

The Beginning of the Journey

The Gospel

Lesson 1

It comes as a surprise to many to learn how very different Christianity is from other religions; at its core, it isn't about morality, or philosophy, or self-fulfillment. Rather, it's about news – good news: the greatest news the world has ever heard. In fact, the word “gospel” literally means “good news,” and it is this news that stands at the center of the Christian faith, and should be the informing core of the Christian life. It is what the apostle Paul called a matter “of first importance” (1 Corinthians 15:3). You will find that we strive to keep the gospel as our central focus.

We'll begin our journey as every Christian must – by unpacking the meaning and substance behind this word “gospel” – what it says about God and about us. We'll seek to discover why the gospel is such good news and why it's appropriate to call it “the main thing.”

I. Man's Dilemma Before God

No one can gain an understanding of the gospel without first recognizing his own rebellion against a perfect, holy God, and the severe consequences justly deserved as a result. In short, we must understand some very serious “bad news” before we can adequately appreciate the “good news.” There are two key elements to the dilemma we all face: our sinfulness and God's holiness.

A. Man's sinfulness

A person must confront his own sinfulness in all its ravaging depths before he can enjoy the comforts of salvation.” – **Martin Luther**

1. What is sin?

Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.

- a. Not just actions, but attitudes

Matthew 5:27-28: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery, ‘But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

- b. Not just acting wrongly, but also failing to act

James 4:17: “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is a sin.”

- c. Not just actions and attitudes, but our nature – who we are at the core of our being.

Genesis 6:5: “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

“A sin consists in doing, saying, thinking, or imagining anything that is not in perfect conformity with the mind and law of God.” –
J.C. Ryle

- 2. **Sin’s true nature.** Defining sin in a relationship to God reveals its true nature: sin is essentially rebellion against God.

- a. Sin is the willful and selfish rejection of God’s rule while choosing to live independently of him.
- b. Sin is always fundamentally and primarily against God.

Psalm 51:4: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.”

- 3. **Sin’s universality.** All people are sinners and stand guilty before God.

- a. Adam’s sin brought sin and death to all men. All people sin because all are by nature sinners.

Romans 5:12: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned”

- b. All people confirm this through their actions: all are sinners.

Romans 3:22-23: “For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”

- 4. **Sin’s pervasiveness.** Man’s sinfulness extends to every part of his being; nothing in him has been unaffected by sin.

- a. Sin’s corrupting effects have touched every part of his being: mind, will, emotions, and body.

Romans 3:10-12: "...as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

- b. This means that man in his sinful state apart from God is incapable of pleasing or obeying God. Even seemingly "good" works are tainted by sin.

Romans 8:7-8: "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

- c. Not only are we therefore enslaved to sin, but we are completely responsible before God for our sin.

Romans 14:12: "So then each of us will give an account of himself to God."

B. God's holiness and wrath

The other facet of mankind's grave dilemma is the character of God. Indeed, man's sinful plight can't be fully grasped until it is viewed through the lens of God's infinite purity and holiness.

- 1. The Bible portrays God as holy. This idea has two main components:

- a. God is transcendent: He is infinitely higher than man – separate, different -He is wholly other than us.

Isaiah 46:9: "...for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me!"

- b. God is morally perfect and infinitely pure – untainted by evil desire, motive, thought, word, or deed.

Deuteronomy 32:3-4: "...ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he."

*Isaiah 6:1-5: "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: **Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of***

*his glory!” And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: **for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”***

2. Because God is holy, he must respond with fierce opposition to sin. This is the meaning of God’s wrath.

a. Wrath is God’s holy response to sin: His personal, active antagonism to sin that derives from his settled opposition to every evil thing. It is therefore right – and even necessary – for God to hate sin, to oppose all wickedness, and to judge all who practice it.

Habakkuk 1:13: “You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong.”

“The wrath of God is his steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising, antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations.” –**John Stott**

b. Some think that the idea of wrath is unjust or unbecoming to a God of love. This is largely because we underestimate both the extent and the seriousness of sin and the holiness of God. Not only is God perfectly justified in his wrath, but without it, his very character would be compromised.

3. In light of God’s holiness, sin has grave and inevitable consequences:

a. A broken relationship with God

Isaiah 59:2: “but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”

b. Enslavement to sin and Satan. Sin places us under the dominion of sin and Satan, unable to break free from their control.

Romans 6:17: “But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted...”

c. Consequences in life. All the sorrow, pain, suffering, sweat, tears, strife, sickness, and death we experience were not part of God’s original good creation. They resulted from the entrance of sin into the world.

- d. Eternal punishment. The ultimate, final, and irrevocable punishment for all who die in sinful rebellion against God is separation in hell from God's beneficent presence.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-10: "in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed."

II. God's Answer to Man's Dilemma: The Gospel

How can we be saved from our sins and the righteous wrath of God? The answer is the gospel: the "good news" of God's saving work on our behalf through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

"The gospel is not only the most important message in all of history; it is the only essential message in all of history." –**Jerry Bridges**

A. The motive for the gospel: God's love and mercy

1. As we have seen, the holiness of God demanded that sin be punished. If God failed to punish sin, he would cease to be just. If he ceased to be just, he would cease to be God.
2. But the Bible teaches that, not only is God holy, he is also loving – love is essential to his nature.

*1 John 4:7-8: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because **God is love.**"*

3. Even though we were deserving of eternal punishment, God, motivated by his infinite love, chose to take upon himself in the person of his Son the full measure of divine wrath.

1 John 4:9-10: "In this is the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

4. This is the glory of the cross: God saved us in such a way that, in one and the same act, he preserved his uncompromising holiness and expressed his fathomless love and mercy.

Romans 3:25-26: “whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

“How then could God express simultaneously his holiness in judgment and his love in pardon? Only by providing a divine substitute for the sinner, so that the substitute would receive the judgment and the sinner the pardon.” – **John Stott**

B. The nature of the gospel: grace

It is often said that “we are saved by grace,” and so we are. Perhaps the best one-word summary we could use for what God has done for us through Christ’s work on the cross is “grace.”

1. Grace refers to “God’s free and unmerited favor.” It is God freely bestowing his goodness to people who deserve only punishment. Notice the components of this idea;
 - a. God is in no way obligated to show kindness and mercy to anyone – least of all those who have rebelled against his rule.
 - b. We are completely unable to earn any merit from God; we stand condemned in the courtroom of God’s justice.
 - c. Yet God resolves to extend mercy and favor in spite of our guilt.
2. It is this grace – this “merciful resolve” – that is the source of our salvation and characterizes what Christ has done for us.

Romans 3:23-24: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...”

3. Because we are saved “by grace” alone, we can never earn our salvation or contribute anything to it. For all eternity, God alone will receive the glory and credit for graciously giving to us what we could never merit on our own.

Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

C. The substance of the gospel: the person and work of Jesus Christ

As stated earlier, the gospel is the “good news” of God’s saving work on our behalf through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the gospel; it is his holy history, the news of who he is and what he has done for us. The gospel includes Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming return.

1. Jesus’ birth

Jesus is fully God, yet he was born into this world as a man, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin named Mary. Jesus is therefore both fully God and fully man.

John 1:1, 14: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”

Matthew 1:20-21: “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

See also Hebrews 2:17; Philippians 2:5-8.

2. Jesus’ perfect, sinless life

Even though Jesus was subject to all the temptations to which we are all subject, he never once sinned in any way.

Hebrews 4:15: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

3. Jesus’ death on the cross

At the heart of Christ’s life and ministry stands the cross. All His life had been preparatory for and led to that moment. At the cross, Christ provided the ground of our salvation – the basis upon which God saves us.

- a. Jesus’ death was substitutionary in nature. He died on our behalf, receiving the legal penalty for our sins and satisfying God’s wrath towards us.

Isaiah 53:4-6: “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

2 Corinthians 5:21: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

- b. Because Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, God no longer holds us responsible to pay for our sin. All of our sins are forgiven: past, present, and future.

Colossians 2:13-14: “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”

- c. Not only are our sins forgiven, but we are also “justified” – that is, we are declared righteous by God.
 - Righteousness is a legal term: it speaks of a “right standing” before God.
 - God considers the righteousness that Christ achieved as belonging to us.
 - This declaration is a once-for-all, permanent event in our lives that nothing can change. Some Christians believe that salvation can be forfeited by the willful denunciation of Christ. While we don’t teach that doctrine at Harvest, we don’t view disagreement on this issue to be one that breaks fellowship nor excludes membership.

4. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead

The resurrection demonstrates that Jesus’ death was an acceptable and effective sacrifice on our behalf. Death is the penalty for our sin, and Jesus’ conquest over death in the resurrection shows that sin has also been overcome.

Romans 4:25: “who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”

1 Corinthians 15:17: "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."

5. Jesus' ascension and return

The ascension marks the beginning of Jesus' reign from the heavenly places. He now has all rule and authority, and he reigns in heaven with the Father, building his church, defeating its enemies, and interceding for his people. At the time that God has determined, he will return to consummate his work and rule on the earth. Then we will reign with him for eternity, worshiping God and experiencing the full fruits of his saving work. What happens immediately after the return of Jesus to earth is a matter of some debate among believing Christians. Some believe that when Jesus returns He establishes a kingdom on earth that lasts for a thousand years, and following that is the judgment of the lost, and the New Heaven and Earth are established. This is called Pre-Millennialism. Others believe that at that time the new heaven and new earth and judgment of sinners happen right away. This is called A-Millennialism. A third group believes that Christians bring a 1000 year period of peace to the earth before Jesus returns. This is called Post-Millennialism. Harvest does not take any official position on the millennium. However, the dominant position at Harvest is pre-millennialism.

Matthew 24:30-31: "Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Revelation 21:3-4: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'"

D. The centrality of the gospel: "the main thing"

It is no mistake that this journey begins with an exploration of the gospel. It does not simply mark the beginning of the Christian life; the gospel is to remain at the center of the Christian life. It is therefore to remain central to the life, ministry, and proclamation of the church.

“We never, therefore, move on from the cross of Christ – only into a more profound understanding of the cross.” –**David Pryor**

We do agree to permit others within our church to disagree on items that are “NOT” essential to salvation. We commit to keep the “main thing” the main thing and strive for unity within some diversity otherwise.

“The gospel is not only the most important message in all of history; it is the only essential message in all of our history. Yet we allow thousands of professing Christians to live their entire lives without clearly understanding it and experiencing the joy of living by it.” –**Jerry Bridges**

Embarking on the Journey

Our Response to the Gospel

Lesson 2

The gospel tells us that God has acted through the person and work of Christ to save us from our sins and remove the barrier that exists between God and ourselves. The gospel is therefore objective; it is a matter of history. It is what Christ did for us; no matter how we feel, the ground of our salvation never changes. We are therefore not to look inward for the reason why God saves us, but upward and outward – to the Savior who died for us.

However, salvation is not somehow “automatic.” The gospel comes to us as news, and it is news to which we must respond. After Christ died, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to a group of believers in Jerusalem, thus giving birth to the church. On that day, in response to the preaching of the gospel by Peter, the hearers were pierced to the heart and asked the perceptive question, “What shall we do?” All who come to Christ must face this same question. And our answer to that question will determine whether we truly embark upon the journey of faith in Christ.

