious note, when we examine ourselves, we must be honest with ourselves when making note of how we live and the things we do. If we find that we place ourselves where we are led into temptation, it would be wise to

stop such behavior. If we find that we are setting our minds on earthly things, we must see that it will lead us away from God. If we find that we are participating in spiritually risky behavior, will we be willing to cease?

**Questions and Application.**

1. Why is it necessary we do regular self-examinations of our spiritual condition? What can happen if we neglect these examinations? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. How seriously should we consider any problems in our spiritual health? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What are some things we can do to ensure we have, and are maintaining, good spiritual health? \_\_\_\_\_

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**APPLICATION**

4. Upon examination, how would others rate my spiritual health? How would God rate it? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Lesson Eight: Maintaining Healthy Communication

(Luke 18:1; Philippians 4:6, 7)

**The Necessity and Benefits of A Good Prayer Life.** As disciples, we would do well to learn and apply what Jesus meant when He said, *“It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master”* (Matt. 10:24, 25). Since Jesus is our Teacher (Matt. 22:36) and Master (Luke 8:24) and we are His disciples and servants, it is in our best interest to be like Him and, as we will see in this lesson, we should be like Him in the manner and frequency of His prayers.

Luke’s record of the life of Jesus shows Jesus to be one who *“often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed”* (Luke 5:16). Within the gospels, we find at least nine occasions recorded where Jesus prayed, whether in private (Mark 1:35) or in public (John 11:41, 42), and we find at least two occasions where Jesus either taught His disciples how to pray (Matt. 6:9-13) or that they should pray always (Luke 18:1-8). We may learn, from His life, that Jesus practiced the very thing He expected of His disciples. As His disciples today, we must follow His example and heed His commands in this, too.

The apostle Paul was one who clearly was a man of prayer. He often notes in his letters that he is praying for the brethren to whom he is writing (cf. Rom. 1:8; 1st Cor. 1:4; 2nd Cor. 13:7-9; Eph. 3:14-19; Phlp. 1:3-11; Col. 1:3-12; 1st Thess. 1:2ff; 3:9-10; 2nd Thess. 1:3; 2nd Tim. 1:3-5; Phlm. 1:4-6), he requests prayers on his behalf and on behalf of his fellow workers (Rom. 15:30; Eph. 6:19, 20; Col. 4:3; 1st Thess. 5:25; 2nd Thess. 3:1; Phlm. 1:22), and urges the brethren to pray, or gives instruction that they be urged to pray (Rom. 12:12; 15:30; Eph. 6:18; Phlp. 4:6, 7; Col. 4:2; 1st Thess. 5:17; 1st Tim. 2:1, 2; 2:8). In the matter of prayer, Paul could honestly say, *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”* (1st Cor. 11:1).

Prayer should be an important part of every disciple’s life if only for the fact it is our only means of communication with our Father. If we

claim to have a relationship with Him, then — at the very least — we should have some sort of communication with Him, and that is done through prayer. It is here we must then consider the *who, what, when, where, why, and how* of prayer so we may understand why we should be willing, effective communicators, and for what we should pray.

⇒ *Who prays?* God has so established man’s place on this earth that all might seek Him (Acts 17:26, 27), but just because God wants all men to pray does not mean the prayers of all men will be heard! God answers the prayers of those who fear Him and seek to do His will (Acts 10:34, 35; John 9:31; Psa. 34:15). He will not hear those who pray if they have, up until then, rejected Him; in fact, God sees such prayers as an abomination (Prov. 28:9; 15:8). Also, if I hide a desire for sin in my heart He will not hear me (Psa. 66:18), or if I am purposefully sinning and continuing in it even as I pray to Him (Isa. 1:15).

⇒ *What do we pray?* It is in prayer that we give Him thanks (Psa. 18:49; 35:18), praise Him (Psa. 42:2-4; Heb. 13:15), make requests on behalf of others (1st Tim. 2:1, 2) or for self (Psa. 6:2-4; Matt. 26:39-42), seek forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1st John 1:9), and bring to Him our cares and anxieties (Phlp. 4:6).

⇒ *When do we pray?* The simple answer is... always (1st Thess. 5:17; Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2). It should be obvious from previous passages that God wants us to pray, and there is no restriction on this. The only time we should not pray is if we are doing it to be seen of men (Matt. 6:5).

