

## DISCIPLESHIP GROUP STUDY - LEADER'S GUIDE

Based on *The Practice of Godliness*, by Jerry Bridges

### Introduction to Leaders

1. Plan on reading through Bridges' book as you walk through the study. It's not particularly "heady" or difficult, but I would not assume that your group is going to read it as well, so use this guide as a way to help lead discussion each week. You may find that one session is not enough time to engage all the issues, so I would encourage you - especially on issues that are uniquely pertinent and normally overlooked - to take 2 sessions on, or give readings before or after the session accordingly. You'll just have to make sure and have enough sessions in the schedule to get through it all.
2. **Extra readings** - Most studies include quotes from other Christian saints of history, with reflection questions. Include them at your discretion. They are meant to enhance the study. If there are quotes throughout the study without a citation, assume it is from the Bridges book. Encourage attenders to read them before, during, or after your study.
3. **Justification and Sanctification** - This study could easily be entitled, "Sanctification," which, as you know, only applies to believers. Therefore, it makes most sense to only apply to believers in the biblical logic of justification first, then sanctification, which are distinct and must be kept in the proper order, but they're never separate. There's no such thing as a justified person who is *not* being sanctified. With that said, however, non-Christians should be invited to come to each group, and as your group walks through this, you should encourage them to talk about these issues with non-Christians, not forgetting that one must be converted before they can live a holy life. We should portray the goodness, beauty and attractiveness of the holy life in order to draw people into the Christian life. If a non-Christian is struggling with impatience, for example, we can offer advice and encouragement about patience, but the first step is to ultimately show them Christ's life as a substitute for their life - gospel before law - if they are to ever grow in real patience. "Look at these beautiful descriptions of biblical patience, how they differ from nihilistic tendencies in Eastern philosophies of patience, and how they can re-orient your life from the bottom-up! Come to Christ, the eminently patient one, who bears even now the sins of those people He made for himself, and you can find a new source of patience and all of life!" They may only be able to hear something like this after experiencing a community of patient people.

4. **Note the Contrasts throughout between Mission-minded kingdom-focused Christians and “respectable” or “pious” establishment Christians** - many of the values discussed, like the fruit of the Spirit, have worldly counterfeits that are praised by the world and/or are praised by a fake Christian sub-culture. For example, self-control may be seen in the world as being moderate in all things; or in the Christendom-established church as being calm and passionless. These descriptions are far from the biblical injunction, which describes the single-minded focus on Christ in the midst of war against fleshly desires as we travel through this world until Jesus returns.
  1. You may find it helpful to read the final reading by GK Chesterton (pp.50-51 here) to get the spirit of the contrasts that avoids moderate compromise in the pursuit of righteousness, truth and ultimately the kingdom of God.

## CONTENTS

### **PART 1: FOUNDATION**

1. What is Godliness? [Ch. 1 & 2 - Value for All Things; Devotion to God]
2. Training to be Godly (Ch.3)
3. Becoming God-Centered (Ch.4)
4. Becoming Godlike (Ch.5) [Mortification & Vivification]

### **PART 2: GOD-CENTERED QUALITIES**

5. Humility (Ch.6)
6. Contentment and God-sufficient (Ch.7)
7. Thankfulness (Ch.8)
8. Joy (Ch. 9)

### **PART 3: GODLIKE QUALITIES**

9. Holiness (Ch.10)
10. Faithfulness (Ch.12)
11. Love (Ch.17)

### **PART 4: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT**

12. Self-Control (Ch.11)
13. Peace (Ch. 13)
14. Patience (Ch. 14)
15. Gentleness, Kindness and Goodness (Ch. 15 & 16)

## 1 | What is Godliness? [Ch. 1 & 2 - Value for All Things; Devotion to God]

1. How would you define “godliness”? What are wrong or bad definitions you’ve heard?
2. **Discuss 1Tim. 4.6-8** - *“ If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. 7 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; 8 for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”*
  1. Consider all the ways this mindset could impact our life:
    1. We are a servant (or “slave”) of Christ, therefore: we don’t belong to ourselves; have a mission from God, for God, and to God’s people; should consider the Christian walk as an athlete considers training (prayer is weightlifting; studying the Word is wind sprints, for example!).
    2. What should change about your approach and practice of prayer, Bible study, church worship, loving others, enjoying fellowship, etc., to make them more like training for godliness?
  2. **Notice the purpose of redemption in Titus 2.11-14** - *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”*
    1. One key assumption here is that godliness is good, desirable, and what we should want, since salvation allows us to experience the good life! Perhaps that’s part of the heart-work we need to do - to really trust that God is good, and sanctification is living the good life, rather than feeling it as the drudgery of Christian living.
3. Bridges defines godliness as “devotion to God that results in a life that is pleasing to Him” (6) - it is Christian character that springs from a devotion to God, not just moral character or benevolence, and always a “devotion in action”.
  1. Devotion to God consists of 3 things: 1. Fear of God, 2. Love of God, 3. Desire for God
  2. Of the 3, which is most evident in your life? Least? Why do you think that is the case?

4. Discuss practical, daily applications of your speech, attitudes, and behavior you can make in light of this study. Consider Psalm 63.1-4 as a prayer for the group.

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

=> **Reading on the connection between our view of the Law and our view of God,** from Sinclair Ferguson's *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance - Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters*

"[Begun in the Garden, there was a] divorce between God's revealed will and his gracious, generous character. . . . in Eve's case antinomianism was itself an expression of her legalism! . . . Legalism is simply separating the law of God from the person of God . . . [out of a] distorted view of God as the giver of his law. . . . **The 'lie' that we now believe is that 'to glorify God' is not, indeed cannot be, 'to enjoy him forever,' but to lose all joy.** . . . The more basic issue is: How do I think about God, and what instincts and dispositions and affections toward him does this evoke in me?" (82-5)

"[The remedy for legalism is grace, but] it is not 'grace' as commodity, grace as substance (Roman Catholic tendency). It is grace in Christ. For **God's grace to us is Christ.** Yes, it is the atonement; but not atonement as theory, or as an abstract reality, something that has an identity of its own outside of and apart from the Lord Jesus. For **Christ himself, clothed as he is in the gospel work, is the atonement** - 'He is the propitiation for our sins.'" (134)

"As Moses ascended Mount Sinai and brought down the Law on tablets of stone, now Christ has ascended into the heavenly Mount, but in contrast to Moses, he has sent down the Spirit who rewrites the law but not merely on tablets of stone but in our hearts. There is a recalibration to Eden, albeit in the heart of a person formerly enslaved to sin, bearing its marks, and living in a world still under the dominion of sin. Now the empowerment is within, through the indwelling of Christ the obedient one, the law keeper, by the Spirit. . . . the Christian can no more be an antinomian than he can adopt the view that salvation is not the **restoration of his life as the image of God.**" (169-70)

### *Questions for Discussion*

- As we begin this study on godliness and our devotion to God, it is important we think deeply about our assumptions of **who God is** and how that impacts our view of his law, sanctification and growth in Christ.
  - How often do you assume God is like a "cosmic killjoy" who wants to take life and happiness from you? Why is that? Where does that come from?
  - Do you ever feel like you want to know God more, but that desire actually has nothing to do with the content of WHO he is, or what that change would be?

- How do you need to train your heart not only to trust God, but to trust God's goodness in his law? To trust that becoming godly is what is best for you, that it's the good life and the happiest life?

## 2 | Training to be Godly [Ch. 3]

1. Remember 1Tim. 4.6-10. Do you approach the Christian life as one of training, like an athlete? Why or why not?

### 2. Key Principles in Training to be Godly

1. Personal responsibility
2. Growth
3. Commitment
4. Cost
5. Mentor
6. Practice

3. **Training with the Word of God: Proverbs 2.1-5** - *“My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, 2 making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; 3 yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, 4 if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, 5 then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.”*

1. Notice how we should treat the Word of God. What would this look like in personal reading/devotion? Communal reading/hearing?

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

=> **Reading on constant warfare in the Christian life, from a classic Puritan text, John Owen’s *The Mortification of Sin***

“Sin does not only still abide in us, but is still acting, still laboring to bring forth the deeds of the flesh. When sin lets us alone we may let sin alone; but as sin is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, and its waters are for the most part deep when they are still, so ought our contrivances against it to be **vigorous at all times and in all conditions, even where there is least suspicion**. Sin does not only abide in us, but ‘the law of the members is still rebelling against the law of the mind’ (Rom. 7.23); and ‘the spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy’ (James 4.5). It is always in continual work; ‘the flesh lusts against the Spirit’ (Gal. 5.17); lust is still tempting and conceiving sin (James 1.14); in every moral action it is always either inclining to evil, or hindering from that which good, or disframing (dismantling or undoing) the spirit from communion with God. It inclines to evil. (Rom. 7.19). . . . It unframes our spirits, and thence is called ‘the sin that so easily besets us’ (Heb. 12.1); on which account are those grievous complaints that the apostle makes of it (Romans 7). So that sin is always acting, always conceiving, always seducing and tempting.

“Who can say that he had ever anything to do with God or for God, that indwelling sin had not a hand in the corrupting of what he did? And this trade will it drive more or less all our days. If, then, sin will be always acting, if we be not always mortifying, we are lost creatures. He that stands still and suffers his enemies to double blows upon him without resistance will undoubtedly be conquered in the issue. If sin be subtle, watchful, strong, and always at work in the business of killing our souls, and we be slothful, negligent, foolish, in proceeding to the ruin thereof, **can we expect a comfortable event?** There is not a day but sin foils or is foiled, prevails or is prevailed on; and it will be so while we live in this world. . . . The saints, whose souls breathe after deliverance from sin’s perplexing rebellion, know there is no safety against it but in a constant warfare. . . .

“**Sin aims always at the utmost;** every time it rises up to tempt or entice, might it have its own course, it would go out to the utmost sin in that kind. Every unclean thought or glance would be adultery if it could; every covetous desire would be oppression, every thought of unbelief would be atheism, might it grow to its head. . . . It is **like the grave that is never satisfied.** And herein lies no small share of the deceitfulness of sin, by which it prevails to the hardening of men, and so to their ruin (Heb. 3.13)— it is modest, as it were, in its first motions and proposals, but having once got footing in the heart by them, it constantly makes good its ground, and presses on to some farther degrees in the same kind. This new acting and pressing forward makes the soul take little notice of what an entrance to a falling off from God is already made; it thinks all is indifferently well if there be no further progress; and **so far as the soul is made insensible of any sin, so far it is hardened:** but sin is still pressing forward, and that **because it has no bounds but utter relinquishment of God and opposition to him.** . . . Now nothing can prevent this but mortification; that withers the root and strikes at the head of sin every hour, so that whatever it aims at, it is crossed in. There is not the best saint in the world but, if he should give over this duty, would fall into as many cursed sins as ever any did of his kind. . . .

“The contest is for our lives and souls. Not to be daily employing the Spirit and new nature for the mortifying of sin is to **neglect that excellent succor which God has given us against our greatest enemy.** If we neglect to make use of what we have received, God may justly hold his hand from giving us more. His graces, as well as his gifts, are bestowed on us to use, exercise, and trade with. Not to be daily mortifying sin is to sin against the goodness, kindness, wisdom, grace, and love of God, who has furnished us with a principle of doing it. . . .