I. Our Response to the Gospel

The appropriate response to the gospel has two components, which are often summarized under the term “conversion.”

“Conversion is our willing response to the gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of sins and place our trust in Christ for salvation.” –**Wayne Grudem**

Although repentance and faith are spoken of separately, they always work together in conversion. There is no true repentance without faith, and no genuine faith without repentance.

A. Repentance

The biblical words for repentance have at their core the idea of turning around or changing direction. To sin is to rebel against God and his rule over our lives. To repent is to turn back to God and to embrace him and his rule and authority over our lives.

1. Repentance is a command of God. All people are commanded to repent and believe the gospel.

Acts 17:30: “...now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”

This repentance has three primary aspects:

- a. Mind: an awareness of the holiness and majesty of God, of our sin and guilt, and of God’s mercy and readiness to forgive
- b. Emotions: a heartfelt sorrow for sin and joy at the prospect of forgiveness
- c. Will: a willingness and steadfast purposing to turn away from all sin and to turn to God in obedience

“The New Testament word for repentance means changing one’s mind so that one’s views, values, goals, and ways are changed, and one’s whole life is lived differently. The change is radical, both inwardly and outwardly... Repentance means starting to live a new life.” –**J.I. Packer**

- 2. Repentance is a gift from God. It is the grace of God that enables us to repent.

2 Timothy 2:25: “correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.”

B. Faith

Faith is the instrument through which the saving benefits of the cross come to us. Salvation is “by grace” – grace is its ground, but it is “through faith” –faith must be exercised before salvation is received (Eph. 2:8). It is both a gift of God and an act of our will. God gives us faith, but we are responsible for exercising it.

- 1. What is faith?

The New Testament word for faith, when used in the context of salvation, means a true commitment of oneself to God, an unwavering trust in his promises, and a persistent loyalty and obedience.

Saving faith has three elements:

- a. Knowledge: We must have certain information – the gospel-revealed to us.

Romans 10:14, 17: “But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

- b. Assent: We must believe that what is revealed is true.

Hebrews 4:2: "For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened."

- c. Trust: We must place trust in what is revealed, being willing to stake our lives on it. This will find expression in our obedience and commitment.

James 2:17, 22: "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works."

- 2. We are saved by faith alone, but true saving faith will be validated by a lifestyle that testifies to the reality of faith. True saving faith will always lead to obedience.
- 3. Faith is a gift from God, not a work that earns us favor with God.

Acts 16:14: "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul."

C. Observing the Ordinances

- 1. We respond to the gospel with repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ. Having received the free gift of salvation, believers are also to respond by observing the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- 2. What is an ordinance? An ordinance is a blessing from Christ which is a sign (a picture) and a seal (a mark of being set apart) given to believers in order to teach and assure us of our salvation. The Lord ordained two ordinances: baptism (Matthew 28:19) and the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23), also known as "communion." Participation in the ordinances does not bring salvation; this comes only by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9; Galatians 2:16). These ordinances are visible signs of an invisible grace which has already taken place in the life of the believer.
- 3. Baptism uniquely depicts initiation into the Christian life, portraying the believer's union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5). It points to the beginning of the Christian life (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38) and displays one's commitment to turn from sin and trust in Christ for salvation. For this reason, we do not baptize infants. If you were baptized as an infant, we would ask that – in obedience to Scripture

and as part of becoming a member of Harvest Community Church – you be baptized as a believer.

A Candidate for baptism should be able to:

- a. Communicate the content of the gospel as well as an expression of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.
 - b. Evidence godly sorrow over sin, followed by repentance which leads to the fruit of the Spirit.
 - c. Examine himself and the condition of his soul (1 Corinthians 11:27-32).
 - d. Demonstrate a willingness to turn away from the world and instead live a life keeping God's commands and loving God's church (1 John 2:15-17; 5:1-5).
 - e. Exhibit fruit which proceeds from regeneration (Galatians 5:22-23).
4. The Lord's Supper uniquely depicts continuing fellowship with God, a repeated act whereby the believer remembers the Lord's death and renews his commitment to Christ and participation in his church (1 Corinthians 11:27-34).

In receiving the Lord's Supper:

- a. We symbolize the death of Christ; our actions give a picture of his death for us.
 - b. We participate and share in the benefits of Jesus' death.
 - c. We picture the spiritual nourishment and refreshment that Christ is giving to our souls.
 - d. We mark our unity with other believers.
 - e. We affirm Christ's love for us.
 - f. We are assured of the blessings of our salvation.
 - g. We proclaim our dependence on and faith in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.
5. How do baptism and the Lord's Supper differ?

“Baptism [is] an ordinance that is only observed once by each person, as a sign of the beginning of his or her Christian life...The Lord's Supper [is] an ordinance that is to be observed repeatedly throughout our Christian lives, as a sign of continuing fellowship with Christ.” – **Wayne Grudem**

We conduct baptism and communion service several times a year and you may find details by visiting the website or contact the church office.

II. God's Initiative Makes Our Response Possible

In the previous lesson, we spoke about the pervasive, corrupting effects of sin. Sin is not only what we do, but who we are: apart from God, we are sinners by nature. So if we're truly "dead" in our sins (Ephesians 2:1) and powerless to change, how is it that we are able to respond to the gospel at all? It is here that the gracious nature of salvation becomes even more amazing: God acts, so that we can act.

A. Chosen in eternity past

God's actions began in eternity past when he chose us and determined that he would save us. This is often referred to as "election."

Ephesians 1:4-6: "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved."

B. Effectively called

God's choosing of us eventually results in his calling us and drawing us to himself.

1. God's drawing us to himself is often called "effective calling." This occurs when God invites and draws sinners to himself by his Spirit through the proclamation of the gospel.
2. While God is the one who draws, this does not mean that a person is somehow saved apart from his own willing response to the gospel. Through the grace of God, the "divine summons" of God brings about the response it requires.

Romans 8:30: "And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

John 6:44: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."

C. Regenerated ("born again") by the Spirit

When God calls us, he then changes our hearts so that we can freely respond. This change is called "regeneration." Some Christians believe that all are called and all have the power to respond without God-created change of heart. While we don't teach that doctrine at Harvest, we don't view disagreement on the issue to be one that breaks fellowship nor excludes membership.

In regeneration, God acts to change our inner natures and impart spiritual life to us. As a result, we become spiritually alive and are then able to believe the gospel and repent of our sins.

Colossians 2:13: “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him...”

D. The supernatural nature of conversion

Given what Scripture teaches about sin, it is not surprising that God must do a supernatural work in our hearts before we can be truly converted. Such an understanding of our conversion is important for our spiritual health.

“Scripture is clear in teaching that we are not all journeying toward God – some having found him, others still seeking. Instead, Scripture presents us as needing to have our hearts replaced, our minds transformed, our spirits given life. We can do none of this for ourselves. The change each human needs, regardless of how we may outwardly appear, is so radical, so near our roots, that only God can bring it about. We need God to convert us.” –**Mark Dever**

“I believe in the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen him; and I am sure he chose me before I was born, or else he never would have chosen me afterwards; and he must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why he should have looked upon me with special love.” –**Charles Spurgeon**

E. We must act, but God gets the glory.

Recognizing God’s grace does not eliminate our responsibility to repent and believe. All people everywhere are commanded to do this (Acts 17:30). However, when we reflect back on our salvation and recognize that it was God’s prior actions that drew us to Himself, we are humbled and exult all the more over God’s amazing, undeserved, and glorious grace. We realize that, in the end, the difference between ourselves and someone who is unsaved is not our own superior goodness, intelligence, spiritual aptitude, or anything within ourselves at all. The only difference between us and them is the mercy and grace of God.

III. “Essentially Reformed”

The biblical truths outlined above are often placed under the heading of “Reformed theology.” Although labels can at times be misunderstood, we use the term “essentially Reformed” as a helpful way to summarize our theological understanding of the gift of salvation.

- The Reformed view of salvation places emphasis on the activity of God and the glory of God in saving sinners.
- We never want to focus on more narrow aspects of Reformed theology at the expense of biblical truths that are central and that we share with many other Christians. The gospel itself is what unites all true believers, and it is the gospel that matters most.
- Taking a less than reformed view of salvation is not a cause for breaking fellowship, nor a reason for exclusion from membership at Harvest. We understand that Christians historically have had honest disagreements on these issues. We believe the love of Christ can enable us to continue in loving community in the midst of their differences.

Continuing the Journey

Sanctification

Lesson 3

As we noted last week, we embark upon the Christian journey when we respond to God's offer of salvation in Christ. No change could be more momentous – we are “born again” (John 3:3), we are “made alive” (Ephesians 2:5), we are transferred from the “domain of darkness” into “the kingdom of his beloved son” (Colossians 1:13), we are forgiven our sins (Ephesians 1:7), we are delivered from wrath (Romans 5:9), we are reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:18) – as Jesus put it, we pass “from death to life” (John 5:24).

As dramatic as this change is, this is only the beginning. God's purposes for us don't end when we become Christians. Rather, conversion sets us on a glorious path in which God will continue to work out his gracious purposes in our lives. What are those purposes? How are they worked out? In this lesson, we will explore what God has for us as we “continue the journey” of the Christian life.

I. The Goal of Our Salvation: Holiness

Salvation is much more than simply deliverance from the penalty of sin. When God saves us, he makes us his own, and begins a renovation program: the process of making us more and more like our Lord Jesus – the process of making us holy.

“In reality, holiness is the goal of our redemption. As Christ died in order that we may be justified, so we are justified in order that we may be sanctified and made holy.” –**J.I. Packer**

A. The barrier to holiness: sin

Sin not only deserves God's punishment; it mars God's good creation and obscures the display of his glory. He therefore desires to eradicate sin and its corrupting effects from his creation. For the believer, salvation is the beginning of the process of removing sin and its effects from our lives.

- At **regeneration**, the power of sin is broken and we are made alive in Christ.
- In **justification**, the penalty of sin is removed as we are declared righteous in Christ.
- In **sanctification**, the pollution of sin is progressively removed as we are made holy in Christ.

To be holy means to be set apart to God. This includes being set apart from all that is sinful and opposed to God. Holiness is God's goal for his people,

and the Christian life involves the process of reaching this goal. The New Testament is full of words that describe this process: transforming, renewing, conforming, maturing, and growing. Although we will never reach perfection in this life, we are called to make every effort to live a holy life for the glory of God.

1 Peter 1:15-16: “but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”

1 Thessalonians 4:7: “For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.”

B. The model for holiness: Jesus Christ

1. Jesus is our Lord, Savior, and example. We are to follow him in attitude and action. Paul called this being “imitators of God.” John used the phrase, “we ought to walk as Jesus walked.” Jesus said simply, “Follow me.”
2. More remarkably, God himself has committed to making us like Jesus. The ultimate goal in sanctification is conformity to the image of Christ.

Romans 8:29: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

C. The motive for holiness: love for God

As we grow to know his love and appreciate what he has done for us, we will also grow in our desire to live a life that is pleasing to him – as Paul says, “a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called...” (Ephesians 4:1).