⇒ *Where do we pray?* The simple answer: everywhere! This goes hand-in-hand with the previous question about “when,” but within reason and common sense, there is no place inappropriate for prayer. If we are uncomfortable praying in a particular place, maybe we shouldn’t be in **that place!** Jesus prayed before the people just before He raised Lazarus (John 11:41, 42) and just before

feeding the 4,000 with the seven loaves and few fish (**Matt. 15:36**); Paul prayed on a ship that was storm-tossed (**Acts 27:35**); Daniel prayed in his room, but with a window open so others could see (**Dan. 6:10**); the disciples prayed at Mary's house when Peter was imprisoned (**Acts 12:5, 12**); others prayed at a riverside location (**16:13**); Paul and Silas prayed while in prison (**16:25**); many disciples prayed together at the separation of Paul from those at Miletus (**Acts 20:36**); and sometimes Jesus would simply go out to a solitary place so He could pray (**Mark 1:35**).

⇒ **Why do we pray?** The simple answer: We pray because we are seeking God's help! We are making requests only God can fulfill, we are asking help for others that no man can provide (cf. **John 17:15**; **Phlp. 1:9-11**), we are offering thanks **to God** for His blessings, we are **praising** God, and we are confessing our sins to Him that we might be forgiven (**1st John 1:9**).

⇒ **How do we pray?** Considering that our prayer is spiritual communication **with God** [the Creator of all things] it should be a given that we do so with the greatest honor and respect for Him (cf. **Rev. 4:11**). When Jesus taught the disciples how to pray, He began the prayer with an exaltation of the name of God (**Matt. 6:9**). But we must also offer up these prayers **in faith**. James says that if we do not, our prayer is basically useless (**Jas. 1:5-7**). John reminds us we can ask in confidence, knowing God hears us (**1st John 5:14, 15**). Finally, we must properly address our prayers — to God the Father. That is how Jesus taught His disciples to pray (**Matt. 6:6, 9**) and Paul also tells us, “*let your requests be made known to God*” (**Phlp. 4:6**) [it was not Jesus, v. 7]. That said, we offer these prayers **through** Jesus Christ. Again, Paul instructs us to do everything in the name of “*the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*” (**Col. 3:17**). Jesus, as our High Priest (**Heb. 4:14**) bears our prayers up to the Father. We come to God **through Him** (**Heb. 7:25**) because Jesus is in heaven for the very purpose of speaking on our behalf **to God the Father** (**9:24**).

**Questions and Application.**

1. Consider the prayers of Jesus; for what did things did He pray? What should these tell us about the content of our prayers? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. How important is it to consider **before we pray** [1] to whom we pray and [2] who we are in relationship to Him? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Can we always know how God answers our prayers? Defend your answer with Scripture. \_\_\_\_\_

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**APPLICATION**

4. What kind[s] of prayers do I mostly offer to God, and what times in my life do I pray most often? \_\_\_\_\_

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## GROWING UP IN ALL THINGS

# Lesson Nine: Using Your 'Support Group'

(Ephesians 4:11-16)

**Many Members — One Body.** The apostle Paul reminded the brethren at Ephesus that Christ had set within the church “*some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers*” that the brethren might be equipped to do the spiritual work they had to do, and that they might edify one another (Eph. 4:11, 12). He went on to say that when we all are built up and become more like Christ, “*the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love*” (v. 16). In other words, when we are all doing our part and working together as a body [the church], we will cause growth!

But let us forever remove the idea from our minds that when we speak of “the church” working together and each part doing its share, that we mean only the things we do together while in the worship assembly, or at the building where we meet. Doing so severely limits the possibilities and opportunities we have to edify, encourage, and help one another. We only spend, at most, one to five hours out of the 168 hours we have each week in the assembly and Bible classes, so most of what we may do for one another is going to happen away from the meeting house. Instead of feeling like we are alone when away from the building where we meet for worship, we should feel like we can call on one another when needed, and not like Elijah when he felt like he was the only one left (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 19). So, what can we do for one another along the lines of promoting and causing spiritual growth? Consider the following as some possible ways we may help one another grow:

⇒ ***We can pray for one another.*** As we saw in the previous lesson, prayer should be an important part of our spiritual life, and it is through prayer that we reveal our true concerns. James directs us to pray for one another for ailments and spiritual needs (Jas. 5:13-16). The apostle Paul asked

prayers on his own behalf (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> Thess. 3:1) and he willingly prayed for others (cf. Phlp. 1:3ff), but ***he also let them know*** he was praying for them. Isn't it encouraging to know that someone cares enough to pray for you?