“The root of an unmortified course is the digestion of sin without bitterness in the heart. When a man has confirmed his imagination to such an apprehension of grace and mercy as to be able, **without bitterness, to swallow and digest daily sins, that man is**

**at the very brink** of turning the grace of God into lasciviousness and being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

*Questions for discussion:*

1. Do you appreciate and understand the great danger we are in, the great battle that is waged against our souls? What makes it difficult to actually believe this?
2. In what ways do you neglect the great gifts and weapons God has given us in this fight?
3. How have you seen yourself in the past becoming more comfortable in “digesting daily sins”, where your heart is losing sensitivity to sin? What led up to this? How ought you to fight against that?

**HOMEWORK!** Consider encouraging everyone to read ALL of Psalm 119 several times until you meet again, focusing on how it models for us godly training, obedience, and engagement with God’s Word.

### **3 | Becoming God-Centered [Ch. 4]**

**Reflect together on Ps. 119** - after reading it over and over since we met, how ought we to change our training with the Word? What convicted you?

**Balanced Growth** - like a 3-legged chair, our growth in godliness needs to involve our fear, love, and desire for God.

1. To grow in fear, consider Isa. 6, Rev. 4-5, Isa. 40, Ps. 139, or Rev. 1.10-17
2. To grow in awareness of the love of God, consider Ps. 103, Isa. 53, Rom. 5.1-11, 2Cor. 5.14-21.
3. To grow in our desire for God, consider Phil. 3.3-14

#### **“Quiet time” that leads to obedience**

- Our times of personal worship should involve aspects of all three qualities (fear, love, and desire) in the form of worship, but also conversation - as we meditate on the Word, listening to God speak to us through the Bible, we should respond in appropriate prayers of praise, reverence, need, confession, etc.
- The “ultimate test, the measure of our obedience is an exact measure of our reverence for Him” (44)
  - Do you hesitate in your obedience? Do you over-complicate or over-think obedience? What prevents you from living out the purity and simplicity of godliness?
  - Consider your motive - “the real reason why I should not [sin] . . . is because God is worthy of my most honorable conduct” (51)

\*\*\*    \*\*\*    \*\*\*

#### **=>Readings:**

***On sifting our motivations for loving God*** - “The acid test of biblical God-centeredness - and faithfulness to the gospel - is this: Do you feel more loved because God makes much of you, or because, at the cost of his Son, he enables you to enjoy making much of him forever? Does your happiness depend on seeing the cross of Christ as a witness to your worth, or as a way to enjoy God’s worth forever? . . . If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ were not there?” (John Piper, *God is the Gospel: Meditations on God’s Love as the Gift of Himself*, pp. 11-12, 15)

*On universal vs. partial obedience - In this section from The Mortification of Sin, Owen is engaging the times when specific sins are dealt with, but in unhealthy or partial ways. He's concerned that we only want to fight sin because it hurts or punishes us, which is a selfish motive, and will only lead to one particular sin being dealt with without getting at the overall condition of the heart.*

“This kind of endeavor for mortification proceeds from a corrupt principle, ground, and foundation; so that it will never proceed to a good issue. . . [it] proceeds from self-love. You set yourself with all diligence and earnestness to mortify such a lust or sin; what is the reason of it? It disquiets you, it has taken away your peace, it fills your heart with sorrow and trouble and fear; you have no rest because of it. Yea, but friend, you have neglected prayer or reading; you have been vain and loose in your conversation in other things, that have not been of the same nature with that lust wherewith you are perplexed. These are no less sins and evils than those under which you groan. Jesus Christ bled for them also. Why do you not set yourself against them also? **If you hate sin as sin, every evil way, you would be no less watchful against everything that grieves and disquiets the Spirit of God,** than against that which grieves and disquiets your own soul. It is evident that you contend against sin merely because of your own trouble by it. Would your conscience be quiet under it, you would let it alone. Did it not disquiet you, it should not be disquieted by you. Now, can you think that God will set in with such hypocritical endeavors—that ever his Spirit will bear witness to the treachery and falsehood of your spirit? Do you think he will ease you of that which perplexes you, that you may be at liberty to that which no less grieves him? No. God says, “Here is one, if he could be rid of this lust I should never hear of him more; let him wrestle with this, or he is lost.” Let not any man think to do his own work that will not do God’s. **God’s work consists in universal obedience;** to be freed of the present perplexity is their own only. Hence is that of the apostle: “Cleanse yourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1). If we will do anything, we must do all things. So, then, it is not only an intense opposition to this or that peculiar lust, but a **universal humble frame and temper of heart, with watchfulness over every evil and for the performance of every duty,** that is accepted. . . .

“He, then, that would really, thoroughly, and acceptably mortify any disquieting lust, let him take care to be equally diligent in all parts of obedience, and know that every lust, every omission of duty, is burdensome to God [Isa. 43:24], though but one is so to him. While there abides a treachery in the heart to indulge to any negligence in not pressing universally to all perfection in obedience, the soul is weak, as not giving faith its whole work; and selfish, as considering more the trouble of sin than the filth and guilt of it; and lives under a constant provocation of God: so that it may not expect any comfortable issue in any spiritual duty that it does undertake, much less in this under

consideration, which requires another principle and frame of spirit for its accomplishment." (*Mortification of Sin*, part 2, ch. 8)

### *Questions for Discussion*

- In the first quote from Piper, how would you answer those questions?
- Owen is definitely not saying that we should expect perfect obedience; rather he is orienting our motivation for fighting sin at all, that it would be God-centered and holistic, rather than selfish or consequential.
- Does this convict you in any way? Do you only fight those sins that result in negative consequences or could lead to embarrassing reputations?
- Discuss how this should lead us all to fuller devotion to God.

## **4 | Becoming Godlike [Ch. 5]**

**Consider the magnitude of the promises in 2Peter 1** - *“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.”*

- This is not an isolated idea - consider Rom. 8.29 (*“conformed to the image of his Son”*) and 2Cor. 3.18 (*“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”*).
- This should seem too good to be true, yet God is truly make us Godlike!
- Bridges begins this chapter distinguishing between qualities that grow from us being God-centered, such as humility and thankfulness, and those that make us more Godlike because we are sharing in qualities God himself has perfectly, like holiness, righteousness and love. This isn't a strict distinction in Scripture, but a helpful one for this study.

**Scripture never pits our personal responsibility against God's working in and through us** - consider Phil. 2.12-13 and Acts 2.23 as they assume compatibility between responsibility and God's sovereign actions.

### **Mortification and Vivification**

Much of this study is considered with what the Puritans called “vivification”, or “putting on” the new life of Christ. This idea cannot be divorced, however, with its tandem idea of “mortification”, or putting to death our old nature of sinful flesh.

- **Read Eph. 4.17-32**
  - Describe what is being put to death
  - Describe what is being put on as new life

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

### => Reading: Owen on Mortification and Vivification

*Discussing how the Spirit is the cause of mortifying our sin, Owen lays down important principles for killing sin, and false ways to attempt to do it in our own strength.*

“How does the Spirit mortify sin? I answer, in general, three ways.

“(1) **By causing our hearts to abound in grace and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh**, and the fruits thereof and principles of them. So the apostle opposes the fruits of the flesh and of the Spirit (Gal. 5.19-23) . . . This “renewing of us by the Holy Ghost,” as it is called (Titus 3:5), is one great way of mortification; he causes us to grow, thrive, flourish, and abound in those graces which are contrary, opposite, and destructive to all the fruits of the flesh, and to the quiet or thriving of indwelling sin itself.

“(2) **By a real physical efficiency on the root and habit of sin, for the weakening, destroying, and taking it away.** Hence he is called a ‘spirit of judgment and . . . burning’ (Isa. 4:4), really consuming and destroying our lusts. He takes away the stony heart by an almighty efficiency; for as he begins the work as to its kind, so he carries it on as to its degrees. He is the fire which burns up the very root of lust.

“(3) **He brings the cross of Christ into the heart of a sinner by faith, and gives us communion with Christ in his death and fellowship in his sufferings.** . . .

“If this be the work of the Spirit alone, how is it that we are exhorted to it?— seeing the Spirit of God only can do it, let the work be left wholly to him. It is no otherwise the work of the Spirit but as all graces and good works which are in us are his. He ‘works in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure’ (Phil. 2:13); he works ‘all our works in us’ (Isa. 26:12)—‘the work of faith with power’ (2 Thess. 1:11; Col. 2:12); he causes us to pray, and is a ‘spirit of supplication’ (Rom. 8:26; Zech. 12:10); and yet we are exhorted, and are to be exhorted, to all these.

“He does not so work our mortification in us as not to keep it still an act of our obedience. The Holy Ghost works in us and upon us, as we are fit to be wrought in and upon; that is, so as to preserve our own liberty and free obedience. He works upon our understandings, wills, consciences, and affections, agreeably to their own natures; he works in us and with us, not against us or without us; so that his assistance is an encouragement as to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself.

“And, indeed, I might here bewail the endless, foolish labor of poor souls, who, being convinced of sin and not able to stand against the power of their convictions, do set themselves, by innumerable perplexing ways and duties, to keep down sin, but, being strangers to the Spirit of God, all in vain. **They combat without victory, have war**

**without peace, and are in slavery all their days.** They spend their strength for that which is not bread, and their labor for that which profits not [Isa. 55:2].

“This is the saddest warfare that any poor creature can be engaged in. A soul under the power of conviction from the law is pressed to fight against sin, but has no strength for the combat. They cannot but fight, and they can never conquer; they are like men thrust on the sword of enemies on purpose to be slain. The law drives them on, and sin beats them back. Sometimes they think, indeed, that they have foiled sin, when they have only raised a dust that they see it not; that is, they distemper their natural affections of fear, sorrow, and anguish, which makes them believe that sin is conquered when it is not touched. By that time they are cold, they must go to the battle again; and the lust which they thought to be slain appears to have had no wound.” (MOS, pt. 2, ch.3)

### *Questions for Discussion*

- Do you “mortify the deeds of the flesh”? Do you seek to kill sin? As it’s said, “Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you”. How ought you be engaged in “putting off your old self” and how does Owen help us understand its importance?
- Notice the battle is done with a knowledge of victory, as opposed to the battle without the Spirit, which can have no victory. How ought the certainty of Christ’s victory change our own spiritual battle? Do you ever try to fight sin apart from Christ and the Spirit? What does that look like?
- Remember, this dying and rising is for the purpose of becoming more like God in Jesus Christ. Therefore, we should expect victory (!) though it will not be complete in this life until Christ makes all things new. Consider ways in which that should give you greater excitement and passion for the work!