1 John 5:3: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.”

II. The Battle for Holiness

While holiness is God’s will for us, this does not mean that the process of sanctification is easy. Given our own sinfulness and the sinful world in which we live, this process involves a battle – one that will require our energies for the rest of our lives.

A. The power of sin is broken.

As unbelievers we were slaves to sin – we were unwilling and unable to resist sin. When we were regenerated, we were freed from the power of sin – its ruling force in our lives was broken. We became willing and able to resist sin.

Romans 6:2, 6, 11: “How can we who died to sin still live in it? ... We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Why then do we still sin?

B. The presence of sin remains.

Although sin has been deposed as the ruler of our lives, it has not been removed as a factor in our lives. We are free from its dominion, but not its presence and influence – our quest for holiness is not unopposed. The remaining influence of sin is called different things: “the flesh,” “the sinful nature,” “indwelling sin.” The sinful world we live in and the devil who opposes us take advantage of this situation to tempt us into all manner of sin. Here is how Paul describes this battle:

Galatians 5:16-17: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

C. The heart is the battlefield.

Regeneration makes man’s heart a battlefield where ‘the flesh’ tirelessly disputes the supremacy of ‘the Spirit.’” –**John Owen**

1. Growth in holiness always comes through the pathway of the heart. The Holy Spirit doesn’t just change us outwardly by “dressing us up” with new behaviors; he transforms us from within.
2. The remaining sin in our hearts is deceptive, wicked, and in active rebellion against God.

Romans 7:8, 21: “But sin...produced in me all kinds of covetousness...when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.”

Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things...who can understand it?”

3. The Bible teaches that our sinful behavior is not caused by other people or our circumstances, but by our own desires, cravings, longings, or lusts. Whatever rules our hearts determines what we do and say in response to people and situations.

James 1:14: “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.”

James 4:1: “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?”

4. We do not sin because our hearts are empty, wounded, broken, or in need of love, self-esteem, or significance. We sin because of sinful desires that have not been recognized and put to death.

Romans 8:5, 8: “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh...Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

5. Indwelling sin inclines our hearts to forget the gospel and to seek happiness, joy, peace, rest, security, and satisfaction outside of Christ. The heart’s idolatrous pursuit of “life” outside of Christ leads to sinful behavior.

III. The Process of Holiness: Sanctification

A. Sanctification defined

Sanctification is the continuing work of God in the life of a believer. It is a progressive work in which we become more and more free from sin and like Christ. In short, our actual lives become increasingly conformed with our legal status before God.

1. It is a process. We don’t become instantly perfect. Rather, we become progressively more holy as we cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
2. There is discernable progress. We actually do become more and more holy, overcoming various manifestations of sin (lying, pride, selfishness, etc.) and becoming more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.
3. It is a work of grace. Many make the mistake of thinking that we are saved by grace but that we then become holy by our own efforts. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are justified by grace and we are sanctified by grace as well. Grace is necessary in both cases, and it is unmerited in both cases. The key difference is that in justification we are passive but in sanctification we actively cooperate with the Holy Spirit in receiving and responding to God’s grace.

This cooperative activity is vividly portrayed by the Apostle Paul:

Philippians 2:12-13: “Therefore, my beloved...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

B. The Holy Spirit works.

The activity of the Holy Spirit precedes any action towards holiness on our part and makes our actions possible. Although we aren't always aware of his activity, if we are becoming more holy it is because he is at work.

2 Corinthians 3:18: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

"The only good we do is what He does in us; it is not that we do nothing ourselves, but that we act only when we have been acted upon, in other words under the direction and influence of the Holy Spirit." –**John Calvin**

C. We work.

Because the Holy Spirit is at work in us, we can therefore work; he makes it possible for us to live holy lives. However, we must never be passive in this process. We are responsible before God to "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

Colossians 1:29: "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

Hebrews 12:14: "Strive...for the holiness."

"Sanctification...is a thing for which every believer is responsible...Whose fault is it if they are not holy, but their own? On whom can they throw the blame if they are not sanctified, but themselves? God, who has given them grace and a new heart, and a new nature, has deprived them of all excuse if they do not live for his praise." –**J.C. Ryle**

IV. Weapons for the Battle

God has equipped us with numerous aids for our battle with sin, and we seek to equip every member to maximize the use and effectiveness of these aids.

A. The Bible exposes and judges the motives, intents, and desires of the heart. It provides truth – God's perspective on reality.

Hebrews 4:12: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

B. Prayers depends our fellowship with God, and therefore brings a greater sensitivity to and conviction of sin. In prayer we can confess our sins,

cultivate a hatred for sin and a love for godliness, and receive strength for our battle with sin.

1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

- C. The Holy Spirit dwells in us so that we can say “no” to the passions and desires of our sinful nature. God has made us new creatures in Christ, and he is actively at work to transform our heart.**

Galatians 5:16: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

- D. Fellow Christians are a crucial part of this battle. We all battle sin and suffer from some degree of spiritual blindness due to the deceptive nature of sin. Therefore, each Christian should be committed to receiving help from others in this battle. This includes confessing our sin to each other and receiving observations from each other.**

Hebrews 10:24: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works...”

At Harvest Community Church, pursuit of sanctification is woven throughout all the facets of our church life. Each member is encouraged to practice **the spiritual disciplines** – especially Bible reading and prayer – and through them to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:19). An essential part of our community groups is the specific and personal application of God’s word to our lives. Our emphasis on relationships provides countless contexts in which we join arms and help each other grow in godliness. The weekly **preaching of God’s word** is a key means to our growth in godliness as a body. Through these avenues and more, we desire to live lives that increasingly reflect God’s character to a lost world.

V. The Heart of Sanctification

The intentional pursuit of godliness is a priority here because the Scriptures command it. In taking sanctification seriously, we are taking god’s holiness seriously and the reality of our own sin seriously. It is not uncommon to find some Christians who downplay the role of sin in their lives – such talk seems negative or counter-productive. However, few endeavors could be more exciting than the glorious pursuit of becoming more like Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Far from making us self-centered or morbidly introspective, our pursuit of holiness intensifies our joy as we become more amazed at God’s forgiveness, more free from the sin in our lives, and more intimately acquainted with our God. Ultimately, our holiness brings God glory as His character is increasingly displayed in our lives. Such mercy and grace provides powerful motivation to cooperate with God’s sanctifying work in our lives and so to “continue the journey” of the Christian life in the context of the local church.

Understanding the Journey

The Importance of Sound Doctrine

Lesson 4

The Christian life is not meant to be an aimless wandering; it is not a journey without meaning. God intends for us to understand who he is, how we are to relate to him, and how we are to understand our lives and the world in which we live. In short, we need God's take on reality. To this end, he has graciously given to us his word, the Bible.

The Scriptures are God's revelation of himself and his purposes. The Bible is, therefore, essential to our lives, our spiritual well-being, our knowledge of God, and our growth in godliness. In this lesson, we will examine this most critical component to the Christian life. How is God's truth to function in our lives? Is it really important to grow in our understanding of doctrine? Isn't simply "loving Jesus" enough? We must answer such questions before we will be prepared to truly "understand the journey" to which God has called us.

I. What Is Doctrine?

Around Harvest, you will often hear talk of people's love for "doctrine" and the benefits of doctrine; you'll also hear of various books people are reading that are helping them in the Christian life – books about various aspects of doctrine. Before we look at the importance of doctrine, perhaps it will be helpful to understand what we mean by "doctrine." We will address this question in two ways.

A. *The storyline of the Bible.* The Bible is not simply a mixed bag of books and ideas that bear no particular relationship to each other. The Bible tells a story: the story of God and his relationship to his creation in general, and to humanity in particular. We must understand this story in order to truly understand God, ourselves, history, and the future.

Some of the main facets of the Bible's "plotline" provide for us a general overview of God and his purposes in the world:

1. Creation. The Bible tells us that "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). This opening statement of the Bible implies some significant truth.
 - a. The world, and history itself, are purposeful. They came about by God's will and proceed in accordance with his will.

Psalm 33:11: "The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generation."

Hebrews 1:3: “[Christ] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”

- b. As Creator, God has prerogatives over his creation. He rules it according to his purposes, and all creation, including humanity, owes it existence and allegiance to him.
2. The Fall. Though created to live in communion with and dependence upon God, mankind rejected God’s loving and benevolent rule and sought to live independently from God, doubting his word and spurning his commands (Genesis 3).

- a. This rebellion introduced sin into the world, and with it death (spiritual and physical), a break in fellowship with God, physical hardship and suffering, and turmoil in human relationships.

Romans 5:12: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”

- b. The fall brought with it judgment. Because God is holy, he must distance himself from and punish all sin.
3. The Plan of Redemption. God is not only holy, but loving and merciful. Despite mankind’s alienation from him and the necessity to punish evil, God sets out to redeem man from sin and to restore man to fellowship with himself. The rest of the Bible, from Genesis 3 on, unfolds this history of God’s redemptive purposes. Here are some of the “highlights” of this wonderful story:

- a. God chooses Abraham, reveals himself to him, and tells him that he will have a special relationship with Abraham and his descendants, In addition, all the nations of the earth will receive God’s blessings through him (Genesis 12:1-3; 18:18).
- b. The story of Israel traces the outworking of this plan, as God gathers from Abraham’s descendants a people for himself, who would know him and who would make him known in the world.
- c. Israel’s history reaches a climax when, from this chosen people comes a Savior – Jesus Christ – in whom all of God’s promises of forgiveness, redemption, and restored communion with God are realized.

- d. The New Testament tells the story of the accomplishment of God's saving purposes through Jesus' life and death, the realization through the church of God's plan to have a people for himself, and the extension of God's saving plan throughout the earth through the preaching of the gospel. It also foretells the consummation of all things when Christ will return to gather his people, to judge the nations, and to restore all things back under the rule of God.
4. Far from being a confusing batch of data, the Bible's storyline illuminates for us the very nature of God – sovereign, holy, and loving – and the nature of mankind as well – isolated from God, corrupted by sin, and subject to His righteous wrath. It also reveals the grace of God – acting to restore all things back to himself through His Son – and how we can find forgiveness and be restored to a relationship with God – through repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Without this understanding, we can know neither God nor ourselves rightly.

B. *Biblical doctrine.* In addition to the flow of Scripture's story, the Bible contains all that we need to know about God in order to know him and live a life pleasing to him. We refer to what the Bible teaches about various topics as "doctrine."

1. When we endeavor to understand what the Bible teaches about any subject, we are pursuing doctrine.
2. The study of doctrine and study of the Bible are not opposed; Bible study should result in sound doctrine. When some react negatively to the idea of "sound doctrine," it would seem they are misunderstanding the concept; the only alternative is "unsound doctrine!"

II. Why Do We Need Doctrine?

Hopefully what we mean when we speak of "doctrine" is clear: what the Bible teaches. But this doesn't answer the question of whether we need to know doctrine – "Isn't loving God enough?" "Isn't having Jesus enough?" Why do we as Christians need to give ourselves to the study of God's word?