⇒ ***We can provide material necessities for one another.*** From the very beginning of the spread of the gospel, we find that believers shared their possessions and gave to each “*as anyone had need*” (Acts 2:45) and because of this genuine, mutual concern for one another, there was not found “*anyone among them who lacked*” (4:34). The apostle John also reminds us this is an expression of the love of God in us (1<sup>st</sup> John 3:17). Though we sometimes think we are too materially rich in this country to see such needs, recent downturns in the economy have reminded us that, sometimes, God's people are not immune to material needs and it is then that we need to step up and help when we can. Imagine the gratitude and the closeness the one in need will feel towards those who provide when they cannot, and the sorrow and dismay when no one does.

⇒ ***We can teach one another, and learn from one another.*** Paul commanded Titus to instruct the older women to “*admonish the young women*” proper, godly behavior (Titus 2:1-5). If you are an older woman, you can teach a younger one; if you are a “younger” woman, you can learn from the older ones. The same could be said of older and younger men. Those who are “older” — by virtue of having lived a few more years than the “younger” — have been involved in more years of study and may be able to shed light on difficult passages. It is also likely we, whether “older” or “younger,” can find someone to explain to us passages we do not understand — if we are willing to listen, or if we are willing to seek their advice.

⇒ ***We can help one another through trials and temptations.*** Have you ever noticed how Satan tempted Jesus? He came to Him when He was physically weakened from hunger and when He was alone (Matt. 4:1-11). Our enemy knows that is the best time to defeat us! But here is

where we often fail one another [and ourselves] by not seeking the help or advice of our brothers and sisters in Christ out of some irrational fear someone will find out we are not perfect. We forget that others may have experience with the same trials or temptations and have overcome them successfully; why not seek the advice of ones who have defeated the enemy? Some older and/or more mature Christians have probably faced and overcome many types of temptations and can advise others how to win; some older and/or more mature Christians may have endured trials others have not yet faced and can advise them about how to prepare for the day they come. The important thing is, we must recognize the source of help is there — and then **use** it.

⇒ ***We can encourage and edify one another.***

The writer of Hebrews addresses Christians who were ready to “throw in the towel” and go back to the Old Law, thinking it would alleviate their persecutions for being followers of Christ. But he urged them, “*Exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*” (Heb. 3:12). He would later admonish them to “*consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching*” (10:24, 25). When we think about one another and how we can encourage and edify one another, we will be helping one another to stand fast and to not give up or give in during those difficult times, but if no one encourages us, what can we expect?

⇒ ***We can reprove, rebuke, and correct one another.*** If we truly love one another as we should, that concern for one another will not end when one decides to quit serving the Lord or falls into sin. Paul admonishes faithful brethren to gently restore our fallen brother (Gal. 6:1); Jesus also told us to rebuke and forgive erring brethren (Luke 17:3). As an example, Paul did not hesitate to rebuke Peter, when needed (cf Gal. 2:11ff) — because he loved Him. As hard as it may be to accept, discipline and correction should arise out of genuine love and concern for one another. A father disciplines his son promptly because he loves him (Prov. 13:24); a disciple who loves his brother or sister in Christ will do likewise.

**Questions and Application.**

1. What should be the motivating factor behind the things we do for one another, and what should that motivate us to **do** for one another? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What is the wisdom in Jesus sending out the disciples two-by-two (Luke 10:1)? How can we use this principle as a pattern for our spiritual work today. \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What part does “*brotherly kindness*” play in our spiritual growth (2<sup>nd</sup> Pet. 1:5-11)? \_\_\_\_\_

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**APPLICATION**

4. What more can I do to encourage my brothers and sisters to grow spiritually? \_\_\_\_\_

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GROWING UP IN ALL THINGS

## Lesson Ten: Loving Like Jesus

(Ephesians 5:2)

**The Identifying Mark of the True Disciple.** The apostle Paul exhorted the brethren at Ephesus to “*walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us.*” These words echo those of our Lord when He said, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*” But He then gave us the reason why we must do this: “*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:34, 35). In other words, when we love one another as Jesus loved us, then the world will know that we are truly one of His disciples. If we do not,...