### **=>Readings on Personal Commitment and the Christian walk:**

- “The truth is that you don’t have to know whether you’re really letting God do it, because in fact you’re always the one who’s doing it, The inner acts of your heart are always your own, even when they’re a result of God working in you. The false presupposition is that it’s an either/or: either you’re doing it or God is, so if you’re at work, God isn’t. . . . **To ‘let go and let God’ is to refuse responsibility, to pretend that the work God has given us is not ours to do.** He has let us have a certain number of talents and he expects us to work with them. And like the Lord in the parable, he will require us to give an account of our work in the end. In that sense, he remains ultimately in control. He’s still Lord, ruler of our lives, judge of the whole world. But his judgment of us will concern precisely those things that he has put in our control. So our being in control of our talents doesn’t contradict his lordship over

our lives. It's the result of his lordship and the basis of his judgment." - Philip Cary, *Good News for Anxious Christians: 10 Things You Don't Have to do*

- "God's working in us is not suspended because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of co-operation as if God did his part and we did ours so that the conjunction or co-ordination of both produced the required result. **God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that because God works we work.** All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God's working in us, not the willing to the exclusion of the doing and not the doing to the exclusion of the willing, but both the willing and the doing. And this working of God is directed to the end of enabling us to will and to do that which is well pleasing to him. We have here not only the explanation of all acceptable activity on our part but we have also the incentive to our willing and working. What the apostle is urging is the necessity of working out our own salvation, and the encouragement he supplies is the assurance that it is God himself who works in us. The more persistently active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that all the energizing grace and power is of God." - John Murray

### *Questions for Discussion*

- How do these readings impact your understanding of your role in the Christian life? Do you understand what is being guarded *against*, that we don't shirk responsibility in a pseudo-spiritual "let go, let God" way, but also that we don't take all the credit and become self-righteous. See also Phil. 1.6 and 1Cor. 15.10
- How would this make you more likely to "train to be godly"?

## PART 2: GOD-CENTERED QUALITIES

### 5 | Humility (Ch. 6)

#### Why is humility often considered the central Christian virtue?

**Read Isaiah 66.1-2:** *“Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.’”*

- Notice the combination of God’s absolute transcendence and our humility.
- How often do you tremble before God and his Word? Why is it so rare?
- “Humility with regard to ourselves, then, consists in ascribing all that we are, all that we have, and all that we have accomplished to the God who gives us grace” (75).
  - “Humility is a fruit of the Spirit, the result of His ministry in our hearts. But this ministry does not occur without deliberate, conscious effort on our part. The Spirit does not make us humble; He enables us to humble ourselves in these difficult situations” (77).
  - Are you defined by humility? Would others who know you well describe you as humble? Why or why not?

#### **Practicing Humility**

- Renew your mind - through Scripture memorization and meditation
- Confess any prideful ways
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to convict you and give you a sensitive heart to see ways you can grow in humility
- Consider ways we are not humble in our conduct? attitude? doctrines?
  - Discuss why this is the case, and how our humility before God connects with our humility among others.
- Meditate on Christ’s humility in Phil. 2.5-8 and God’s promise in 1Peter 5.5-7

#### **Contrasted with worldly modesty:**

- We may think we’re being humble when we’re simply being “modest” by not talking much about ourselves or not bringing attention to ourselves. Hidden under this modesty is often a self-righteous judgment of those who can’t be as “humble” as us. Modesty is simply not drawing attention to one’s self, not being flashy or self-promoting, which some parts of our world still value, but it is not humility. It’s trying to be humble without considering God;

- No, biblical humility is not equivalent to modesty or uncertainty, but is uncertainty with regards to one's self, yet certainty with regards to God. **We are most humble the more certain we are of God.** When Isaiah is overwhelmed by God's presence in Isa. 6 and naturally falls on his face in humility, he does not lose certainty, he loses self-confidence for greater God-confidence. Christian humility is always rightly combined with Christian boldness, both of which point away from ourselves to God.
- Biblical humility is not being shy or speaking little about ourselves (though it may include the latter); but rather it is a total re-orientation to depend upon God rather than self. Similarly, pride and slothfulness can have the same root of self-focus and self-concern: pride looks at myself and thinks I'm capable, and sloth looks at myself and thinks I'm incapable. Humility is when I stop looking at myself altogether because I'm focused on Christ, who alone is capable.
- Do you often confuse worldly modesty with biblical humility? Why?

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

**=>Reading: from Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1959)**

*Discussing the first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven", Lloyd-Jones explains why humility is central to the Christian life and must come first if anyone is to enter the kingdom or grow as a Christian.*

"There is no one in the kingdom of God who is not *poor in spirit*. It is the fundamental characteristic of the Christian and of the citizen of the kingdom of heaven, and all the other characteristics are in a sense the result of this one. As we go on to expound it, we shall see that it really means an emptying, while the others are a manifestation of a fullness. **We cannot be filled until we are first empty.** . . . There are always these two sides to the gospel; there is a pulling down and a raising up. . . It is an essential part of the gospel that conviction must always precede conversion; the gospel of Christ condemns before it releases. Now that is obviously something which is fundamental. If you prefer me to put it in a more theological and doctrinal form, I would say that there is no more perfect statement of the doctrine of justification by faith only than this Beatitude. . . . The Sermon on the Mount, in other words, comes to us and says, 'There is the mountain that you have to scale, the heights you have to climb; and the first thing you must realize, as you look at the mountain which you are told you must ascend, is that you cannot do it, that you are utterly incapable in and of yourself, and that any attempt to do it in your own strength is proof positive that you have not understood it.' It condemns at the very outset the view which regards it as a program for man to put into operation immediately, just as he is.

"There is a clear-cut division between these two kingdoms - the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world, the Christian man and the natural - a complete, absolute

distinction and division. Now there is perhaps no statement that underlines and emphasizes that difference more than this 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' Let me show you the contrast. This is something which is not only not admired by the world; it is despised but it. **You will never find a greater antithesis to the worldly spirit and outlook than that which you find in this verse.** What emphasis the world places on its belief in self-reliance, self-confidence and self-expression! Look at its literature. If you want to get on in this world, it says, believe in yourself. That idea is absolutely controlling the life of men at the present time. Indeed I would say it is controlling the whole of life outside the Christian message. . . .

"Now in this verse we are confronted by something which is in utter and absolute contrast to that, and it is tragic to see how people view this kind of statement. Let me quote the criticism which a man offered a few years ago on that famous hymn of Charles Wesley, 'Jesu, Lover of my soul'. You will remember the verse in which Wesley says, 'Just and holy is Thy name, I am all unrighteousness; Vile and full of sin I am, Thou art full of truth and grace.' This he ridiculed and asked, 'What man desiring a post or job would dream of going to an employer and saying to him, 'Vile and full of sin I am'? Ridiculous!' And he said it, alas, in the name of what he regards as Christianity. You see what a complete misunderstanding of this first Beatitude that reveals. As I am going to show you, we are not looking at men confronting one another, but **we are looking at men face-to-face with God. And if one feels anything in the presence of God save an utter poverty of spirit, it ultimately means that you have never faced Him.** That is the meaning of this Beatitude." (Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 35-6)

### *Questions for Discussion*

- Do you see why humility is central to the Christian? Do you agree with his contrast between the world and the Christian's virtue here? What makes it so hard for us today to truly be humble?
- What can you do to remember regularly the centrality of being poor in spirit?

## **6 | Contentment and God-sufficiency (Ch. 7)**

**Note that “content” and “sufficient”** in the New Testament are often synonyms, such that God’s promise “My grace is sufficient to you” is literally the reason we can be “content.”

**Significance of discontentment:** “Discontent is a questioning of the goodness of God. . . Discontent is one of the most satanic of all sins, and to indulge in it is to rebel against God just as Satan did” (83).

Where do you most lack contentment? Why? “After possessions, probably the most common need is to learn contentment with our place in society or in the body of Christ” (82).

When it comes to our vocations, “service to God through service to mankind is the only motivation acceptable to God for diligence and hard work. We must avoid selfish ambition (the desire for more money and prestige) and instead make it our ambition to please God in all of our work. . . . Paul told the Colossians that slaves were more accountable to God for their work than they were to their earthly masters” (86).

Consider the relationship between: being a faithful steward of God’s work/ gifts, which should lead us to contentment; and, being a frantic worker focused on results and consequences and circumstances, which cannot lead us to contentment.

### **Steps to grow in contentment:**

1. Meditate on God’s sovereign grace in making you who you are and where you are
2. Realize I do not deserve to be where I am
3. Realize each part of the body of Christ is indispensable

### **Read 1Tim. 6.6-11**

### **Contrasted with worldly apathy or indifference:**

- Contentment also gets mistaken for other non-Christian virtues, especially since we live in a culture where most of our immediate needs (food, shelter, clothing) are rarely in doubt. Being indifferent about evil, sin, injustice, and blasphemy are not signs of Christian contentment; neither is being so “overly confident” that God’s kingdom will prevail, that we stop pursuing means of grace for it to come.
- As JC Ryle writes, “A true Christian is one who has not only peace of conscience, but war within. He may be known by his warfare as well as by his peace.” Consider

Paul's contentment that was always combined with godly ambition for preaching God's word and caring for the churches he oversaw.

- God's sovereignty and the certainty of his kingdom is NEVER used in Scripture as a reason to stop working or stop caring; rather, they are motivations to eagerly work, knowing that nothing can stop our mission! Paul's claim that "I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me" (Phil. 4.13) is a declaration of contentment because his **zeal cannot be thwarted** by worldly circumstances.
- Do you often pretend as if you're content, when you're truly just being indifferent? What are you indifferent or apathetic about and why?
  - The opposite of apathy is feverish activity, which is done out of a LACK of certainty in God's promises. Do you tend toward the feverish end of the spectrum or the apathetic? Why? Could there be a common root between the two?

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

#### =>Readings:

*A.W. Tozer on pursuing God alone* - "When religion has said its last word, there is little that we need than God Himself. The evil habit of seeking God-and effectively prevents us from finding God in full revelation. In the end lies our great woe. If we omit the end we shall soon find God, and in Him we shall find that for which we have all our lives been secretly longing. We need not fear that in seeking God only we may narrow our lives or restrict the motions of our expanding hearts. The opposite is true. We can well be assured to make God our All, to concentrate, to sacrifice the many for the One.

"The author of the quaint old English classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, teaches us how to do this. 'Lift up thine heart unto God with a meek stirring of love; and mean Himself, and none of His goods.' . . . When the Lord divided Canaan among the tribes of Israel, Levi received no share of the land. God said to him simply, 'I am thy part and thine inheritance,' and by those words made him richer than all his brethren, richer than all the kings and rajas who have ever lived in the world. And there is a spiritual principle here, a principle still valid for every priest of the Most High God.

"The **man who has God for his treasure has all things** in One. Many ordinary treasures may be denied him, or if he is allowed to have them, the enjoyment of them will be so tempered that they will **never be necessary to his happiness**. Or if he must see them go, one after one, he will scarcely feel a sense of loss, for having the Source of all things he has in One all satisfaction, all pleasure, all delight. Whatever he may lose he has actually lost nothing, for he now has it all in One, and he has it purely, legitimately and forever....

“In the deep heart of the man [Adam] was a shrine where none but God was worthy to come. Within him was God; without, a thousand gifts which God had showered upon him. But sin has introduced complications and has made those very gifts of God a potential source of ruin to the soul. . . . The roots of our hearts have grown down into things, and we dare not pull up one rootlet lest we die. Things have become necessary to us, a development never originally intended. **God’s gifts now take the place of God, and the whole course of nature is upset by the monstrous substitution. . . .**

[Referring to Abraham’s act of nearly sacrificing Isaac] “Now he was a man wholly surrendered, a man utterly obedient, a man who possessed nothing. He had concentrated his all in the person of his dear son and God had taken it from him. . . . I have said that Abraham possessed nothing. Yet was not this poor man rich? Everything he had owned before was his still to enjoy: sheep, camels, herds and goods of every sort. He has also his wife and his friends, and best of all he has his son Isaac safe by his side. He had everything, but he possessed nothing. There is the spiritual secret. There is the **sweet theology of the heart which can be learned only in the school of renunciation. . . .** After that bitter and blessed experience I think the words *my* and *mine* never again had the same meaning for Abraham. . . .