A. The necessity of doctrine

"The conviction that Christian doctrine matters for Christian living is one of the most important growth points of the Christian life." – **Sinclair Ferguson**

1. We cannot truly love God without loving biblical doctrine.

Mark 12:28-30: “And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’”

- a. True love for God involves the whole person. There is an unmistakable inclusion – if not emphasis – on loving God with our minds – with what we think, our values, our opinions, our reasoning, with our view of God and ourselves and the world.
 - b. We simply cannot love what we do not know.
2. What we believe determines the way we live.

“However paradoxical it seems to our natural minds, it is one of the facts of spiritual reality that practical Christian living is based on understanding and knowledge.” –**Sinclair Ferguson**

- a. Every Christian is a theologian.
- b. The real question is not, “Do we need sound doctrine?,” but rather, “Is the doctrine I have sound?”

“No Christian can avoid theology. Every Christian has a theology. The issue, then, is not, do we want to have a theology? That’s a given. The real issue is, do we have a sound theology? Do we embrace true or false doctrine?” –**R.C. Sproul**

B. The purpose of sound doctrine

1. Sound doctrine provides a right understanding of God’s person and character.
 - The only way for us to know God is for him to reveal himself to us. The only place he does this in such a way that we can have a relationship with him is in his word.
2. Sound doctrine enables us to respond appropriately to God.
 - Wrong ideas about God produce unacceptable worship of God: idolatry.

Acts 17:23, 30-31: “...What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you...The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness

by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

3. Sound doctrine produces true and vigorous affections for God.
 - God’s word is designed to produce godly affections in our souls.

*Psalm 1:2: “His **delight** is in the law of the Lord.”*

*Psalm 19:8: “The precepts of the Lord are right, **rejoicing** the heart.”*

*Psalm 119:16: “I will **delight** in your statutes; I shall not forget your word.”*

*Psalm 119:50: “This is my **comfort** in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.”*

*Jeremiah 15:16: “Your words were found and I ate them, and your words became for me a joy and the **delight** of my heart;”*

*John 15:11: “These things I have spoken to you, that my **joy** may be in you and your joy may be full.”*

*Romans 15:4: “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scripture we might have **hope**.”*

“True spiritual and gracious affections...come from the enlightening of the mind in order to understand the things that are taught of God and Christ...False affections arise from ignorance rather than instruction...But the Scriptures are able to give to the saints spiritual and supernatural understanding of divine things.” –
Jonathan Edwards

4. Sound doctrine produces stability in the Christian life.

*Ephesians 4:13-14: “...until we all attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, **tossed to and fro by the waves...**”*

5. Sound doctrine protects us against false doctrine.

Ephesians 4:13-14: “...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children,

tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

6. Sound doctrine generates true love for God and others.

Philippians 1:9: “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge...”

7. Sound doctrine produces in us true discernment.

*Philippians 1:9-10: “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and **all discernment**, so that you may approve what is excellent...”*

8. Sound doctrine strengthens the church.

Ephesians 4:15-16: “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

III. How is a Commitment to Sound Doctrine Expressed in This Church?

We seek to express our commitment to sound doctrine in a variety of ways.

A. A commitment to the authority of God’s word

1. We accept the Bible, including the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament, as the written word of God; that they are the only infallible record of God’s self-disclosure to mankind; that Scripture in the original manuscripts is fully inspired by God and free from error in all it teaches.
2. Because we believe that Scriptures are the word of God, they are the final authority for all that we do as individuals and as a church.

B. A commitment to the preaching of God’s word

Preaching is the unique means by which God’s word is brought effectively to the assembled congregation.

*2 Timothy 4:1-2: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: **preach***

the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching,”

“We see how God, who could in a moment perfect his own, nevertheless desires them to grow up into manhood solely under the education of the Church. We see the way set for it: the preaching of the heavenly doctrine has been enjoined upon the pastors....Many are led either by pride, dislike or rivalry to the conviction that they can profit enough from private reading and meditation; hence they despise public assemblies and deem preaching superfluous. This is like blotting out the face of God which shines upon us in teaching.” –**John Calvin’s Institutes, IV. 1.5**

“For neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life, as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the Church on earth.” – **John Calvin’s Institutes, IV. 3.2**

C. A commitment to the singing of God’s word

“Ephesians 5:18-20: “...be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

D. A commitment to apply God’s word to every area of our lives

- Training for marriage and parenting
- Ministries for children, youth and singles
- Leadership development courses
- Evangelism training
- Community Groups

E. A commitment to provide biblical resources

- Our bookstore/resource center
- Audio ministry
- Sermon Audio and video: www.harvestpa.org
- HCCI Bible Classes
- Recovery Ministry for those working through life’s struggles
- Prison Ministry

IV. “Impassioned Orthodoxy”

At Harvest, we combine two things that some might say don't mix: a commitment to sound doctrine, and the passionate pursuit of God's presence.

The more we know of God and his manifold perfections, the more we appreciate his redemptive work through Christ's death on the cross, the more our love for God should be enflamed. Truth, pursued for the love of God and set aflame by the Holy Spirit, nurtures, deepens, and enriches our affections for God. Without understanding God's truth, our understanding of the journey of the Christian life will be hindered, and our fruitfulness in it limited. Let us pursue God's truth together, and thus fulfill in an ever-increasing way Jesus' command: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength”* (Mark 12:30).

Strength for the Journey

Empowered by the Spirit

Lesson 5

In previous lessons, we've seen over and over our dependence upon the grace of God in the Christian life. The very plan of salvation is the story of God's gracious initiative to send his son to die on the cross for sinners who were as yet in rebellion against God. Having responded to the gospel, Christians then learn that their response was actually rooted in God's gracious choosing and calling of them before the foundation of the earth. In the fight for holiness, we find that all our efforts have their start in the sanctifying work of God, who "works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). The Christian life is truly "all of grace, from first to last."

Because of this, God never intended believers merely to "trudge on" in their own strength. Indeed, one of the great promises of Scripture comes at the very end of the book of Matthew, just after the giving of the Great Commission: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). In this lesson, we will explore more fully the source of strength for the Christian journey: the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

I. The Holy Spirit: God's Active Presence

A. While God is omnipresent (present at all places at all times with all of his being), he makes his presence known in different ways for different purposes.

- He can be present to bless, to sustain, to punish, or to empower.

B. God manifested his presence in various ways throughout history, but these reached a climax in the person of Jesus Christ.

John 1:1, 14: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

C. In the church age, God's presence is primarily manifested in the world, and especially in the church, in the person of the Holy Spirit.

John 14:16-18: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he

dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

D. Christians have the great privilege not only of trusting in God’s omnipresence, but of personally experiencing his nearness.

Romans 8:15-16: “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...”

James 4:8: “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”

E. God’s active presence among his people accomplishes many things. It is not uncommon to focus narrowly on more dramatic aspects of this, such as miracles, healings, or prophecy. Scripture, however, portrays the Spirit’s work as pervasive and multifaceted – what might be called “the broad work of the Spirit.” To fully appreciate God’s active presence, we need to recognize the countless ways in which the Spirit is at work in and among us.

“...the Spirit’s major role in Paul’s view of things lies with his being the absolutely essential constituent of the whole of Christian life, from beginning to end. The Spirit thus empowers ethical life in all of its dimensions – personal, corporate, and in the world. Believers in Christ, who for Paul are “Spirit people” first and foremost, are variously described as living by the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, and sowing to the Spirit...the Spirit conforms the believer into the likeness of Christ to the glory of God. The Spirit is therefore the empowering presence of God for living the life of God in the present.” – **Gordon Fee**

II. The Holy Spirit: God’s Saving Presence

The New Birth. The greatest miracle one can ever experience is the miracle of regeneration, in which the Holy Spirit changes our natures and imparts spiritual life to us. Nothing can ever compare with this mighty work of the Spirit in our lives.

Titus 3:4-7: “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

III. The Holy Spirit: God’s Purifying Presence

- A. *The Holy Spirit.* One of the Spirit’s primary activities is to remove sin from our lives and to make us more and more holy, just as God himself is holy.**

2 Corinthians 3:18: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

- B. *The Fruit of the Spirit.* As the believer cooperates with the work of the Spirit in his life, the Spirit produces “fruit in his life, consisting of godly attitudes and behavior. This supernatural work is the opposite of our natural tendencies, and is the reproduction of the life of Christ in the believer.**

Galatians 5:16, 22-23: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

IV. The Holy Spirit: God’s Empowering Presence

In addition to effecting regeneration and sanctification, the Holy Spirit also empowers believers for Christian witness and service. (Acts 1:5; 1:8; 2:38).

- A. The Holy Spirit gives the believer an increased awareness of God and empowerment for life and service.**

1. This is foretold by John the Baptist in each of the four gospels (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16 and John 1:33) and by Jesus (Acts 1:4-5). It is the “promise of the Father” – God’s empowering presence for the new covenant age.

Acts 1:4-5, 8: “And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’...But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

2. Spiritual empowerment stimulates consistent growth in godliness and enables the believer to bear witness concerning the gospel and to serve the Lord with spiritual power.

Galatians 5:16: “But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

3. How may we know if we have received it?
 - a. We receive through faith, asking God, knowing that he loves to give good gifts to his children.

Luke 11:13: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

- b. A powerful effect of this experience is the active presence of God. More than mere belief, the Spirit graciously overwhelms us with a sense of the majesty and truth of God as revealed in Christ.

Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

- c. Discernable increasing evidence of the fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)

B. Although this is often a significant, identifiable and dramatic event, being baptized in the Spirit is only the beginning of a process of empowerment that God desires for every believer.

1. The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power for Christian life and witness. Our responsibility and privilege is to live a life of dependence upon God, asking for his Spirit to continually fill us, to empower us, and to strengthen us to live lives for his glory.

Ephesians 5:18: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit..."

2. There are differing views among Christians as to when a person is baptized in the Holy Spirit. Some believe that it occurs at regeneration, while others hold that it is an experience distinct from regeneration. Transcending these differences are certain, clear truths of Scripture that all Christians can affirm: God promises the Holy Spirit to every Christian and desires every Christian to experience the Spirit's empowering presence for life and witness.

At our church, we have found it possible to accommodate Christians who differ on this issue when certain beliefs and values concerning the Spirit's ministry are believed, cherished, and applied. These common values are what is most important to us as a church and would include:

- A recognition of the need for ongoing empowerment by the Spirit in the Christian life.
- A Belief that Christians are to seek to be continually filled by the Spirit.
- A life of constant dependence upon the Holy Spirit.
- A faith-filled pursuit of those things that are indicative of being filled with the Spirit: genuine love for God, a hunger for his Word, the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, a love for fellowship, a burden for the lost, and boldness in Christian witness.
- A belief in the continuity of the spiritual gifts listed in Scripture, and an earnest desire for whatever gifts the Spirit would graciously give.
- A love for, and pursuit of, the active presence of God.

C. Spiritual Gifts

In addition to giving us increased boldness and effectiveness in witness (Acts 4:31), prompting worship and thanksgiving in our hearts (Ephesians 5:18, 20; Acts 10:46), increasing our growth in godliness (2 Corinthians 3:18), and strengthening our relationship with other believers (Ephesians 5:18, 21), the Holy Spirit also imparts supernatural gifts for the edification of the church and for works of ministry in the world.