Under the Old Law, the commandment was, “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (Lev. 19:18). While this was certainly a *good* thing, Jesus raised the standard in giving us the *new commandment*”; no longer are we to merely love our neighbor *as ourselves*, but now we must love one another *as Jesus loved us*. But do we understand what this requires of us? It would be in our best interest to understand it because how we are perceived by the world often makes a difference in whether or not we have any positive influence on them when we seek to teach them the gospel, and it could mean the difference between their belief and rejection. With that in mind, let us consider a few things required of us in this command. The love we must have is a love:

⇒ *Willing to give up everything for one another.* Love, at its very foundation, is sacrificial. If you love your spouse, you would “climb the highest mountain and swim the deepest ocean” for him or her, right? That is the love Jesus had for us! Remember that Jesus “*came down from heaven*” (John 3:13) — the very place we all aspire to be! He gave up heaven to be born in a stable and laid in a feed trough, live the lowly life of a carpenter’s son, and to be humiliated by crucifixion. He also gave up all the glories of being God to live in the

form of lowly man and to be treated shamefully (Phlp. 2:5-8). This is the kind of love we must have for one another! We must be willing to give up *our* riches and our honor for the sake of one another. If we do not see the value of loving one another to this extent, we cannot then claim to love one another *as Christ loved us*.

⇒ *Willing to take the time to teach one another.* None would dispute the fact Jesus spent a great deal of His later years teaching and working miracles, but we probably do not fully understand how much time and effort He put into teaching anyone who was willing to listen. We see a glimpse of this right after the death of John the Baptist when Jesus, after hearing the news, tried to withdraw to a deserted place, but was followed [and preceded] by people who heard of it (Matt. 14:13). Mark’s account says that they had not even had time to eat (Mark 6:31), but when the crowds came, Jesus healed their sick (Matt. 14:14) and taught them (Mark 6:33, 34). He did this because He had compassion for the people — genuine, deep-seated love. This is the kind of love we must have for one another! If we genuinely care for one another [especially regarding our spiritual condition] we must be willing to teach one another when it is evident — or even not-so-evident — that teaching is needed. We must, then, be willing to give of our time and effort to do this because we care more about them than even our personal needs. Would we be willing to miss a meal that we might teach?

⇒ *Willing to gently rebuke [and forgive] one another.* The worldly way of thinking says that the worst thing a friend can do is point out what is wrong in someone’s life. God does not think so, however! When the adulterous woman was brought to Jesus, He put her accusers in their place, but He also told the woman, “*Go and sin no more*” (John 8:1-11). By the Law, she should have been

put to death but Jesus, in His infinite wisdom, pointed out her sin as sin, but also showed mercy and forgave her. The same could be said when the sinful woman came to Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee (**Luke 7:36-50**). While Simon could only see *her* sins and none of his own, Jesus recognized her sinfulness, but He also saw her contrite heart and desire for forgiveness and was willing to forgive her. This is the kind of love we must have for one another! When a brother or sister in Christ sins [“when,” not “if” because it **will** happen], we must be willing to point out the sin; and when they come to us seeking forgiveness and repenting of their sins, we must also be willing to forgive the sin. There is no “probation period” for them to prove themselves to us because there is none with God’s forgiveness. Can you imagine having to *wait* for forgiveness from God?

⇒ ***Evident to all that we each love one another.*** As a reminder, Jesus said that when we love another as He loved us, “*all will know that you are My disciples.*” We may rightly conclude from this, then, that love is not mere words, but **action**, and if we truly love one another as Jesus loved us, it will be evident to all who see us. When Jesus came to Mary and Martha after the death of Lazarus, He saw Mary and the Jews around her weeping, and He “*groaned in the spirit and was troubled*” (**John 11:33**). As they went to see where Lazarus was laid, Jesus wept and some of the Jews said, “*See how He loved him!*” (**vv. 35, 36**). When Jesus went to the cross for our sins, it was not fully understood **then** why He did it but, looking back, we can see that the deed was done out of love for us. Paul uses this self-evident fact to instruct us to live as He lived and love as He loved (**Eph. 5:2**). If we are to truly love one another as Jesus loved us, it must be a love that is evident to those around us. That doesn’t mean we have to cry, when they cry, but we **must** be willing to sorrow when they are sorrowful.