“Our Lord came not to destroy but to save. Everything is safe which we commit to Him, and nothing is really safe which is not so committed. . . . [The Christian ought to] put away all defense and make no attempt to excuse himself either in his own eyes or before the Lord. **Whoever defends himself will have himself for his defense, and he will have no other. But let him come defenseless before the Lord and he will have for his defender no less than God Himself.**” (AW Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 18-28)

### *Questions for Discussion*

- Discuss ways in which you pursue “God-and”. What are those things that distract you from humble surrender to and contentment in God alone? What possessions of yours have the tightest grip on your heart? What could you never imagine losing? Why? Pray for the power of a changed heart and new wisdom to look at your possessions without thinking “mine.”
- What tempts you to act and believe as if God is not sufficient? Why?
- For which gifts of God are you more thankful than God himself?

*Michael Green on zeal in preaching in the early church* - “The militaristic analogies favoured by Christian writers from St Paul to Tertullian, despite the fact that the Christians refused to enter the army, suggest a coherence, a recognition of spiritual battle, and a fierce (and frequently apocalyptic) commitment . . . The first Christians were rather like the early Communists: **small groups bound together by an overmastering**

**passion. . . . But our Western churches show little of that spirit.** They prefer to see themselves as a hospital rather than an army. Yet this almost military vision, commitment and sacrifice is a major characteristic of the overflowing churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America today. Without something like it in the West, how will anyone in our jaded society be moved? They may be pardoned for reflecting, 'These people are Christians, are they? Very nice for them, if they like that sort of thing. But it has nothing to offer me.' Not until we in the West burn with a passion which is almost a pain to reach people with the gospel will they be likely to take the matter seriously. . . .

"There was no trace of compromise in their preaching. They looked for nothing less than total surrender to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Indeed they went out of their way to **ridicule pagan gods**. Had they been willing to practise their Christianity while remaining silent about other deities they could have had a comparatively safe passage. But they insisted that there was no other God than the Father of Jesus Christ. He was a jealous God. . . They lived in a world more relativist and far more pluralist than our own. And yet they would not make any compromise on this issue." - (*Evangelism in the Early Church*, 18, 21)

*Questions for Discussion:*

- Consider ways in which you fall into being more comfortable. Do you fit his description of the Western church? Why?
- Discuss real-life ways you can re-kindle the fire that gripped the early Christians in yourself and among our church today.

## **7 | Thankfulness (ch. 8)**

Bridges notes that the main “God-centered qualities that enhance our devotion to God are the virtues of humility, contentment, and thankfulness. In humility we acknowledge God’s majesty, in contentment His grace, and in thankfulness His goodness” (97).

**Read 1Chron. 29.10-22** - in David’s thanksgiving, what does he recognize?

Of all people, Christians should be the most thankful. For what do you most often give God thanks? What is hardest to thank God for?

“To fail to be thankful is a most grievous sin” (98) - see Rom. 1.21.

### **Purposes of Thanksgiving:**

- Acknowledge God’s goodness and honor Him
- Promotes the glory of God
- Promotes humility in us
- Stimulates our faith
- Builds contentment

Can you connect the dots between thanksgiving and these purposes? What purposes do you neglect the most?

### **Contrasted with “spiritual gratitude”**

- Many new age spiritual circles or self-help books promote the general virtue of gratitude, regardless of the Person, Thing, Universe or Force to whom you are grateful. They counsel us to spend a few minutes each day to consider what we can be grateful for, and scientific studies support the fact that people who do this are happier. How does this contrast with biblical thankfulness? What difference does it make that we’re thanking our Father and Lord Jesus Christ?
- Being thankful so we can be happier is obviously a selfish motive. Another major difference has to do with Truth. Who or what really gave us what we are thankful for? If the God of the Bible is the one, but we’re calling him a force or the universe, then our thankfulness is an offense to who God is.
- Notice also that non-Christians may be thankful for things they don’t deserve - recognizing they didn’t make their own bodies, choose their family, etc. - and see themselves as blessed. How is this different from being thankful for forgiveness, for mercy, for salvation?

- It is much bigger and grander; eternal; and doesn't have to sacrifice justice for love, or vice versa (without the cross of Christ, I can be thankful for not receiving what my sin deserves, but then the "universe" lacks justice; or I can be thankful for (myself or others) receiving just punishment, but then the "universe" lacks love).

**Spend some time in prayer** when you do nothing but give thanks to God. Though it should be a regular part of our prayer time, doing only thanks without any intercession can work in our hearts a more thankful disposition. Be careful, though, that thanksgiving doesn't become too me-centered ("thank you for how great MY LIFE is"); rather, it should inspire our dependence upon Him, remembering the purposes above.

*(This activity is in place of a reading)*

## 8 | Joy (Ch. 9)

Consider the fact that we are *commanded to be joyful* (1Thess. 5.16, Phil. 4.4; Rom. 5.3). As a command, it's something we can always do by the power of the Holy Spirit; and to not be joyful is to be sinful.

### What are your biggest stumbling blocks to joy?

- Recurring sin or sinful attitudes?
- Misplaced confidence - trusting the wrong things, or the right things too much (see Lk. 10.20; Phil. 3.1)?
- "Chastening or discipline that God often administers to His children" (109) (see Heb. 12.5-11)?
- "Experiencing trials of faith" (109) (see Rom. 5.1-5; James 1.2-4)?
- Practical atheism - living as if there is no God, or denying His love and control?

### Guides to grow in joy:

- Confess and forsake sin
- Trust in God's covenant to be faithful
- Take the long-range view of life
- Give thanks in all circumstances
- Realize that joy pleases God and is why Jesus came (John 10.10)

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

### =>Reading:

*On real joy only coming from a deep sense of sin* - "I cannot help feeling that the final explanation of the state of the Church today is a defective sense of sin and a defective doctrine of sin. Coupled with that, of course, is a failure to understand the true nature of Christian joy. There is the double failure. There is not the real, deep conviction of sin as was once the case; and on the other hand there is this superficial conception of joy and happiness which is very different indeed from that which we find in the New testament. Thus the **defective doctrine of sin and the shallow idea of joy, working together, of necessity produce a superficial kind of person** and a very inadequate kind of Christian life. . . .

"We have to be poor in spirit before we can be filled with the Holy Spirit. Negative, before positive. And here again is another example of exactly the same thing - conviction must of necessity precede conversion, a real sense of sin must come before there can be a true joy of salvation. . . . They have failed to see that they must be convicted of sin before they can ever experience joy. They do not like the doctrine of sin. They dislike it intensely and they object to its being preached. They want joy apart from conviction of sin. But that is impossible. . . .

**“The true Christian is never a man who has to put on an appearance of sadness or joviality.** No, no; he is a man who looks at life seriously; he contemplates it spiritually, and he sees in it sin and its effects. He is a serious, sober-minded man. His outlook is always serious, but because of these views which he has, and his understanding of truth, he also has ‘a joy unspeakable and full of glory’. So he is like the apostle Paul, ‘groaning within himself’, and yet happy because of his experience of Christ and the glory that is to come. The Christian is not superficial in any sense, but is fundamentally serious and fundamentally happy. You see, the joy of the Christian is a holy joy, the happiness of the Christian is a serious happiness. None of that superficial appearance of happiness and joy! No, no; it is a solemn joy, it is a holy joy, it is a serious happiness; so that, though he is grave and sober-minded and serious, he is never cold and prohibitive. Indeed, he is like our Lord Himself, groaning, weeping, and yet, ‘for the joy that was set before him’ enduring the cross, despising the shame.” (Lloyd-Jones, *Studies*, 45, 51)

### *Questions for Discussion*

- **Contrast** in your own words the difference between joy and superficial happiness. When are you tempted to “put on a happy face” and does that diminish the true power of Christ? How so?
- In what situations do you find it hard to be joyful? Why is that? What would joy look like in those circumstances?
- Consider how we may “swing” to the other side of the spectrum and only express happiness when we really feel it because we’re so afraid of being superficially happy. This option, too, is false because it’s still depending on our feelings and acts as if we cannot fulfill a command (Rejoice!) unless we “truly” feel it. How can we avoid these dangers as well?
  - Remember, any command from God - Rejoice! Love! Pray! - we must be able to obey regardless of circumstances. It’s never *whether* we should love, it’s *how*.

## PART 3: GODLIKE QUALITIES

### 9 | Holiness (Ch.10)

When you think of “holiness”, what first comes to mind? Why do you think words that the Bible uses positively - holiness, righteousness, purity - have become negative, even sarcastic terms in our culture?

#### **Bridges notes 5 essential elements to holiness:**

1. **Conviction** - knowledge of the truth, allowing the Holy Spirit to convict us by his Word, renewing our mind so we’er not swept up by the convictions of the world. “A belief is what you hold; a conviction is what holds you” (125)
  2. **Commitment to obedience** - desire for full obedience, not partial (see reading in Study #3)
  3. **Discipline of Choices** - “we become what we do. . . . we must learn to make the right choice in the face of each specific temptation” (126).
  4. **Dependence on the Spirit** - “simultaneous personal responsibility and total dependence upon God for fulfillment is one of the most important principles in the practice of godliness” (128).
  5. **God-Centered Desire** - “God does not give us His power so that we might feel good about ourselves; He gives us His power so that we can obey Him for His sake, for His glory” (129).
- Of these 5, which do you struggle with the most? For what do you need prayer the most? Why?
  - Of these 5, what do you instinctively under-appreciate or dismiss? Why? Do you over-appreciate any to the neglect of the others?
  - The term “holy” literally means “to be set apart,” which you can see in Jesus’ prayer for his disciples in John 17.15-19. Do you consider your life as one that is set apart for a unique mission, consecrated for God’s purposes? What prevents you from remembering that and praying for it more?

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

**=>Reading: J.C. Ryle (1816-1900) on the fight of sanctification and holiness**

“Sanctification is a thing which does not prevent a man from having a great deal of inward spiritual conflict. By conflict I mean a struggle within the heart between the old nature and the new, the flesh and the spirit, which are to be found together in every believer (Gal. 5.17). A deep sense of that struggle, and a vast amount of mental discomfort from it, are no proof that a man is not sanctified. No, rather, I believe, they are healthy symptoms of our condition and prove that we are not dead, but alive. **A true**

**Christian is one who has not only peace of conscience, but war within. He may be known by his warfare as well as by his peace. . . .**

“What sort of persons are those whom God calls holy? A man may go to great lengths and yet never reach true holiness. It is not knowledge—Balaam had that; nor great profession—Judas Iscariot had that; nor doing many things—Herod had that; nor zeal for certain matters in religion—Jehu had that; nor morality and outward respectability of conduct—the young ruler had that; nor taking pleasure in hearing preachers—the Jews in Ezekiel’s time had that; nor keeping company with godly people—Job and Gehazi and Demas had that. Yet none of these were holy! These things alone are not holiness. A man may have any one of them and yet never see the Lord.