1. All believers have and received spiritual gifts.

*1 Corinthians 12:7: "To **each is given** the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."*

2. All of the gifts are supernatural. In Scripture, all of the gifts, from seemingly "natural" ones like mercy and serving to "supernatural" ones like healing, are viewed as being from God and empowered by the Spirit.

*1 Corinthians 12:7: "To each is **given the manifestation of the Spirit** for the common good."*

3. The validity and importance of the various spiritual gifts have been and continue to be debated within the Christian community. At Harvest, this is our position on speaking in tongues and healing.

a. Speaking in Tongues is one of the most widely debated topics within the Christian community today. It is an issue that we

cannot avoid discussing since the Bible mentions tongues; however, it is NOT an issue that we choose to debate. Speaking in tongues is speaking in a language that is different from one's native language. Tongues is seen being used in two different ways in Scripture- speaking the wonders of God to man and speaking to God.

The Gift of Tongues was used in Scripture to fulfill God's purposes and is still used today. Since it is listed in I Corinthians 12 as one of the gifts of the Spirit, we have no reason to believe that this one gift has ceased to exist. The position of Harvest is that the gift of speaking in tongues should be of private use and not of public use within our worship services. In I Corinthians, Chapter 14, Paul tells us that tongues are for private or personal edification and is of no profit in edifying the body if no one understands what is being said. Paul places a greater emphasis on (1) Understanding and (2) Prophecy than the unknown tongue.

In addition, Paul states in verse 26 to let all things be **done for edification** when coming together in worship. The only way tongues can be edifying to the body in a worship service is if there is an interpretation. Paul also states that if the church is speaking in tongues those who don't understand will think you are mad or strange. Since Harvest Community Church exists to evangelize the lost, it is our position that those who have the gift of tongues use that gift to speak between themselves and God, thereby not denying the speaking of tongues while not causing distraction to the unbelievers.

Paul does give restrictions for speaking in tongues during a worship service. It should be noted, however, that the verse states "if anyone speaks in tongues," which would seem to imply that it is not a necessary part of a worship service. In fact, he states when you come together everything should be done for the strengthening of the church. To enter into this practice during a worship service can and has caused a great deal of confusion (which God is not the author of.) When tongues leads to confusion, it does not strengthen the church. This is the primary reason Harvest does not promote speaking in tongues in its worship services.

- b. **Healing** was an important ministry of our Lord. Jesus healed as a means of demonstrating the power of God and as a witness to draw the hearts of men to Him. **Scripture clearly records God's power to heal sin, the brokenhearted, sickness and disease, and our land.** Since the Bible testifies that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that healing was provided for in the

Atonement, we have no reason to believe that God has retired or ceased from performing miracles and healings. We believe that God is able to heal today.

God often uses a person as a vehicle to administrate His gift of healing; but, healing is the result of the supernatural intervention of the power of God in our lives. It is through His name that we are healed. Sometimes the vehicle that God chooses to use is medicine and the medical field. We recognize that God uses physicians to treat while the Great physician heals.

The Bible lays out five basic guidelines for those who seek healing:

- **CONFESS** our sins that we may be healed
- **PRAY**
- Exercise our **FAITH**
- Call on the **ELDERS** of the Church
- **LAY HANDS** on the individual seeking healing and **ANOINT** with oil as a symbol of God's grace at work in the life of that individual.

There are many factors and mysteries with regard to why one is healed and one is not. While we cannot always answer every question, we can know four things for certain.

- It is appointed unto man once to die, and suffering is a part of life here on earth.
 - We will not experience total and complete healing until our bodies are glorified
 - When the Grace to be healed is not given, the Grace to endure is promised
 - We can continue to trust God knowing that He works all things for His good.
4. The purpose of spiritual gifts is the glory of God and the edification of other believers.

1 Corinthians 10:31: "So, whether, you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

1 Corinthians 12:7: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

V. Pursuing God's Empowering Presence

Because God invites us to draw near to him (Hebrews 4:16; James 4:8) and commands us to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), we can have confidence that he will respond to our pursuit of him.

A. Diligently practice the spiritual disciplines, especially the study of God’s word, prayer, and worship.

1. Amazingly, God desires an intimate relationship with us, and the spiritual disciplines are means God has given us to commune with him, receive his grace, and grow in godliness.

“The Spiritual Disciplines then are also like channels of God’s transforming grace. As we place ourselves in them to seek communion with Christ, his grace flows to us and we are changed. That’s why the disciplines must become priority for us if we will be godly.” –**Donald Whitney**

2. The Bible is God’s self-revelation to man. In it we learn what God is like and how we are to respond to him. There is no more important activity for the Christian than reading and meditating upon the word of God.
3. Prayer is communication with God. It is the lifting up of our hearts, thoughts, and desires to God. When we pray, we communicate with God, and he communicates with us. For our part, we communicate our gratitude, confess our sins, submit our wills, present our requests, and pour out our worship. We also listen, allowing God to give us divine perspective on our lives, search our hearts for sin, illumine our minds with his truth, encourage our souls with his promises, and assure us of his love through Christ.

B. Recognize the value of the corporate gathering of the church for experiencing a fresh infilling of the Spirit.

While private devotions are crucial for the Christian life, God is pleased to reveal his active presence in corporate meetings in ways we don’t normally experience when we’re alone.

“Conversely, it’s true that God will manifest his presence to you in congregational worship in ways you can never know even in the most glorious secret worship. That’s because you are not only a temple of God as an individual, but the Bible says (and far more often) that Christians collectively are God’s temple... God manifests his presence in different ways to the “living stones” of his temple when they are gathered than he does to them when they are apart.” – **Donald Whitney**

C. The Sunday Celebration

In the life of this church, nothing exceeds the importance of our Sunday morning corporate meetings. These times provide a context where we can worship God together, hear the word of God proclaimed and taught, and be built together in our mission as a church.

Each Sunday has three primary goals:

1. *To worship and glorify God.* There is no higher calling for the people of God than to worship and glorify him together. Our Sunday meetings provide the opportunity to glorify God, to declare his perfections, to praise his name, and to adore him together.
2. *To receive from God.* Although the main purpose of corporate worship is the exaltation of God, worship is nonetheless a means by which we encounter God together and are refreshed by his presence, strengthened by his grace, encouraged by his promises, and transformed by his truth. These things occur both through our times of worshipping God through song and through the preaching of God's word.
3. *To minister to one another.* Believers are given the privilege of caring for, encouraging, and building up each other. Each Sunday is an opportunity for us to minister to others through prayer, words of encouragement, prophecy, greeting, sharing of Scriptures, and a multitude of other ways.

D. Other Corporate Contexts

In our church, there are a variety of other gatherings that take place within various ministry spheres. Community Groups also play a critical role in our life together as a church. Each of these contexts provide opportunities for us to experience God's active presence together as we seek him through worship, the teaching and application of God's word, and fellowship with each other.

VI. God's Active Presence: Our Privilege and Need

As believers, we should never be satisfied with anything less than the nearness of God – his active presence. He has promised to draw near to us, and he empowers us by the Holy Spirit to glorify him and serve him more effectively as he accomplishes his purposes through the church. To be a Christian is to be marked by the presence of God, and how gracious he is to give us the Holy Spirit to empower us for our lives, our service to him, and our life together as a church. How desperately we need this. And how wondrous it is that we can pursue this in faith, and do so together.

Together on the Journey

The Priority of the Local Church

Lesson 6

I. Why Is the Church Important?

When it comes to the Christian life, the question of the church's importance is perhaps one that is too often overlooked. How often do we stop and think, "Why is the church so important? What is the purpose of the church?" The answer to such questions will provide us both direction for how churches should build the body of Christ and encouragement to be faithful as we play our part in it.

In this lesson, we will explore the critical role that the local church plays in God's glorious purposes, as well as the overall vision of this particular local church. We will find that our relationships with other believers are a tremendous means of blessings, both for ourselves and others. God never meant for us to live the Christian life alone. Instead, he gives us the marvelous privilege of traveling on the journey **together**.

A. The ultimate purpose of the church is the glory of God.

1. The Bible clearly reveals that mankind stands in rebellion against God. However, throughout history God has made himself known to people, called them to himself, and gathered them together to worship him and bring glory to his name. Because the church is uniquely God's we are to be distinctly different from the world.

*Exodus 19:4-6: "You yourselves have seen what I do to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, **you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**"*

2. Believers living after Christ came to earth have the even greater privilege of joining together to enjoy and proclaim the pinnacle of God's saving acts: the death of Christ on the cross for our sins.

Ephesians 1:3-8: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood,

the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us...

B. The church's role is exclusive.

The church is God's chosen means for carrying out his purposes until he returns. He has ordained no other organization or structure for this purpose.

Matthew 16:18: "...I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

1 Timothy 3:15: "...if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth."

C. Our true nature as the church, and as Christians, is corporate.

Throughout the history of redemption, God has been acting to save a people, not a disconnected group of isolated individuals.

*1 Peter 2:9-10: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a **people** for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's **people**; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."*

There are many aspects of the Christian life that we typically think of as involving our personal relationship with God: our response to the gospel, our growth in godliness, our love for doctrine, and our empowerment by God's Spirit. While all of these things are critical for our personal lives, it is possible to understand them incorrectly as involving only our personal lives.

It is a key assumption of New Testament teaching that the Christian life is to be lived out in relationship with other believers in the context of the local church. Although we enter into a relationship with God as individuals, we nevertheless enter into something greater than our own individuality: the church – the community of God's people.

II. Why Should I Join a Local Church?

Why go to all this trouble to learn about this church? Does it really matter if I actually join a church? Am I not already a member of "the universal Church?" Isn't my personal relationship with Jesus what really matters? Such questions are common, and not altogether surprising given our individualistic culture and natural tendency toward independence. However, such questions also reveal a misunderstanding about the church and God's purposes in and through the church. The Scriptures make it clear: **God's**

specific purposes for his people are accomplished as individual join themselves to and participate in local churches.

A. Local church membership is biblical.

The primary New Testament metaphors for the church – body (1 Corinthians 12:27), temple (Ephesians 2:21), household (1 Timothy 3:15), and flock (Acts 20:28) – have as a key characteristic the idea of separate individuals joined together into a single entity. While all genuine believers are members of the universal body of Christ, they are to express this tangibly through membership in a specific local church.

B. Local church membership is vital to our spiritual health and growth.

Without being jointed together with other believers, we will lack the strength and nourishment that each member – including ourselves – is to supply.

Ephesians 4:15-16: “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

C. Local church membership is sharing life together.

Far from so many of our modern misconceptions, the biblical picture of the church can best be described as community: a group of people, joined by a common life, united by common values and a common purpose, devoted to living out this life together within the larger society. This is the type of church life to which God calls us – a life that shines as a testimony to his work in us. His intention for our lives together is more than simply attending the same Sunday meetings and believing the same doctrines.

Acts 2:42-47: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belonging and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.”