**Questions and Application.**

1. Why is it a matter of spiritual growth/maturity to be able to say we love one another like Jesus loved us? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. To what lengths did Jesus go to demonstrate His love for us? Cite Scripture. To what lengths should **we** be willing to go to demonstrate our love for one another? Cite Scripture. \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Using the description of love by Paul (**1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 13:4-8**), give a brief description of how we should demonstrate our love for one another. \_\_\_\_\_

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APPLICATION
4. What are some things I can do to demonstrate my love for my brothers and sisters in Christ? _____
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## Lesson Eleven: Maintaining Purity

(1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4:12)

**In the World, But Not *of* the World.** It is discouraging, to say the least, to pick up the paper, scan the Internet, or read an e-mail that tells yet another story about how some seemingly-devoted Christian has been found to be involved in some sexual sin. Maybe it was a man who had been married for years who left his family for another woman; maybe it was a preacher who got involved with a young woman he was counseling; maybe it was a married woman who got involved with one of her children's teachers; maybe it was a couple of young people who got too familiar with one another until it inevitably led to a sexual act. Regardless of the details, these brothers or sisters got themselves into situations that led to sexual sin and became willing participants in tragic stories that ended with destroyed lives, destroyed families, destroyed reputations, and destroyed influences.

We **could** start by citing the world around us as partly to blame for this. After all, it doesn't take too much investigation to see how the loose sexual standards of the world are getting bolder and more crude and that we are being constantly bombarded by sexual innuendos, the outright promotion of ungodly sexual practices, pornography in just about every medium, and a society that openly disdains sexual restraint or standards. In the past, advertising used subtle sexual references and innuendos; now, we have some companies blatantly using immoral sexual behavior as the appeal. In the past, there were hints and flashes of immodesty to draw attention to the product; now, some companies use outright nudity. The television and movie industries have always pushed boundaries, but in the past, they set standards and self-censored; now, "censorship" is viewed in the most negative light and only the possibility of lost revenue restricts them from going as far as they **really** want to go. But while none of this is news, let us not fool ourselves into thinking there is no blame to be laid at our own feet. These things are being used because **they are successful**. Someone out there — even someone

who professes to be a believer — desires to see these things.

That said, let's begin in earnest with a reminder from the portions of God's word that address the need to be pure ***in mind*** that we might also be pure in our actions and words. First, let us consider the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount where He said, "*You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart*" (**Matt. 5:27, 28**). To emphasize the seriousness of this matter, Jesus went on to speak of the necessity of ridding ourselves of the body parts that offend [i.e., leads us to sin], rather than condemning ourselves to eternal punishment (**vv. 29, 30**). While the removal of certain parts of the body may reduce or eliminate unhealthy sexual desires, Jesus is speaking more of the unhealthy desire itself that must be eliminated than a literal removal of a body part. Paul echoes this sentiment in his letters to the Ephesians (**Eph. 4:22**) and Colossians (**Col. 3:5**) when he talked about the need to "*put off*" or even "*put to death*" sinful desires. That means we cannot view pornography while excusing ourselves that it is not "actual" adultery or fornication. At best [which is a stretch], it is a sinful desire and is clearly unacceptable to God.

And let us try to fool ourselves and think these situations named in the opening paragraph came about by accident, or were not preventable. It is necessary here to emphasize the words of James regarding 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. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death*" (**Jas. 1:13-15**). This means every time **I** am tempted, it is something **I** desire; every time **you** are tempted, it is because it is something **you** desire. If we are tempted to get involved in a sexual sin, it is not

by accident; it is because we *desired* it. When we start looking for excuses for our actions is when we have become “*hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*” (Heb. 3:12).

Paul’s admonition to the young evangelist Timothy was that he “*be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity*” (1<sup>st</sup> Tim. 4:12). Just a few sentences later, he exhorts him to treat the younger men “*as brothers*” and the younger women “*as sisters, with all purity*” (5:1, 2) and, later, simply says, “*keep yourself pure*” (5:22). The Greek word translated as *purity* or *pure* in each of these passages refers to *chastity*, or sexual purity, and should be emphasized as much today as it was then. Paul adds yet another warning to Timothy in the second letter, warning him to “*flee youthful lusts*” while pursuing the ways of God (2<sup>nd</sup> Tim. 2:22). The fact Paul addresses this issue as often as he does to this young evangelist should not be dismissed without serious consideration!