“What then is true practical holiness? . . . Holiness is the **habit of being of one mind with God**, according as we find his mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God’s judgment, hating what He hates, loving what He loves, and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. He who most entirely agrees with God, he is the most holy man.

“A holy man will endeavor to shun every known sin and to keep every known commandment. . . . **A holy man will strive to be like our Lord Jesus Christ.** He will not only live the life of faith in Him and draw from Him all his daily peace and strength, but he will also labor to have the mind that was in Him and to be conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29). It will be his aim to bear with and forgive others, even as Christ forgave us; to be unselfish, even as Christ pleased not Himself; to walk in love, even as Christ loved us; to be lowly-minded and humble, even as Christ made Himself of no reputation and humbled Himself. . . .

“It is the greatest misery of a holy man that he carries about with him a ‘body of death’; that often when he would do good ‘evil is present with him’; that the old man is clogging all his movements and, as it were, trying to draw him back at every step he takes (Rom. 7:21). But it is the excellence of a holy man that **he is not at peace with indwelling sin, as others are. He hates it, mourns over it and longs to be free** from its company. . . .

“**We must be holy, because this is one grand end and purpose for which Christ came into the world.** [see 2Cor. 5:15; Eph. 5:25-6; Titus 2:14] . . . In short, to talk of men being saved from the guilt of sin, without being **at the same time saved from its dominion in their hearts**, is to contradict the witness of all Scripture. Are believers said to be elect? It is ‘through sanctification of the Spirit.’ Are they predestinated? It is ‘to be conformed to the image of God’s Son.’ Are they chosen? It is ‘that they may be holy.’ Are they called? It is ‘with a holy calling.’ Are they afflicted? It is that they may be ‘partakers of holiness.’ **Jesus is a complete Savior. He does not merely take away the guilt of a believer’s sin; He does more—He breaks its power** (1Pet.1:2; Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 12:10).” (Ryle, *Holiness*)

*Questions for Discussion*

- When you were reading, did any part of your mind instinctively say “yea, but we’re not saved by works”? Why the knee-jerk reaction? Does that become an excuse or justification (pardon the pun!) for not fighting the good fight?
- What areas of your life reveal a lack of holiness? Why? What specifically makes it hard in these areas to be holy? What assumptions are underneath your unholy actions?
- Why has “holiness” lost its attractiveness to the world and to many Christians? Why does it seem like such a drudgery to many people now? How can we change that perception?

## **10 | Faithfulness (Ch. 12)**

Clearly a quality of God that we rely upon! As we imitate Him, “the faithful person is one who is dependable, trustworthy, and loyal, who can be depended upon in all of his relationships and who is absolutely honest and ethical in all of his affairs” (149). Note how Daniel’s rivals couldn’t find anything for which to charge him (Dan. 6.4).

### **Read Proverbs 27.5-17**

#### **Faithfulness includes:**

- **Absolute Honesty** - not just in the “big stuff” - the “Holy Spirit reminded me of other occasions of seemingly innocent ‘social lying,’ of instances of exaggeration or manipulating the facts of a story just a bit” (150).
  - Consider small “white lies” you commit and why.
- **Dependability** - rather than “commitment if it’s convenient”, we’re called to dependability in face of shifting circumstances and desires. Can people rely on you or not?
- **Unswerving Loyalty** - Prov. 17.17 reads “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity”. Do you act more like a “fair-weather friend” (a contradiction in terms) than a biblical one?

Consider times when you’ve been unreliable. Why were you so? How can you change those habits?

#### **Contrast with people-pleasing, boring predictability, or being a “yes-man”**

- Why is this virtue different from worldly acceptance or tolerance? Can we be “loyal” to a person without accepting or tolerating them in instances of sin?
- It’s important to remember this includes “absolute honesty” since our culture often pits honesty *against* loyalty. We are called to be faithful to God, faithful to our promises, and faithful to wanting what is good for others. Being faithful or reliable does not mean being predictable in the safe, pejorative sense of the term. Being faithful could actually be very risky or active at times. When do you confuse these two sides?

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

=>Reading: *Lewis Smedes on promises, faithfulness and truth-telling*

"Why make promises at all? And if you do make them, why keep them? Why not tune in to growth and change and the maximizing of your feelings? The answer to the nettlesome whys of promise-making is this, to paraphrase Hannah Arendt (*The Human*

*Condition*)—the only way to overcome the unpredictability of your future is the power of promising. **If forgiving is the only remedy for your painful past, promising is the only remedy for your uncertain future...** When I make a promise I bear witness that my future with you is not locked into... the fateful combinations of X's and Y's in the hand I was dealt out of my parents' genetic deck. When I make a promise, I testify that I was not routed along some unalterable itinerary by the psychic conditioning visited on me by my slightly wacky parents. I am not fated. I am not determined. When I make a promise to anyone I rise above all the conditioning that limits me... No German shepherd ever promised to be there with me. No home computer ever promised to be my loyal help. **Only a person can make a promise, and when he does, he is most free...**

"When I married my wife, I had hardly a smidgen of sense for what I was getting into with her. How could I know how much she would change over the years? How could I know how much I would change? My wife has lived with at least five different men since we were married—and each of the five has been me. The connecting link with my old self has always been the memory of the name I took on back there: **"I am he who will be there with you."** When we slough off that name, lose that identity, we can hardly find ourselves again...

"The future of the human family rides on... a promise spoken and not forgotten. A man named Abraham strode off into his unpredictable future as he gambled on the reliability of a promise uttered by a Presence he had scarcely begun to feel. And so the new possibility for history began. Moses tried to get a better fix on the identity of this Presence... "What is your name?" he dared to ask. And the answer came... "I am he who will be there with you." (Exod. 3:14)... Then a man from Galilee talked to his friends about sealing this ancient promise in his blood and a day later he spilled it... on a mound they called Golgotha. "I am he who will be there with you" was there with us, dying, then rising, and then being with us to the end of the world... Human destiny rests on a promise freely given and reliably remembered. Whenever you and I make and keep a promise, we are as close to being like God as we can ever be." – Lewis Smedes

### *Questions for Discussion*

- Marriage is the obvious example, but how else do you see this idea of promising playing out?
- Are you a person who keeps your promises? What do you see is lacking in a world that is skeptical of vows and covenants?
- What prevents you from keeping your promises and why?
- Have you been betrayed by someone breaking their promises? How has that impacted your outlook on your own or others' promises since then?

## **11 | Love (Ch. 17)**

**Read 1John 4.7-12** - “our devotion to God is validated by our love for other people” (205)

Relying on 1Cor. 13, Bridges writes “love binds together all the virtues of Christian character. Love is not so much a character trait as the inner disposition of the soul that produces them all. Bethune says love is ‘a holy, abiding and vigorous spirit, which rules the whole man, ever directing him to the humble and loving fulfillment of all his duties to God and man.’ But although love may be more a motivational force than an actual display of Christian virtue, it *always* results in actions on our part. Love includes us and directs us to be kind, to forgive, to give of ourselves to one another” (207).

Reflecting on Exod. 33, he notes, “God’s goodness is the preeminent expression of His glory. Therefore, if we desire to be Godlike and to glorify God in our lives, we must make the cultivation and exercise of love in our hearts an urgent priority. There are three overall prayer requests I make for myself and for others for whom I pray: that I and they would grow in holiness, humility, and love. Of these three, however, love has priority, for if I love God I will seek to be holy, and if I love other people I will seek to be humble, putting their interests ahead of mine” (208-9).

**Remember as well that love costs, gives, and grows in desire:**

- “love gives, even at great cost to itself” - is your love costly? why or why not? when and when not?
- “God gave in order that He might forgive” - he gave us his Son, out of love, so He could satisfy justice and forgive us
- The saying “I can love him, but I can’t like him”, rightly tries to appreciate love as a commanded action, but can be an excuse that is ultimately unbiblical and unbalanced. Consider 1Peter 1.22 and Rom. 12.10. “Love is more than a mere act of the will. . . . Love is a *vigorous* spirit that rules the whole man, ever directing him. . . . We should do more than just decide to do acts of love, we should desire to do them. This is not to say we are to do acts of love only when we feel like doing them; it is to say we are not to content ourselves merely with acts of the will, good as those acts may be. **We are to lay hold on God in prayer until He gives that vigorous and loving spirit that delights to reach out and embrace** our brother and to meet his need or forgive his sin, even if it is at great cost to ourselves” (215-6).

### **Contrast with tolerance and worldly acceptance**

- Perhaps this word more than any other in our study is used to mean any kind of good-will or feeling toward another. Our culture knows that love is important, but often doesn't know how to define it. "I believe in a God of love, not in a God of wrath or judgment" is a common refrain and feeling. If your love for someone does not include *any* judgment, what is your love likely to become?
- Consider Eph. 4.15 - "speaking the truth in love". Do you more often simply "speak the truth" regardless of how you may be loving the person you're speaking to? Or do you simply "speak in love", regardless of the actual content of your speech? Why is that? What's underneath your tendency?

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

### **=>Readings:**

*Miroslav Volf on love and justice* - "One could object that it is not worthy of God to wield the sword. Is God not love, long-suffering and all-powerful love? ... In a world of violence it would not be worthy of God not to wield the sword; **if God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make the final end to violence God would not be worthy of our worship.** [This may be] unpopular with many Christians, especially theologians in the West. To the person who is inclined to dismiss it, I suggest imagining that you are delivering a lecture in a war zone. Among your listeners are people whose cities and villages have been first plundered, then burned and leveled to the ground, whose daughters and sisters have been raped, whose fathers and brothers have had their throats slit. . . . Soon you would discover that it takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human nonviolence corresponds to God's refusal to judge. In a scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, it will invariably die." - (Exclusion and Embrace, 303-4)

*Tim Keller on defining love according to the cross* - "The Biblical doctrine of the cross is not about human beings trying to appease a begrudging, unwilling god, but about the **Lord himself coming and voluntarily putting forth himself** as the substitutionary payment. (God was himself in Christ reconciling the world to himself; 2 Cor 5:18-19). This is the very opposite of the blood-thirsty gods of primitive religion. Modern people don't believe in the depth and reality of spiritual evil and guilt. They don't see that the holy justice of God must be honored. On the other hand, ancient people had no concept of a God so loving and gracious that he would come and make the perfect payment himself."

*Michael Green on boundary-crossing love in the early church* - "The Church had qualities unparalleled in the ancient world. Nowhere else would you find slaves and masters, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, engaging in table fellowship and showing a real love for one another. That love overflowed to outsiders, and in time of plague and disaster the Christians shone by means of their service to the communities in which they lived. . . . love without strings attached." - (*Evangelism in the Early Church*, 20)

*C.S. Lewis on developing love for those we don't 'like'* -

Note: "charity" here, from the older translations of "caritas" is used for the Christian form of "love" - "Natural like or affection for people makes it easier to be 'charitable' towards them. It is, therefore, normally a duty to encourage our affections - to 'like' people as much as we can (just as it is often our duty to encourage our liking for exercise or wholesome food) - not because this liking is itself the virtue of charity, but because it is a help to it. . . . But though natural likings should normally be encouraged, it would be quite wrong to think that the way to become charitable is to sit trying to manufacture affectionate feelings. Some people are 'cold' by temperament; that may be a misfortune for them, but it is no more a sin than having a bad digestion is a sin; and it does not cut them out from the chance, or excuse them from the duty, of learning charity. The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. **Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did.** As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less. . . .