“Those first Christians of Acts 2 were not devoting themselves to social activities but to a relationship...They understood that they had entered this relationship by faith in Jesus Christ, not by joining an organization. And they realized that their fellowship with God logically brought them into fellowship with one another. Through their union with Christ they were formed into a spiritually organic

community... We must grasp the idea that fellowship means belonging to one another in the Body of Christ, with all the privileges and responsibilities that such a relationship entails.” – **Jerry Bridges**

III. Fellowship: The Foundation of Our Relationships

Because the Holy Spirit has joined us together as a community, our relationships are to be marked by this reality. We don't simply attend the same service, or enjoy the same interests – we have been united at the deepest level by the Spirit of God. The New Testament characterizes our relationships with each other by the word *fellowship*.

“We should not think of our fellowship with other Christians as a spiritual luxury, an optional addition to the exercises of private devotions. Fellowship is one of the great words of the New Testament: it denotes something that is vital to a Christian's spiritual health, and central to the Church's true life... The Church will flourish and Christians will be strong only when there is fellowship.” – **J.I. Packer**

A. What is fellowship?

The word often translated fellowship in the New Testament (*koinonia* – cf. Acts 2:42) is also rendered participation, partnership, and communion. The word expresses the idea of sharing something in common, or joining a mutual endeavor (often with sacrifice involved.)

1. Biblical writers took up this word to describe the relationship believers have with God through Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:9: “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

2. It was also extended to describe the relationship believers have with each other.

1 John 1:3: “...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

3. Our fellowship with God is what makes our fellowship with other believers unique. The richness Christians experience in their relationships with one another is human relationship at the deepest level possible.

C.J. Mahaney defines fellowship as “the communication of our current relationship with and experience of God himself.” Biblical fellowship is not merely “socializing” – it is sharing our common life in Christ: life that is rich, enduring, and eternal.

B. The biblical example of fellowship

The Bible describes fellowship in concrete terms as actions we do with or for “one another.” Here is a sampling:

1. Worship God together (Ephesians 5:18-20).
2. Pray for one another (Ephesians 6:18).
3. Carry one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2).
4. Encourage one another (I Thessalonians 5:11).
5. Confess our sins to one another (James 5:16)
6. Correct one another (Galatians 6:1; Matthew 18:15).
7. Serve one another (Galatians 5:13).

We must recognize our responsibilities as member of the body and position ourselves to serve others. In short, we must give ourselves to **purposeful involvement** in each other’s lives.

IV. The Fruit of our Fellowship

Genuine fellowship profoundly enriches our relationships within the church.

A. *Growth in godliness. Sanctification is a group project. We simply cannot make the same progress in isolation that we can make in community with other believers.*

1. We need the consistent encouragement of others. Consistent, intentional, and specific encouragement is to be a mark of those who serve “the God of encouragement” (Romans 15:5).

1 Thessalonians 5:11: “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”

2. We need others to help us resist sin and to strengthen our resolve for godliness.

Hebrews 3:13: “But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

3. We need the input of others to help us see our sin and repent from it. Because we are naturally blind and deaf to our own sin, we desperately need the correction of others. When given and received humbly, correction is a true expression of biblical love.

Galatians 6:1: “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”

4. We need to confess our sins to others so as to weaken sin's power and invite accountability. Few things are more effective in cultivating humility and promoting fellowship than confessing our sins and pursuing evaluation from others.

James 5:16: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed."

- B. Providing mutual care.** We live in a fallen world, and the effects of sin – our own and others' – are all around us: pain, sorrow, sickness, death. God has promised to care for us, and much of his care comes to us through other believers. Indeed, Christians are to be distinguished by their sacrificial love for one another.

1 Corinthians 12:24-26: "But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."

- C. Benefiting from the diversity of gifts.** The Holy Spirit distributes gifts to build the church. But God has also made us dependent upon one another – no one person has all the gifts necessary. To mature as a body, we need one another and the unique gifts each one brings.

Ephesians 4:16: "...from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it build itself up in love."

1 Corinthians 12:7: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

- D. Presenting a compelling witness.** Ultimately, our lives together are intended to show the world a compelling picture of the grace of God. Our unity and love for one another is one of the most powerful testimonies we can give to unbelievers who are lost, isolated, fragmented, and ultimately without hope.

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

V. A Means of Our Fellowship: Community Groups

1. One of the primary ways we build relationships and cultivate fellowship with each other here is through our network of small groups – what we call "Community Groups."
2. While we are joined to all believers in the local church, Community Groups allow us to relate more deeply with a small number of people. An integral part of our

church's ministry, Community Groups provide an important context for accomplishing a number of biblical priorities.

“The value of the small group is that it can become a community of related persons, and in it the benefit of relatedness cannot be missed nor its challenge evaded. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say, therefore, that small groups...are indispensable for our growth into spiritual maturity.” – **John Stott**

A. The purpose of Community Groups

1. ***Application of God's word to our lives.*** Merely hearing God's word is insufficient; we must apply it to our lives for there to be fruit. Community Groups enable us to do this together. We seek to apply the Bible's teaching, review Sunday messages, discuss Christian books, and use a variety of other resources with the intention of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. ***Pursuit of biblical fellowship.*** Genuine fellowship isn't practical in a large crowd. Community Groups provide a place where we can build intimate relationships, care for one another, and help each other grow in our relationship with God.
3. ***Ministry to one another.*** God has made us dependent on each other, and Community Groups provide a context where we can minister to each other with the gifts that God has given us. Meetings often include times of prayer for one another and opportunities for individual to exercise spiritual gifts for the edification of other.

B. Participation in Community Groups

Membership in this church assumes active involvement in a Community Group. We encourage new members to discuss and ask questions about these groups during class discussions. It is hoped that each new member will engage in a Community Group after completing the pastoral interview.

C. Our responsibilities within Community Groups

Each member is important to the group, and should seek to contribute to the group's health and success. We each have the responsibility in our group to:

1. ***Faithfully attend meetings and functions.*** We're much more likely to benefit if we are actually present!
2. ***Willingly participate.*** Come ready to contribute, to serve, to share, and to open yourself to others. When the group has an assignment, diligently complete it. Both you and others will benefit from your participation

3. *Build relationships with other members outside the meeting.* Don't confine your investment to the Community Group meeting – let this be the springboard to rich, enduring relationships.

VI. The Church: Dear to God and Dear to Us

Our main concern is not whether you become part of our church, but that you become part of a church. Ultimately, this is not an issue of our personal preference or convenience, but of the glory of God. We exist for his glory, and Scripture is clear that God desires to make his glory known through the church. This is why the church – the gathering of God's redeemed – is so dear to him. We trust it will become dear to you as well.

“If I had never joined a church till I had found one that was perfect, I should never have joined one at all. And the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect church after I had become a member of it. Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us.” – **Charles Spurgeon**

As we see in the New Testament, this life is one that is to be shared with others. The church – with all its imperfections – is to be a foretaste of our fellowship with the saints in heaven (Hebrews 12:22-24). May this amazing privilege be our ongoing experience as we “continue the journey together.”

Also see Appendix A: HCC Membership Covenant

Participating in the Journey

Servanthood and Stewardship

Lesson 7

One of the realities of Christian existence is that we now belong to Another (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). All that we are and all that we have now belong to God. Of course, everything that we are and have – our personality, intellect, gifts, abilities, opportunities, possessions – has been given to us by God anyway (1 Corinthians 4:7)! Conversion simply gives the believer the opportunity to offer all of this back to God for his glory and for the eternal good.

A common metaphor in Jesus' parables is that of the servant – we are not called to be great as our culture defines greatness, but to serve faithfully. The words we long to hear on that final day are “Well done, good and *faithful* servant.” Such is the nature of the Christian life: serving is not something we do on occasion – it is way of life. The Christian journey is not one of observation, but participation. In this lesson we will explore two of the primary ways we are called to *participate* in this journey: through servanthood and stewardship (the faithful use of our resources) within the context of the local church.

“Fellowship involves sharing what we have with others. One of the most valuable things we can share is ourselves: our time, our talents, and our energies in serving one another in the Body of Christ.” – **Jerry Bridges**

I. Servanthood

A. The Christian's call to serve

There are to be no passive participants in the church. Indeed, one of the express purposes of our salvation is to rescue us from an existence leading to death and to set us free to serve God:

Hebrews 9:14: “...how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

Serving is therefore a God-given expectation of every Christian. But it is much more than merely a duty; what higher privilege is there than to give one's life in glad service to our gracious, sovereign God who saved us?

Since our service to God is closely connected to our salvation by God, we begin our exploration of servanthood with the greatest servant of all: Jesus Christ.

1. Servanthood is modeled by Jesus' example.

Although Jesus was worthy of the worship and service of all creatures, he humbled himself as a servant, and modeled a lifestyle of servanthood for all who would follow him.

Philippians 2:5-8: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Mark 10:43-45: "But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

2. Servanthood is mandated by Jesus' call.

While we can do nothing to earn our salvation, our salvation nevertheless ushers us into a life of following our Master, relinquishing our prerogatives and rights. A critical aspect of following Christ is following his example of servanthood.

John 13:14-17: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them"

3. Servanthood is motivated by Jesus' sacrifice.

At the heart of all of our service to God stands the cross. Because we stand forgiven, we are set free to find joy in knowing and serving God. Because the Spirit indwells us, we find we have fresh affections for God and a new desire to glorify God. We do not serve God in order to be forgiven or to gain God's favor, but because we have been forgiven and have received God's favor as a gift. Gratitude and joy provide the fuel for the believer's service to God and others.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15: "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;

and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”

“We should serve God not just because it is a duty, because serving him is much more than that. We should serve God because it glorifies God. He is worthy of everything we can do for him and his church. Wouldn't you agree? – **Donald Whitney**

B. The requirements of Christian service

The grace of God expressed through the cross of Christ provides the primary basis for our service to God. When this is the case, our servanthood will be characterized by certain qualities that both provide godly motivation for service and assure that our service is glorifying and pleasing to God.

1. **Christian service is God-centered.** When we serve other people, whether they be fellow Christians in the local church or non-believers in our lives, we are actually rendering service to God himself. This reality helps to purify our motives for serving, helping us to put to death the isolation that comes from selfishness and the craving for others' approval that comes from pride.

Colossians 3:23-24: “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”

2. **Christian service is others-focused.** When serving is motivated by grace, it will not be self-serving, but rather characterized by an authentic desire to glorify God and to meet the needs of others. Few things so distort our service as selfishness, but grace-motivated service actively places the desires of God and the needs of others above one's own.

Galatians 5:13: “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

3. **Christian service is characterized by humility.** True servanthood adopts a posture that others are more important than self. A servant doesn't demand recognition or dictate how he is to serve, but rather takes simple delight in being used by God to meet the needs of others.

Philippians 2:3-4: “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

4. **Christian service is empowered by the Spirit of God.** The believer not only labors for God, but by the power God provides. Dependence upon God for motivation, strength, and effectiveness in serving assures that God receives the glory for our service. God gives each believer spiritual gifts that motivate and empower our service for his glory and others' good.