Young people are going to be bombarded with pressures from their peers to practice immoral sexual behavior as soon as they move out of the house — if they haven’t already been endangered by the mere presence of computers in the home, with instant access to pornography or an overwhelming amount of depictions and stories of sexual immorality. But let us not think that sexual sins are only problems for “young people”; the cases of sexual sin among our brethren that have come to light in recent months and years involved people of all ages. Satan does not quit trying to lure us into sexual sins just because we reach some magical age. Like he does with all sins, he is going to keep tempting us until we die. He may go away for awhile, but he will be back (cf. Luke 4:13). Be alert!

One last note: Let us be alert to the possibility of these sins touching our lives and the lives of others, but let us also not treat sexual sins as acts that are unforgivable. Sometimes, we cannot forgive ourselves if we succumb, and sometimes we cannot bring ourselves to forgive others who have succumbed. As with *any* sin, if we are guilty, we can be forgiven by God through repentance and confession (1<sup>st</sup> John 1:9); if it is others who

are guilty and *they* repent, we must be willing to forgive, too (Luke 17:3). That said, let us be keenly aware of the consequences and the long-term damage these sins may bring on all involved and on those in the world who might use this as an excuse to criticize the faith and/or all religion.

### Questions and Application.

1. Without getting graphic, list some sexual sins. How are these sins now viewed by our modern society and how might this possibly affect believers? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What is the answer to temptations to get involved in sexual sins? Cite Scripture[s]. \_\_\_\_\_

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### APPLICATION

3. What are some ways I might help a brother or sister tempted by sexual sins? \_\_\_\_\_

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## GROWING UP IN ALL THINGS

# Lesson Twelve: Growing By Doing

(James 1:21-27; 2:14-26)

**The Test of Any Man.** Try to imagine, for a minute, the life of Jesus: Remember all the things He said and did? Now try to imagine the life of Jesus and His wonderful teachings, but without the actions and deeds. What if He had never healed any sick, never walked on water, or never fashioned a whip and driven out the moneychangers? What if He had never calmed the stormy sea, healed the man who had been blind since birth, or fed the 5,000? What kind of impact would He have had on the people then? What kind of influence would He have had on the common people, or even on His harshest critics? Without His deeds, the critics might have left Him alone and Jesus might possibly have been remembered only as a great Teacher. But without those deeds, so much would be *missing* — things that *proved* Him to be the Christ; these things were an absolutely necessary part of the life of Jesus and are evidence to us that He was who He said He was! But, friends and brethren, if we can see the importance good works meant to defining who Jesus was, we must then see that righteous deeds should also be a necessary, defining part of *our* lives!

The Holy Spirit-inspired apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians that we who are God's people today were "*created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*" (**Eph. 2:10**). He would write to Titus that we were to, furthermore, be "*zealous for good works*" (**Titus 2:14**); we should eagerly desire to do them! While we may not be *saved* from our sins by meritorious, righteous works (**Titus 3:5**), we are in Christ for the very purpose of *practicing* good works — righteous deeds that bring glory to God and not self (cf. **Matt. 5:16**). Paul instructed Titus to teach the brethren to "*be careful to maintain good works*" and to "*also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful*" (**Titus 3:8, 14**), indicating that they were to be a priority in our lives. He commanded Timothy to teach the rich to "*be rich in good works, ...storing up for*

*themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life*" (**1<sup>st</sup> Tim. 6:18, 19**). Here, it should be obvious that works even have something to do with obtaining that eternal life. [Again, they are not what save us from our sins, but they are a necessary part of our life of faithfulness.] Finally, Paul admonishes the women to not focus their attention on the outward appearance, but to adorn themselves with the things that were "*proper for women professing godliness, with good works*" (**1<sup>st</sup> Tim. 2:9, 10**). In other words, if we are professing to be godly, then good works will be a natural [i.e., *expected*] part of who we are and what we do.