"Consequently, though Christian charity sounds a very cold thing to people whose heads are full of sentimentality, and though it is quite distinct from affection, yet it leads to affection. The difference between a Christian and a worldly man is not that the worldly man has only affections or 'likings' and the Christian has only 'charity'. The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he 'likes' them: **the Christian, trying to treat every one kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on** - including people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning. This same spiritual law works terribly in the opposite direction. The Germans, perhaps, at first ill-treated the Jews because they hated them: afterwards they hated them much more because they had ill-treated them. The more cruel you are, the more you will hate; the more you hate, the more cruel you will become - and so on in a vicious circle for ever." (CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

*Questions for Discussion*

- This is one way to think of God's sanctification in us, which is meant to teach us to feel and love as He does. As God continues to renew our minds and souls, he gives us new desires and affections that will align naturally with God's good law; hence, "writing the law on our hearts". Have you begun to see this in your life at all? What specifically makes this difficult?
- Of the other quotes above, what sticks out to you the most? How would that change the way you consider and act out your love?

## PART 4: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

### 12 | Self-Control (Ch. 11)

*“Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.” (Prov. 25.28)*

*“God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” (2Tim. 1.7)*

**Self-control means** governing one’s desires, saying yes to what we should, and no to what we shouldn’t. In Scripture it relates to:

- Moderation, temperance and inner strength
- Soberness, sound mind

#### **Consider self-control in 3 main areas:**

1. **Body** - though God made all physical and sensual appetites, we have corrupted them. Consider not only sexual ones, but also gluttony, laziness, unhealthy abuse of our bodies.
2. **Thoughts** - **read Phil. 4.8** - “It is in our thought life that our emotions and actions begin and that sinful desires plant their roots and entice us into sin. . . . The gates of our thought lives are primarily our eyes and our ears. What we see or read or hear largely determines what we think. . . . Guarding our hearts begins with guarding our eyes and ears. We must not allow that which panders to sexual lust, greed (called materialism in our present society), envy, and selfish ambition to enter our minds. We should avoid television programs, magazine or newspaper articles, advertisements, and conversations that arouse such thoughts. . . . In both of his letters to Timothy, Paul felt it prudent to warn Timothy to *flee* temptation” (139).
3. **Emotions** - consider anger / rage, resentment, self-pity, and bitterness - how displeasing they are to God and how concerned he is to curb them.

“It is God who works in us to will and to act. Our own particular areas of vulnerability must be made the subject of earnest, beseeching prayer for God’s grace to work in our will. At the same time we must realize that **the will is strengthened by obedience. The more we say no to sinful desires, the more we will be able to say no.** But to experience this, we must persevere through many failures. A large part of learning self-control is breaking bad habits and replacing them with good ones. And this process always involves a certain amount of failure. Finally, as Kehl points out, ‘True spiritual self-discipline holds believers in bounds but never in bonds; its effect is to enlarge, expand, and liberate.’ James describes the Word of God as ‘the perfect law that gives freedom’ (Ja. 1.25). As we grow in the grace of self-control, we will experience the liberation of those who, under the guidance and grace of the Holy Spirit, are freed from the shackles of self-indulgence and are brought into the freedom of true spiritual discipline” (144-5).

Which area of life do you struggle most with self-control? Why?

**Contrast with worldly moderation, or just avoiding “extremes”**

- Worldly counterfeits of self-control may take different faces.
  - In a world of religious extremist violence, many people agree that we all just need to be a bit more moderate and less “fundamentalistic” in our faith. That is NOT biblical self-control, because an extremely zealous Christian should never be motivated to violence, but rather to extreme acts of love and service.
  - In a world of religious pluralism, we have to be able to “get along” with everyone, so the less certain we are of our own religion, the more cooperative we’re likely to be, or so the reasoning goes. The false premise here is similar - the more serious of a Christian I am, the more I will be devoted to the public good for people of all faiths and none. Asking me to be less Christian would actually take away my motivation for working together with people who are different from me!
  - In an individualistic perspective, self-control could simply be masked as never being excited, passionate, or angry about anything. This, too, falls far short of biblical self-control. **Self-control is a corollary to zealous faith in expectation of the coming reign of Christ**; it should be expressed in a Christian’s life through clear and **undistracted focus on Jesus and our eternal home**. Notice 1Peter 4.7, 1Cor. 9.25, and 2Peter 1.6 - they all relate to the eternal journey.
- Which of these 3 can you most relate to? Why?

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

**=>Reading**

*On Self-Denial, though a little different from “self-control”, Calvin has an amazing 2 chapters in his Institutes, Bk. 3, Ch. 7-8. Consider reading yourself and bringing key passages or assigning beforehand.*

***On Self-Control in Regards to Pornography Use and Sexual Addiction***

*Leader’s note: please discern whether this reading and this topic as it pertains to self-control is appropriate for your group. The data behind pornographic use alone, not to mention other sexual sins, among Christians is staggering. Do not be naive about the damage it may be doing in a Christian’s soul. For the full reading, see “Your Brain on Porn,” by Covenant Eyes, a Christian website and accountability tool. Encourage anyone in your group who struggles with this to confess it to another brother or sister in Christ and engage in real accountability - it’s not a battle that can be fought alone.*

**“God wired the brain in such a way that it wants to remember where our natural drives are satisfied. If the body is thirsty, the brain’s job is to remember in vivid detail**

where water can be found, and dopamine is the neurotransmitter responsible for helping us remember where to satisfy our natural drives.

“When sexually stimulated, dopamine is released into a region of the brain responsible for emotion and learning, giving the viewer a sense of sharp focus and an awareness of craving: “I have got to have this thing; this is what I need right now.” Dopamine supplies a great sense of pleasure. The next time the viewer gets the itch for more sexual gratification, small packets of dopamine are released in the brain, saying, “Remember where you got your fix last time. Go there to get it.”

“In the context of a secure marital relationship, this push to return to the source of pleasure brings couples back together again and again in sexual intimacy, building a bond of love. But in the context of viewing pornography, the effect is something altogether different.

“Continued exposure to porn, especially for long periods of time, releases surge after surge of dopamine, giving the brain an unnatural high. The brain eventually fatigues, limiting the release of dopamine, leaving the viewer wanting more but unable to reach a level of satisfaction. This is called **desensitization**. Everyday pleasures begin to lose their luster—including sex—and the viewer expands their pornographic tastes and seeks out more novel or harder pornography to get the same arousal.

“James says sin begins in strong desire, but “sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:14-15). Growing sin brings about all forms of death—death to pleasure, death to relationships, and ultimately eternal death.

“While the brain becomes desensitized to pleasure in general, it becomes **hyper-sensitive to various sexual triggers**. In his book *Wired for Intimacy*, Dr. William Struthers offers a way to understand sensitization. He writes:

‘Like a path is created in the woods with each successive hiker, so do the neural paths set the course for the next time an erotic image is viewed. Over time these neural paths become wider as they are repeatedly traveled with each exposure to pornography. They become the automatic pathway through which interactions with women are routed. The neural circuitry anchors this process solidly in the brain. With each lingering stare, pornography deepens the Grand Canyon-like gorge in the brain through which images of women are destined to flow. This extends to women that they have not seen naked or engaging in sexual acts as well. All women become potential porn stars in the minds of these men.’

“In other words, the more a person masturbates to pornography, the wider the neuro-superhighway becomes, developing more and more “on-ramps.” Sexual cues are everywhere and they all lead to the same place.

“The Apostle Paul vividly describes the **never-ending lust people experience when cut off from the life of God**. He writes, “They have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity” (Eph. 4:19, NIV). One act of lust leads to two, two leads to four, and four leads to an all-consuming desire. Its appetite is never satiated. . . .

“Normally, when emotions, impulses, and urges surge from the midbrain, the prefrontal lobes are there to exercise “executive control” over them. But when this region is weakened by continual porn use, willpower is eroded and there is nothing to stop the sense of craving for pornography. As a result, the **person experiences the urge, not just as a desire, but as an intense need**. Neuroscientists call this problem hypofrontality. This person no longer has mastery over his passions but is a slave to them.

“It is just as Paul says: as men and women become calloused, desensitized to God and all that is good, they also experience a great “hardness of heart” (Eph. 4:18). They become “slaves to various passions and pleasures” (Titus 3:3).

“Just as sure as pornography stirs up lustful cravings in us, the **Holy Spirit is a source of new, holy cravings**. Galatians 5 says we who have the Holy Spirit have the “desires of the Spirit” (5:17). God promises that when we “keep in step with the Spirit,” the lusts of the flesh that lead to sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality will not have their way in us (5:16,25). We can become new men and women from the inside out.

“What does it mean to keep in step with the Spirit of God, to walk in the Spirit?

“**1. We must walk in accountability** where we can share our darkest secrets and be reminded of our highest calling. To walk in the Spirit, we must confess our sins to each other, pray for each other, and stir up one another to live according to our true identity.

“**2. We must internalize Scripture**, the inspired words of the Spirit. To walk in the Spirit, we need to renovate our thoughts according to the truths He has revealed, rejecting the lies pornography has fed us.

“**3. We must walk in pure pleasure**, taking great delight in holy and wholesome longings—finding pleasure in all that is honorable, pure, lovely, and excellent. To walk in the Spirit, we need to pursue pure pleasures with sincere gratitude until pornography loses its luster.

“**4. We must walk in our true identity**, listening to cry of the Spirit in our hearts, “Abba, Father,” which confirms our new identity. To walk in the Spirit, we need to learn to relate to God, from the depths of our soul, as dearly loved adopted sons and daughters, believing that we belong to God and that our ties to sin are broken forever.

“**5. We must stir up the hope the Spirit inspires in us—the hope of righteousness**. To walk in the Spirit, we need to wait eagerly for this hope, putting faith in God’s promises that we are destined for an eternity of purity, and longing to see that purity spill over into our present lives. . . .

“When it comes to saying no to lust and pornography, there are tailor-made **promises in the Scriptures that hold out to us blessings** of having a sexually pure mind and body.

- If you are sexually pure, you will be living in the will of God for your life (1 Thessalonians 4:3).
- If you fill your mind with that which is honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy, then God’s peaceful presence will be with you (Philippians 4:8-9).
- If you are not enslaved to your lusts, you will be free to serve others in love (Galatians 5:13).
- If you are sexually pure, your life will be fruitful, and that fruit will be full of goodness and truth (Ephesians 5:8-9).
- If you are sexually pure, your mind will no longer be foggy, your heart will be teachable, and you will be filled with the very life of God (Ephesians 4:17-19).
- If you are sexually pure, your heart will not be enslaved to the worship of sex, which means you can wholeheartedly devote yourself to the true and living God (1 Kings 11:4).
- If you are sexually pure, you will be more prepared to be a great lover and to enjoy sexual intimacy with your spouse or future spouse (Proverbs 5:18-19).
- If you are sexually pure, you will keep your marriage bed undefiled (Hebrews 13:4).
- If you are sexually pure, you will no longer waste time but instead make the most of it (Ephesians 5:16).
- If you are sexually pure, you will be an honorable person (1 Thessalonians 4:4).
- If you are a sexually pure person, you will not be enslaved to your passions (1 Corinthians 6:12).”