1 Peter 4:10-11: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

C. Giving expression to servanthood in our church family

An important aspect of membership here is finding a place to use one's gifts to glorify God and serve others. Involvement in service typically takes one of two forms.

1. Spontaneous ministry opportunities: We all have numerous opportunities provided to us by God to serve him and others. These spontaneous occasions encourage us in our dependence upon God and in cultivating the heart of a servant.
2. Structured ministries of the church: These include ongoing commitments made in various aspects of church life, such as Community Groups, Ministry Teams, and Children's Ministry. These and other ministries of the church provide concrete opportunities for service that meet specific needs and spur us on in building relationships and growing in accountability.

II. Stewardship

Stewardship involves the faithful use of resources that belong to another. An important part of following Christ is the use of our material resources for God's purposes and to meet the needs of others. In fact, Scripture is clear that an authentic relationship with Christ *will find expression* in the faithful use of our resources for his purposes. For the remainder of this lesson, we will examine a second important means of participation in the Christian journey: the use of our money and possessions for the glory of God, the work of his church, and the well-being of others.

"Christian stewardship is the management of life and all its resources for the glory of God." – **Murray J. Harris**

- A. The reality of stewardship. The faithful use of our resources begins with a stark realization: God owns everything! All that we have comes from him,**

and therefore we don't really own anything; we are merely stewards – overseers or managers – over things that belong to God.

Psalm 50:10-12: “For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine.”

B. *The purpose of stewardship.* In addition to meeting our physical needs, God provides material resources to further the work of his kingdom through the local church.

Throughout salvation history, God has called his people to support his work through giving.

1. In the Old Testament, God's people were to give a tithe, or the first tenth, of their income to God. This practice predated the giving of the Law (Genesis 14:20; Genesis 28:22), and was later formalized in the Law of Moses for the maintenance of the temple and provision for the priests and Levites who served there (Leviticus 27:30-32; Deuteronomy 14:22-24).
2. In the New Testament, giving to support the work of the church remained an expectation of believers.

a. Giving to support the needs of individuals:

Acts 4:34-35: “There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

b. Giving to support the church's leaders so they can devote their time and energies to serving the church:

I Corinthians 9:13-14: “Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.”

c. Giving to support the extension of the gospel:

Philippians 4:15-16: “And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.”

3. The practice of tithing illustrates important guidelines and provides a helpful starting point for regular giving to the church.
 - a. The financial support of the New Testament church is likened to the support of the temple in the Old Testament.
 - b. Believers are commanded to financially support the local church where they receive care and training.

1 Timothy 5:17-18: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’”

1 Corinthians 9:13-14: “Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (cf. Matthew 10:10).

- c. In the New Testament, obedience to God’s law is intensified due to the transforming work of the Spirit in light of Christ’s work on the cross (for example, hatred is likened to murder – Matthew 5:21-22; lust is likened to adultery – Matthew 5:27-28). In the same way, our giving is not merely to be thought of as “paying our dues,” but should flow from the giving of our entire selves to God. In light of this, tithing is a reminder of God’s ownership of us, and is an appropriate starting point for our giving.

2 Corinthians 8:3-5: “For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints – and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”

- d. We are to give regularly and systematically. This demonstrates a commitment to God and a trust that he will provide for all our needs (see Exodus 23:19).

1 Corinthians 16:2: “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper...”

4. Offerings over and above our regular giving provide for special needs, specific ministries, care for the deserving poor, and the expansion of the gospel.

Acts 4:34-35: "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

C. *The character of stewardship.* The faithful use of our resources is not only commanded by God; it is in fact an undeniable indicator of our spiritual health. Moreover, what we actually do with our money reveals where our heart truly is (Matthew 6:21). Materialism, selfishness, greed, hoarding, anxiety over money – all of these reveal that our trust lies not in God but in money. In the same way, generosity and faithfulness reveal that our trust is in God – by such things we confess that God, not our possessions, is the source of our life.

Luke 16:11-13: "If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Matthew 6:19-21: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Here is a sampling of the motives and attitudes Scripture commands in the area of giving:

1. Giving is to be generous, not stingy.
2 Corinthians 9:6: "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."
2. Giving is to be enthusiastic, not grudging.
2 Corinthians 9:7: "Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."
3. Giving is to be deliberate, not haphazard.
2 Corinthians 9:7: "Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."
4. Giving is to be discreet, not showy.

Matthew 6:1-4: “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

5. Giving is to be with faith, not anxiety.

Malachi 3:10: “Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.”

III. The Privilege of Participation

One of the great tragedies in much of western Christianity is the misconception that “church” is an ornate building or service to be attended, rather than the community of God’s people, saved by his grace. By definition, then, to be a member of the church is to be a participant in the life of God, with the people of God, made possible by the grace of God. Viewed in this light, our participation in the life of the church is not an option, or the prerogative of a privileged few, but the call and responsibility of every person redeemed through the work of Christ on the cross. Having been purchased by God, we have the awesome privilege of offering all that we are and have to him for his glory.

Care Along the Journey

Pastoral Leadership

Lesson 8

We have explored how the journey of the Christian life is not to be merely and individual one, but a journey we undertake with others. We are not self-sufficient, independent creatures, but we need the help and blessing that comes from relationships with other believers in the context of the local church. In addition to the normal relationships with others in the church, God provides another essential means of grace for our lives: the leadership and care that comes from pastoral ministry.

To enable the building of his church and the extension of the gospel, God has appointed leaders within the local church. All too often, deficiencies in the church regarding the importance of leadership and the biblical role of pastors have sentenced congregations to immaturity and aimlessness. God's desire, however, is for churches to experience the maturity, stability, and fruitfulness that result when leadership and care are extended by gifted leaders with proven character. In this lesson, we will explore the biblical mandate for, and strategic importance of, pastoral leadership – God's provision for all of us to experience "care along the journey."

"Effective leadership is the need of the hour, and for the church under mandate to evangelize the world, it is an indispensable requirement – indeed an urgent agenda." – **Alex Montoya**

I. The Biblical Basis for Pastoral Ministry

A. Clarifying the terms

The New Testament uses three main terms to speak of what we typically call a "pastor:" elder (*presbyteros*- Titus 1:5; 1 Timothy 5:17), overseer/bishop (*episkopos*-1 Timothy 3:1-2; Titus 1:7), and pastor (*poimen*-Ephesians 4:11). Scholars have long agreed that these terms, instead of indicating separate offices, are actually used interchangeably, giving us three different facets of the same office:

- *Overseer/bishop* indicates the role of oversight.
- *Pastor* indicates the role of care.
- *Elder* indicates the necessity of spiritual maturity.

B. The imperative of a biblical perspective

It is increasingly popular for pastoral ministry to be pragmatically defined or culturally conditioned, rather than scripturally determined. When this occurs, the

role of the pastor is distorted, the effectiveness of the pastor is diminished, and the health of the church is weakened.

II. The characteristics of a Pastor/Elder

The Scriptures give us clear guidelines for viewing pastors and for determining what pastors are to be like. These markers provide for us both perspective (to view this through God's eyes) and protection (from cultural distortion).

A. A gift from God to the church

Unlike gifts such as prophecy, healing, and mercy, some gifts God gives to the church are actually *people* – the leaders God gives to serve the church.

Ephesians 4:7-8, 11-14: "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.' ...And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."

B. A model for the church

Pastors are to lead lives of integrity, faithfully modeling biblical standards for the Christian life. Indeed, all of the biblical qualifications for an elder except one deal with *character*. Pastors are certainly not sinless, but there should be the consistent display of these characteristics in their lives.

1 Timothy 3:1-7: "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil."

Pastors in this local church take this responsibility to be an example seriously, and they pursue accountability to a group of leaders within the church whom we refer to as the Elder Team or "E-Team".

C. Consistent with God’s design for the church

In addition to the requirement of godly character, Scripture also teaches that leadership in the church is to be exercised in a primary way by men (1 Timothy 2:11-15). This requirement, far from being an outmoded, culturally-conditioned standard, instead reflects the unique and complementary roles men and women have as part of the created order.

We seek to affirm and apply all that Scripture teaches about manhood and womanhood. Indeed, the biblical vision of manhood and womanhood is a glorious one! Both men and women are equal in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Therefore, men and women are equal in value and dignity. We have equal worth before God, equal access to Christ and the blessings of salvation (Galatians 3:28; Acts 2:17-18), and we are equally valued members of the body of Christ. This Scriptural vision leaves no room for feelings of superiority or inferiority, for pride or discouragement, on the basis of gender.

Scripture is also clear that men and women have different – but equally valuable roles in the home and in the church. All members of the body of Christ are gifted by God and are essential to the health of the church (1 Corinthians 12:4-26). However, Scripture restricts the primary governing and teaching roles in the church to men (1 Timothy 2:11-15). Because we desire Scripture to govern our practice, the pastors of this church are all men. As pastors, we count it an unspeakable privilege to care for and equip all the members of our church – both men and women – to fulfill their God-given callings and to bear fruit for his glory and for the good of the church.

D. Recognized by the church

Since God gives leadership to the church, it is the responsibility of the church – and especially the church’s leaders – to recognize and acknowledge this leadership. When we use biblical criteria to assess leadership in the church, we can be confident that our leaders are called by God and given to the church to lead us.

“God, who drafts men and fits them for ministry, intends that his work in them be on display so brightly that the church is able to see it, and then able to confirm his call through their appointment to public ministry.” – **David Hegg**

III. The Role of a Pastor/Elder

In the early stages of the church, leaders recognized the importance of maintaining biblical priorities in their labors (see Acts 6:1-4). The Scriptures outline what the job description of a pastor should be.

A. Lead the church.

According to Scripture, elders are called by God and accountable to God to lead the local church. The Bible describes this in various ways:

*1 Timothy 5:17: “Let the elders who **rule well** be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”*

*1 Peter 5:2: “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, **exercising oversight...**”*

*1 Timothy 3:4-5: “[An elder] must **manage** his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he **care for** God’s church?”*

*Romans 12:6, 8: “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: ...the one who **leads**, with zeal.”*

B. Nourish the church.

God has ordained his word as the primary instrument for the nourishment and strengthening of his church, and he charges pastors with the task of feeding the church with his word. Indeed, the health and future of the church depends upon its leaders faithfully transmitting sound doctrine and biblical practice to others.

1 Timothy 4:6: “In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.”

*2 Timothy 4:1-2: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: **preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.**”*

C. Equip the church.

The pastor is to be an equipper, training the church so that each member may be positioned for maximum fruitfulness in his or her life. One sign of effective pastoral ministry is the extent to which people are equipped to then serve others. In a healthy local church, leaders **train-** people **minister!**

Ephesians 4:11-12: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry...”

D. Protect the church.

As shepherds of God's people, pastors are called to protect the church from the dangers it faces, such as false teaching, the allurements of the world, and the ravaging effects of sin. Pastors protect the church in a variety of ways:

1. Teaching sound doctrine to strengthen the church in its faith and life

1 Timothy 4:6: "In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following."

2. Discerning errors and temptations offered by the culture, to protect the church from erroneous doctrine or practice

Acts 20:28-31: "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears."