So, now that we have shown good works [righteous deeds] a necessary part of the disciple's life, what has this got to do with spiritual growth? In reality, doing good deeds is not just a "part" of one's faithfulness, but it is what *defines* and *exemplifies* faithfulness. As James said, "*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*" (**Jas. 1:22**). "*Faith without works,*" he would go on to say, "*is dead*" (**2:26**). Faith is not merely the words we say or the knowledge we gain; it is what we do with what we have learned and it is proving our words by what we do. Remember that Jesus likened the one who heard His words and *did* them to the wise man, and the one who heard but *did not do* to the foolish man (**Matt. 7:24-27**). Friends and brethren, it is in the *doing* that we prove our faith, and not by what we say.

Let's put it another way: How do we get physically stronger? Well, we might begin by going to the library or going online to find some instruction about proper exercise or weightlifting. If we find something that addresses our need, we might diligently study the instructions until we can recite them from memory, refute false concepts about proper exercise, and expose fallacious methods of attaining good health. But, having this ability, what good does it do us if we do not put it

FaceTime FaceTime into practice in our own lives? If we know all there is to know about the proper methods and means to obtaining and maintaining good health through diet and exercise, but never *do* what the book says, what good have we done? Without actually implementing the instruction, we have done ourselves absolutely *no good!* Friends and brethren, is this what many of us have done with God’s spiritual instructions? We read His Book diligently, we come together regularly to discuss what we have learned and how to implement it, and we can even recite portions of the Book from memory. But if we are not *practicing* the good works that should have naturally resulted from our conversion, what good have we done for our own spiritual condition?

We all know that, in the physical realm, we do not become stronger unless we start lifting those weights. That involves work and effort. In the same sense, we will not grow spiritually unless and until we actually start doing the work and putting forth the effort. If we are spiritually weak in some area, we must exercise in those things that we may become stronger. For example, if we do not think we know enough to be able to teach others, we must do more study to be able to answer the questions, and then get out and do some teaching! As scary as that sounds, it is in the *doing* that you learn what to say and how to answer questions — and even what questions may be asked by others. Maybe we are weak in encouraging brethren; if that is our spiritual weakness, we need to pick up the phone and call a brother or sister who could use some encouragement. If we never pick up the phone, we won’t ever take that first step and we will remain weak. And so it must be for every aspect of our spiritual life: Strength comes by *doing*.

Finally, in the physical world, when we are lifting those weights, it is wise to have a “spotter” to be able to help when we have taken on too much. Spiritually-speaking, it is also wise to have someone be our “spotter” to help us when we have taken on too much. There is no shame in that, however; pushing the limits is how we find out what our limits

are, and that, in itself, will help us to become stronger. Bring someone along with you to study with your neighbor; have someone check on you and those phone calls or notes; involve each other in these efforts and much more can and will be done and we will all help one another to grow spiritually...and that’s a *good* thing!

**Questions and Application.**

1. How important are works in defining us as disciples of Jesus Christ? Cite Scripture for your answer. \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. Who, in the Bible, was known for saying, but not doing? What did Jesus call them? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. How important is *knowing* of what God wants us to do? *Doing* what God wants us to do? \_\_\_\_\_  
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APPLICATION
4. What more can I <i>do</i> for the work of the Lord? What areas do I need strengthening? _____ _____ _____ _____

## GROWING UP IN ALL THINGS

# Lesson Thirteen: Review

### REVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. What part does *repentance* play in becoming a “new creation”?
2. List some ways a spiritually-minded man may be noticeably different than a fleshly-minded man.
3. How important is it to know the content and purpose of each book of the Bible, and how does this affect our interpretation of it?
4. What difference will it make in the life of a disciple if he or she does not study the Bible with the intent of learning and becoming spiritually mature?
5. Why is knowing God an important part of becoming spiritually mature? How does spiritual maturity help us to know God?
6. What are the benefits of [regular, not occasional] spiritual exercise?
7. Why should we conduct regular spiritual self-examinations, and what should we be looking for?
8. What part does prayer play in helping us achieve and maintain spiritual maturity? How does the mature disciple see prayer?
9. In what ways can we help one another achieve and maintain spiritual maturity? What must necessarily exist before this can be done?
10. How does love identify the mature disciple? What/Who is the standard?
11. How prevalent is sexual sin in this country, and how has it affected the Lord’s people?