### *Questions for Discussion*

- Do you ever engage in porn use? If you do, consider reading the full article cited above, and begin by confessing openly to a Christian brother or sister you can trust.
- If porn use is not an issue for you, do you see how other sins in your life, or lack of self-control elsewhere, can take the form of an addiction? What are they?

## **13 | Peace (Ch. 13)**

**“Three different expressions of one peace** - the peace that God gives, which is called the fruit of the Spirit:

- Peace with God - Read Rom. 5.1 (and Col. 1.20)
- Peace within ourselves
- Peace with other people” (158)

### **1. Peace with God** - Read Rom. 5.1-5

1. This passage assumes justification by faith, and then describes all the benefits that derive from that - are you at peace with God because of that? Why or why not?
2. Consider discussing further these issues if the group is struggling with it, or consider how how lack of confidence in being at peace with God flows into the next two areas of peace.

### **2. Personal Peace**

1. “The more calamitous events in our lives usually force us to turn to the Lord with all our hearts, and, in so doing, we experience His grace and peace. But the more ordinary adversities of life rob us of peace because we have a tendency to try to deal with these events ourselves” (159) - is this true? Why or why not?
2. Based on John 16.33 - “in this assurance of peace, Jesus made two promises. His first promise was that we will have trouble in the world. The same circumstances that rob us of our joy also rob us of our peace. The common denominator of all these circumstances is uncertainty. . . . But the second promise that Jesus made was just as correct. He has overcome the world. . . . So why do we worry? Because we do not believe” (160).
3. **Steps to personal peace:** 1. Examine your motives - “you may want deliverance instead of peace. Are you looking for the wrong answer?” 2. Look to the Holy Spirit - “peace is the fruit of the Spirit. . . your responsibility is to come in prayer, asking for the peace and looking to him for it” (162)
  1. Read Phil. 4.6-7 and 1Peter 5.6-8

### **3. Peace with Christians**

1. 1Peter 3.10-11 tells us to pursue peace - Bridges writes, “the pursuit of peace does not include an easygoing, peace-at-any-price kind of attitude; it does not include capitulating to wrong or injustice. . . Pursuing peace does not mean running away from the causes of discord” (165)
  1. **Steps to pursue peace:** 1. We are fellow members of the same body, and we belong to one another (1Cor. 12.12; Rom. 12.5); 2. That body is Christ’s body

and his glory; 3. The cause of discord often lies wholly or partly with us, so we must seek humility; 4. We must take initiative to restore peace, it's our responsibility whether we've been wronged or have done the wrong (Matt. 5.23-4; 18.15).

2. With non-Christians - it's still our responsibility to pursue peace, and not to take revenge, we just don't share the same unifying foundation

**Consider an area of life** or person that causes you anxiety and/or conflict. Discuss practical steps you can take to respond accordingly and pursue peace. What scares you about taking those steps, if anything? What about the reconciled, peace-giving grace of God does not give you enough courage?

### Contrast with apathy and indifference (similar to above, on contentment)

- Peace also gets mistaken for other non-Christian virtues, especially since we live in a culture where most of our immediate needs (food, shelter, clothing) are rarely in doubt. Being indifferent about evil, sin, injustice, and blasphemy are not signs of Christian peace; neither is being so "overly confident" of your salvation that you lose your excitement or passion.
- As JC Ryle writes, "A true Christian is one who has not only peace of conscience, but war within. He may be known by his warfare as well as by his peace."
- We are at peace with God (Rom. 5.1) because of Christ's finished work. If we receive this peace, and think "well, that's good, now I can take it easy", we must wonder whether we are really Christian at all. Having **received justifying peace**, a more appropriate response would be "unbelievable! Praise Jesus, I never have to doubt again whether God is angry at me, whether God judges me, whether I am God's enemy! Nothing can shake me from the foundation of God's love if Jesus' sacrifice was enough! (Rom. 8.28ff.)"
- Do you often pretend as if you're peaceful, when you're truly just being indifferent? What are you indifferent or apathetic about and why? The opposite of apathy is feverish activity, which is done out of a LACK of certainty in God's finished work in Christ. Do you tend toward the feverish end of the spectrum or the apathetic? Why?

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

=>Reading: *Calvin on taking peaceful refuge in God, but not in a fake or needless way* - "By 'assurance' I do not understand to mean that which soothes our mind with sweet and perfect repose, releasing it from every anxiety. For to repose so peacefully is the part of those who, when all affairs are flowing to their liking, are touched by no care,

burn with no desire, toss with no fear. But for the saints the occasion that best stimulates them to call upon God is when, distressed by their own need, they are troubled by the greatest unrest, and are almost driven out of their senses, until faith opportunely comes to their relief. For among such tribulations God's goodness so shines upon them that even when **they groan with weariness under the weight of present ills, and also are troubled and tormented by the fear of greater ones, yet, relying upon his goodness, they are relieved of the difficulty of bearing them,** and are solaced and hope for escape and deliverance. It is fitting therefore that the godly man's prayer arise from these two emotions, that it also contain and represent both. That is, that he groan under present ills and anxiously fear those to come, yet at the same time take refuge in God, not at all doubting he is ready to extend his helping hand. . . .

"Now what sort of prayer will this be? 'O Lord, I am in doubt whether thou wilt to hear me, but because I am pressed by anxiety, I flee to thee, that, if I am worthy, thou mayest help me.' [By no means!] . . . If we would pray fruitfully, we ought therefore to grasp with both hands this assurance of obtaining what we ask (Heb. 4.16; Eph. 3.12). . . For only that prayer is acceptable to God which is born, if I may so express it, out of such **presumption of faith, and is grounded in unshaken assurance of hope.** . . .

Prayers are vainly cast upon the air unless hope be added, from which we quietly watch for God as from a watchtower. . . . Faith is not at all overthrown when it is joined with the acknowledgment of our misery, destitution, and uncleanness. For however much believers may feel pressed down or troubled by a heavy weight of sins, not only bereft of all things that might obtain favor with God, but laden with many offenses that justly render him terrifying, nevertheless they do not cease to present themselves; and this feeling does not frighten them from betaking themselves to him, **since there is no other access to him.** For prayer was not ordained that we should be haughtily puffed up before God, or greatly esteem anything of ours, but that, having confessed our guilt, we should deplore our distresses before him, as children unburden their troubles to their parents. Moreover, the boundless mass of our sins should amply flourish us with spurs or goads to arouse us to pray." (*Institutes*, 863, 865)

### *Questions for Discussion*

- Does this encourage you in your own struggle for peace? It should take work to gain peace! We should expect God to answer our prayers for peace, but we should also need God's power to give us peace!
- Pray together with these points in mind

## **14 | Patience (Ch. 14)**

### **Five types of godly patience discussed in Scripture:**

1. **Suffering Mistreatment** - enduring abuse, sometimes translated as “longsuffering”, without growing resentful or bitter.
  1. How? Consider the justice of God (1Peter 2.23) and the faithfulness of God (1Peter 4.19). Also see Gen. 50.20
  
2. **Responding to Provocation** - in occasions where our anger or temper can be aroused, and we have the power to respond (as opposed to above, which often times we don’t have power)
  1. How? Consider that God is “slow to anger”. See James 1.19 and 1Cor. 13.5
  2. “We are like the unmerciful servant when we lose our patience under provocation. We ignore God’s extreme patience with us. We discipline our children out of anger, while God disciplines us out love. We are eager to punish the person who provokes us, while God is eager to forgive. We are eager to exercise our authority, while God is eager to exercise His love” (173).
  3. Some people’s temper more naturally tends to anger, in which we case they “must especially work at patience under provocation. Rather than excusing himself by saying, ‘That’s just the way I am,’ he must acknowledge his quick temper as a sinful habit before God. . . . He should apologize to the person who is the object of his outburst *each time* he loses his temper.” (174)
  
3. **Tolerating Shortcomings** - sometimes translated “forbearance” or “tolerance”
  1. With “faults and failures of others [that] . . . affect us and irritate or disappoint us” (174)
    1. Impatience here is rooted in pride and neglecting the fact that we all have different abilities and gifts from God. See Eph. 4.2-3 and Col. 3.13
    2. Anytime we are led to confront or correct, we must make sure it “is not from a spirit of impatience but from a spirit of love and concern for the welfare of the other person” (177).
  
4. **Waiting on God**
  1. Consider Abraham’s long wait for the birth of Isaac
  2. Psalm 40.1-2 and James 5.7-11
  
5. **Persevering through Adversity** - as opposed to long-suffering with people, this seeks endurance through circumstances
  1. Read Heb. 12.1-14

2. "Endurance can be produced only under stress, whether physical or spiritual. In Romans, Paul says suffering produces perseverance. James says trials that test our faith develop perseverance. Endurance and perseverance are qualities we would all like to possess, but we are loathe to go through the process that produces them. That is why God is so faithful to allow or to bring trials into our lives, even though we shrink from them" (181).

1. How often do we pray for perseverance without the means needed?

"The fruit of patience in all its aspects - long-suffering, forbearance, endurance, and perseverance - is a fruit most intimately associated with our devotion to God. . . . Only as we fear God will we submit to the trials He sends or allows. And only as we deeply apprehend His love for us in Christ will we find the courage to bear up under them. Trials always change our relationship with God; either they drive us to Him, or they drive us away from Him. The extent of our fear of Him and our awareness of His love for us determine in which direction we will move" (182).

- How have you found this true in your life? What area do you need to experience deeper patience in the face of trials?

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

### =>Reading

*On Christian hope, the source of our patience* - "Hope is one of the Theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. **Aim at heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither. . . .**

"Most of us find it very difficult to want 'Heaven' at all— except in so far as 'Heaven' means meeting again our friends who have died. One reason for this difficulty is that **we have not been trained: our whole education tends to fix our minds on this world.** Another reason is that when the real want for Heaven is present in us, we do not recognize it. Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or first

think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, can really satisfy. . . . There was something we grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in the reality. . . .

“The Christian says, ‘Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. **I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death;** I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do same.’” (CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

### *Questions for Discussion*

- Consider what this passage should do to us:
  - **It should encourage us** because the disappointment and unmet desires we feel are not wrong or unexpected! As Lewis says in “The Weight of Glory”, our desires are not too strong, but too weak, for we are far too easily pleased. How ought this to encourage you in your patient suffering?
  - **It should fix our gaze on the eternal life** that the best things in this world are only meant to point to. Do you tend to “aim at earth” all too often? How does that make you more and more impatient?
  - **It should give us patience and hope** in all matters of suffering

*On patience as a central virtue in the early church* - “The growth of the Christian church in the Roman Empire is mysterious. Scholars who spend their entire lives studying this phenomenon continue to find it surprising. Why did this minor mystery religion from the eastern Mediterranean - marginal, despised, discriminated against - grow substantially, eventually supplanting the well-endowed, respectable cults that were supported by the empire and aristocracy? What enabled Christianity to be so successful that by the fifth century it was the established religion of the empire? . . . Patience was not a virtue dear to most Greco-Roman people, and it has been of little interest to scholars of early Christianity. But it was centrally important to the early Christians. They talked about patience and wrote about it; it was the first virtue about which they wrote a treatise, and they wrote no fewer than three treatises on it. **Christian**

writers called patience the ‘highest virtue,’ ‘the greatest of all virtues,’ the virtue that was ‘peculiarly Christian.’ The Christians believed that God is patience and that Jesus visibly embodied patience. And they concluded that they, trusting in God, should be patient - not controlling events, not anxious or in a hurry, and never using force to achieve their ends. . . .