3. Modeling, encouraging, and protecting biblical standards of godliness. This includes, when necessary, the administering of church discipline in cases of unrepentant believers in a biblical and redemptive manner.

*Matthew 18:15-17: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, **that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses**. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."*

"A shepherd's oversight of the flock expresses itself broadly in two ways. First, the shepherds provide truthful, positive direction and leadership to the flock. Second, they watch for spiritual dangers such as sin, false teaching, and false teachers, including Satan's assaults against the church." – **John MacArthur, Jr.**

E. Serve the church.

Although pastors are responsible to lead the church, they are to do so as servants. Following the examples of Jesus who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45), leaders are to posture themselves as servants and expend themselves for the glory of God and the good of others.

Mark 10:43-45: “But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

1 Peter 5:2-3: “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

IV. The Biblical Response to Leadership in the Church

A. Actively identify your designated place of involvement.

The New Testament is clear that each Christian is allotted by God to a specific local church and to the eldership of that church. This divine assignment results in numerous benefits:

- It helps to ensure that believers are properly cared for.
- It provides an explicit context in which believers are to serve others.
- It helps leaders to identify those for whom they are accountable before God.
- It creates an accountability arrangement in which unrepentant believers can be cared for biblically and redemptively.

Hebrews 13:17: “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, and those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

B. Exercise the responsibilities of membership.

At our church, there are certain expectations of members, which are simply expressions of a biblical commitment to a particular local church. It would be natural to expect that any member who is pursuing his or her relationship with God and believes that God has called him or her to this church will fulfill these expectations:

1. Support of the church’s Statement of Faith
2. Consistent participation in the Sunday morning meeting
3. Consistent participation in a Community Group
4. Regular involvement in serving
5. Regular financial support of the church
6. Willingness to support and follow the leadership of the church
7. A commitment to living by God’s word and to growing in godliness

C. Maintain a biblical attitude toward your leaders.

To our individualistic culture, the Bible's commands concerning leaders might seem antiquated or, perhaps, authoritative. Neither is the case. And, as with all the Bible's commands, proper understanding and faith-filled obedience will result in blessing for ourselves and for the church as a whole. By what should our attitudes be characterized?

1. A faith-filled submission

Hebrews 13:17: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."

Submission does not mean passivity or blind obedience. Rather, submission is an expression of faith towards God – that he has appointed leaders for us and he will use them for our good. It recognizes the critical role that leadership plays in bringing about God's purposes in the church and in the lives of believers. Fundamentally, submission is an attitude: *a disposition to affirm and support the leadership of the church, and to increase its effectiveness through joyful and faith-filled participation.*

2. A God-honoring appreciation

1 Timothy 5:17: "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching."

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13: "We ask you, brothers to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among ourselves."

The appeal to honor leaders can seem self-serving. Biblically, though, honor is an expression of humility and integrity. The biblical concept of honor exhorts us to recognize God's provision through another person, to cultivate gratitude for this provision, and rightfully to appreciate and acknowledge those who have served and benefited us. In so doing, we are actually giving glory to God for his goodness to us through other people. There exists an unfortunate confusion between exalting leaders and honoring leaders in the body of Christ. Exalting leaders is idolatry and is totally unacceptable. Honoring leaders, however, is biblical and should be the regular attitude and practice of every Christian.

D. Support your leaders in their labors.

The apostle John voiced a sentiment which resonates in the heart of every pastor: *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth"* (3

John 4). In addition to passionately pursuing God, believers can support the labors of their pastors in many ways:

- Joyfully participating in the life of the church
- Praying for your pastors
- Refusing to listen to slander or accusation against your pastors

V. The Blessings of Leadership

Biblically, ungodly leadership (or the absence of leadership) is viewed as an expression of God's judgment, and godly leadership as an expression of blessing (e.g., Isaiah 3:1-5). The same is true in the church: God appoints leaders for the purpose of bringing about his intentions for the church, including health, growth, stability, and maturity.

Ultimately, the church's leaders are a primary means by which God's own care for his people is expressed. Pastors are merely under-shepherds, laboring on behalf of the Chief Shepherd – Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:2, 4). As a famous hymn states, the journey of the Christian life is fraught with “many dangers, toils, and snares.” Leadership in the church helps provide “care along the journey,” that we might not only have safe passage, but grow into the fullness of God's purposes for the church, for his glory.

Reaching Others on the Journey

Evangelism and Mission

Lesson 9

We've looked at many essential topics that relate to our relationship with God and with other believers in the context of the local church. However, our study wouldn't be complete without giving attention to a critical component of the Christian life: the mandate from our Lord to reach others with the gospel. Our relationship with God was never intended to be merely a private journey concerned only with one's personal beliefs. On the contrary, those who have been reconciled to God through the work of Christ by definition become "ambassadors for God" in sharing the gospel with others (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

One of the songs of Revelation proclaims that Christ's death ransomed people from God "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelations 5:9). As we turn our attention to the church's mission to glorify God through the proclamation of the gospel throughout the earth, we will see that each of us has the great privilege and responsibility of sharing the gospel with others, demonstrating its reality in our lives, and participating in the mission of the local church.

I. Church with a Mission

We want to avoid the mistake of viewing church life as simply a routine to fulfill, or viewing ourselves as a static gathering of believers. From the very beginning, God's people had, at the core of their identity, an element of mission, and the goal of expansion.

- A. *The plan commenced: God's covenant with Abraham.* When God revealed himself to Abraham, he promised not only to bless Abraham, but to in turn make him and his descendants a blessing to all the nations of the earth.**

Genesis 22:17-18: "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

- B. *The plan continued: The Great Commission.* After Jesus accomplished his atoning work on the cross, he gave his followers a mandate to proclaim the gospel to all the nations. It is through the proclamation of the gospel that God will gather his people to himself, and thus fulfill his original promise to Abraham to bless "all the nations."**

Matthew 28:18-20: "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- C. The plan completed: The heavenly throng.** We see the ultimate fulfillment of God’s plan and Jesus’ commission in the book of Revelation, which pictures people from all over the earth giving glory to God and to the Lamb of God who died for them. The Bible is clear that God’s intention to bring glory to his name by gathering a people to himself will surely reach its intended goal.

Revelation 7:9-10: “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothes in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

II. People with a Message: Evangelism

Since every Christian has personally experienced the grace of God through the gospel, each of us has a part to play in this glorious commission as we testify to the salvation God offers through the gospel.

“Evangelism is the verbal proclamation of the good news of salvation with a view of leading people to a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ,” –**D.S. Lim**

A. The participants in evangelism: Every Christian!

The work of evangelism is essentially that of bearing witness – each of us is called to testify to what God has done for us through the gospel. Each of us has been empowered by God, and each of us has his or her own story to tell God’s amazing grace to us through the cross.

Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

1 Peter 3:15-16: “but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect...”

B. The substance of evangelism: The Gospel

We aren’t merely calling others to live a moral life, or asking them simply to “believe in God,” or trying to convince them that Christians are “nice people.” Salvation comes only through faith in the finished work of Christ on our behalf.

As the apostle Peter said, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Romans 1:16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

The gospel is the “good news” of God’s saving work on our behalf through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Communicating the gospel faithfully will help to preserve its power and protect us from distorting its truth.

C. The method of our evangelism: Declaration and Demonstration

1. Declaration: Telling the good news

Romans 10:14-15: “But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”

Since the gospel, is by definition, “good news,” evangelism always involves the sharing of this news. Every Christian is called to be an ambassador of the gospel, and we seek to equip each of our members to share the gospel accurately, joyfully, and faithfully.

2. Demonstration: Living the good news

Matthew 5:13-16: “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

In addition to proclaiming the gospel, Christians are to testify to the reality of the gospel by the way they live. The Bible describes believers as “...his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). These good works include deeds of kindness and love that express God’s love to people and give credibility to the message we proclaim.

This demonstration of the gospel takes place in countless, daily ways through the lives of individuals and families as they live in our community. We are also seeking to facilitate this demonstration through

various organized ministries now and in the days to come, through which our members can use their gifts to care for others and testify to the gospel.

D. The context of our evangelism

1. **Personal.** We encourage each of our members to bear witness to Jesus Christ and share the gospel in the *network of relationships* He provides to us. These “fields of harvest” (see Matthew 9:38) include our family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, classmates- anyone whom God has sovereignly placed in our lives.
2. **Corporate.** We believe that God has a plentiful harvest for us to reap in our region. We therefore seek to reach those in the area in which God has placed us, and to provide context our members can utilize to reach out to those in their relational networks.

III. Our Broader Mission: Church Planting

As Jesus instructed the first believers to reach their local area ("Jerusalem"), their nearby neighbors ("all Judea"), their more distant neighbors ("Samaria"), and people in all places no matter how far ("even to the end of the earth"), we believe that we can reach Western PA and the ends of the world from Kittanning, PA. [Acts 1:8] Thus, missions is a part of who we are not something we do.

We pursue mission work with our planned financial investment, as well as human involvement of all kinds. This means that we will remember to give regularly to the work of missions from our offerings; likewise, we will send our people, both in short and long term missions. Church planting anywhere in the world is our responsibility as the Lord leads us. This must remain a priority of each elder, and a responsibility of all members of the body. [Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Timothy 6:17-18]

We are committed to crossing cultural boundaries in order to achieve the unity Jesus desires for His church. This means that we will continually seek to reach out across racial, generational, ethnic, and economic barriers that divide the world. [Ephesians 2:14; Galatians 3:28-29]

We see our congregation as a part of the worldwide body of Christ. Accordingly, other believing congregations in our town are not our competitors but members of our family. We seek to strengthen those churches engaged in the same work as ourselves. Furthermore, we have a responsibility to pray for other congregations and to support their ministries as we are able. [Mark 9:40; 1 Corinthians 10:24]

Personal Testimony

Lesson 10

You will find that the remainder of our classes will be very interactive and the time allotted to each session will adjust as needed based on the makeup of each class.

During this week, we will give individuals an opportunity to prepare their personal testimony. Keep in mind that using this tool well, will be one of the most powerful tools that each of us can use in leading others to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Please review the handout. Your personal testimony will not be a resume or a life history. While we may have some interest in hearing that information, the sole purpose of this testimony is to speak to others about how God has changed things in your life.

Now, in your own words, make some notes regarding your life before salvation. Then include how you came to realize that Jesus had much more to offer than your previous ways. Briefly, how has your relationship with God impacted your life?

Try to build this into a 2-5 minute conversation. You can always add more details if they seem appropriate in the conversation.

Spiritual Gifts

Lesson 11 & 12

Let us take a quick look at the references in scripture to begin our discussion regarding how God sees those in His Church.

Matthew 22:36-40: “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

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

Ephesians 2:1-10: And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience- among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

John 15:1-11: I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my

disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Galatians 5:16-26: But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Matthew 20:25-28: But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Mark 9:35: And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

At the conclusion of Lesson 11, please take home and complete the spiritual gift questionnaire.

Questions and Answers

Lesson 13

Baptism

Membership Covenant

Website

My Harvest

Ministry Needs & Opportunities

Pastoral Interviews

Basic Church Government Process

Introduce to Church