“Cyprian relates the faith that the Christians are to demonstrate to a particular virtue—patience. Their faith is a patient faith: ‘Therefore, as servants and worshipers of God, let us show by spiritual homage the patience that we learn from the heavenly teachings. For that virtue we have in common with God.’ Christians, said Cyprian, are to be visibly distinctive. They are to live their faith and communicate it in deeds, and their deeds are to embody patience. *Patientia*: when Christians make this virtue visible and active, they **demonstrate the character of God to the world.** . . .

“[Origen] knew that when Christians are not properly trained, persecution can destroy them, emptying them ‘of all [their] reserves and [making them] suddenly naked and empty.’ These **believers can survive only if they have been formed so they embody the virtue of patience,** ‘so that by our patience [the pagans’] shamelessness may be overcome.’ To Origen, patience was a source of hope. . . .

“In general, when ancient Latin writers used the term *patientia*, they didn’t have heroes in mind; they were thinking of subordinates and victims. Patience seemed an appropriate attitude for people of no account who were on the receiving end of action or experiences. For these people—powerless, poverty-stricken, and often female—*patientia* was ignominious. Patience was the response of people who didn’t have the freedom to define their own goals or make choices. Notably patience was a response of slaves, for whom it was an inevitability, not a virtue. But Tertullian didn’t draw primarily on pagan philosophy or conventional usage. . . . For all Christians, whether poor or more comfortably off, whether slave or free, it is ‘the highest virtue’, . . . at the heart of being a Christian. **To be a Christian means that one has accorded to patience ‘pre-eminence in matters pertaining to God.’**” (Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*)

### *Questions for Discussion*

- Consider the importance of patience, and why we overlook it in the Christian life.
- **Contrast** this type of patience with inactivity or worldly apathy. This type of patience is very active, but is active toward different sorts of things than those who are impatient and uncertain of God.
- In regards to patience and hope, Calvin has a wonderful chapter titled “Meditation on the Future Life” in Bk. 3 of his *Institutes*

## 15 | Gentleness, Kindness and Goodness (Ch. 15 & 16)

“We pray for patience, we pray for love, we pray for purity and self-control. But who of us ever prays for the grace of gentleness? . . . ‘Perhaps no grace is less prayed for, or less cultivated than gentleness. Indeed it is considered rather as belonging to natural dispositions or external manners, than as a Christian virtue; and seldom do we reflect that not to be gentle is sin’” (183).

=>Is this true of you and our church? Why or why not?

**Defining Gentleness** - “Billy Graham defines gentleness as ‘mildness in dealing with others. . . . It displays a sensitive regard for others and is careful never to be unfeeling for the rights of others.’ Gentleness is an active trait, describing the manner in which we should treat others. [As opposed to] meekness [which] is a passive trait. . . . It is the recognition that the human personality is valuable but fragile and must be handled with care. Both gentleness and meekness are born of power, not weakness. **There is a pseudo-gentleness that is effeminate, and there is a pseudo-meekness that is cowardly. But a Christian is to be gentle and meek because those are Godlike virtues**” (184).

- See Isa. 40.9-11 for the combination of strength and gentleness in God
- “Gentleness is stooping down to help someone. God continually stoops down to help us, and He wants us to do the same: to be sensitive to the rights and feelings of others” (185).
- See also Paul’s appeal “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (2Cor. 10.1) and Jesus’ invitation in Matt. 11.28-30

=> Discuss these definitions of gentleness. Do you agree? Why? What does it look like? Do you have models of gentleness that come to mind?

Consider these synonyms to gentleness - considerateness, a forbearing spirit, “yieldedness, reasonableness, big-heartedness, geniality, [and] . . . humane” (189).

### **Steps to develop a gentle spirit:**

1. “We must decide that this is a trait we really do want to develop. . . if we really want to care about other people”
2. “We can ask those who know us best and will be honest how we come across to other people. Are we dogmatic and opinionated, blunt and abrupt?”
3. “We should also ask the Holy Spirit to make us aware of specific situations in which we fail” (191)

**On Kindness and Goodness** - "These two traits finish a natural progression in godly character: **patience** denotes a godly response to ill-treatment; **gentleness** defines a godly demeanor toward people at all times; **kindness and goodness** involve an active desire to recognize and meet the needs of others. Kindness is a sincere desire for the happiness of others; goodness is the activity calculated to advance that happiness. Kindness is the inner disposition, created by the Holy Spirit, that causes us to be sensitive to the needs of others, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. Goodness is kindness in action - words and deeds" (193).

**Consider Eph. 2.8-10 and 1Tim. 5.9-10** for the place of good works in the lives of God's people, especially the everyday, ordinary aspects of their lives.

- Why do we tend to overlook good works as essential to the Christian life? Are we too afraid of "works righteousness"?
- This is connected to how we are created and re-created in Christ - to do good works! Do you see that as a privilege and benefit, or simply an additional duty? Why?
- How are you able to do good through your various vocations?

Bridges quotes George Bethune as he writes, "'True goodness is not merely impulsive, but rational and considerate - It will therefore pause, and be at some trouble to inquire what service, and how best it may be rendered. . . . Goodness should be willing to give time, and thought, and patience, and even labor; not mere money and kind words and compassionate looks.'"

- Do you consider how you can be regularly engaged in good works? Or is goodness seen as a luxury you may get to once you complete all the "real" parts of life?
- Do you need to grow in spontaneous acts of kindness (and thus developing more of a kind spirit), or in maturely thinking about habits of kindness, or both?

=> **Reading:** *On truth-telling* - "If I lie to my neighbor, I take reality away from him. I force him to decide on the basis of falsehood, unreality. If I tell a person who wants to buy my car that it is in splendid mechanical shape, although... it needs a valve job, I rob him of the freedom to decide on the basis of reality. If you pretend that you are pleased with your daughter's report card when in fact you are furious because she has not been studying and her grades show it, you rob her of the freedom to respond to your anger and force her to respond to a charade instead. Thus, lying demeans our neighbors. We treat them as non-persons." - Lewis Smedes

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

### Contrast the reading with worldly stereotypes of gentleness or kindness

- Gentleness easily gets confused with weakness, lack of passion, lack of a backbone. If Jesus was both gentle, yet had a backbone, how would you describe Jesus as gentle?

#### =>Reading on Christian morals in general and why “gentleness” is not bland

*In this excerpt from G.K. Chesterton’s Orthodoxy, he is reflecting on the apparent paradoxes of Christian morals as they struck him on his journey towards belief. Critics of Christianity may find it contradictory to believe, say, BOTH that God can offer mercy to the most hardened criminal AND that God demands perfect justice; yet this is precisely why worldly views of gentleness appear weak, but Christian gentleness is Christlike and revolutionary.*

“[The Church’s] fierce crusaders and meek saints might balance each other; still, the crusaders were very fierce and the saints were very meek, **meek beyond all decency**. . . . The idea was that which I had outlined touching the optimist and the pessimist; that we want not an amalgam or compromise, but **both things at the top of their energy; love and wrath both burning**. . . .

“In one way Man was to be haughtier than he had ever been before; in another way he was to be humbler than he had ever been before. In so far as I am Man I am the chief of creatures. In so far as I am a man I am the chief of sinners. . . . Now Man was to tread on the earth as if to subdue it. Christianity thus held a thought of the dignity of man that could only be expressed in crowns rayed like the sun and fans of peacock plumage. Yet at the same time it could hold a thought about the abject smallness of man that could only be expressed in fasting and fantastic submission. . . . One can hardly think too little of one’s self. One can hardly think too much of one’s soul. . . .

“Take another case: the complicated question of charity, which some highly uncharitable idealists seem to think quite easy. Charity is a paradox, like modesty and courage. Stated baldly charity certainly means one of two things - pardoning unpardonable acts, or loving unlovable people. . . . A sensible pagan would say that there were some people one could forgive, and some one couldn’t. . . . In so far as the act was pardonable, the man was pardonable. That again is rational, and even refreshing; but it is a **dilution. It leaves no place for a pure horror of injustice**, such as that which is a great beauty in the innocent. And **it leaves no place for a mere tenderness** for men as men, such as is the whole fascination of the charitable. Christianity came in here as before. It came in startlingly with a sword, and clove one thing from another. It divided the crime from the criminal. The criminal we must forgive unto seventy times seven. The crime we must not forgive at all. It was not enough that slaves who stole wine inspired partly anger and partly kindness. **We must be much more angry with theft than before, and**

**yet much kinder to thieves than before. There was room for wrath and love to run wild. . . .**

“St. Francis, in praising all good, could be a more shouting optimist than Walt Whitman. St. Jerome, in denouncing all evil, could paint the world blacker than Schopenhauer. Both passions were free because both were kept in their place. . . . By defining its main doctrine, the Church not only kept seemingly inconsistent things side by side, but, what was more, allowed them to break out in a sort of artistic violence otherwise possible only to anarchists. **Meekness grew more dramatic than madness.** Historic Christianity rose into a high and strange COUP DE THEATRE of morality--things that are to virtue what the crimes of Nero are to vice. The spirits of indignation and of charity took terrible and attractive forms, ranging from that monkish fierceness that scourged like a dog the first and greatest of the Plantagenets, to the sublime pity of St. Catherine, who, in the official shambles, kissed the bloody head of the criminal. Poetry could be acted as well as composed. . . .

“Sometimes this **pure gentleness and this pure fierceness met and justified their juncture**; the paradox of all the prophets was fulfilled, and, in the soul of St. Louis, the **lion lay down with the lamb**. But remember that this text is too lightly interpreted. It is constantly assured, especially in our Tolstoyan [pacifist] tendencies, that when the lion lies down with the lamb the lion becomes lamb-like. But that is brutal annexation and imperialism on the part of the lamb. That is simply the lamb absorbing the lion instead of the lion eating the lamb. The real problem is--**Can the lion lie down with the lamb and still retain his royal ferocity?** THAT is the problem the Church attempted; THAT is the miracle she achieved.”

### *Questions for Discussion*

- Do you understand what he means by gentleness being fierce? How does this change your perception of Christian gentleness, meekness, or other seemingly “weak” virtues? Since we are called to be meek and gentle, yet courageous to the point of death and the world’s rejection, how ought that change our view of gentleness?
- Why do we tend to pit gentleness against strength? Consider the apostle Paul’s example - passionate and adventurous leader yet open about his anxieties, pains, and weaknesses to the point of boasting about them.
- In what ways do we need to grow in our gentleness? What makes it so hard to be gentle or kind in certain circumstances?