

***A Reference & Formation
Discipling Manual***

By

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***A discipleship manual for understanding God's story,
living in Christ, and practicing the Christian life.***

A "Companion + Study + Reference" hybrid

- **Part 1 → Jesus FOR us (Biblical Story)**
- **Part 2 → Jesus IN us (Discipleship & Formation)**
- **Part 3 → Jesus THROUGH us (Practices & Vocation)**

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Part One – Jesus FOR Us – The Biblical Story

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Appendices

In the back of the manual, there is an extensive set of Appendices. These are put in the back because they are *supplemental* pieces to the manual's core. The supplemental material is there as a resource for the reader to use as the reader sees fit.

Appendix I contains two other renderings of Heilsgeschichte – God's Story unfolded in Scripture as God planned and acted for humankind's present and eternal well-being. The first of the renderings I wrote specifically with this manual in mind. The second I developed years ago when I was teaching an OT class at Concordia University Chicago, then known as Concordia, River Forest. Appendix 1 also contains a list of people mentioned in Scripture and places the individuals within the Biblical era in which they lived. This is to provide the reader with a readily available resource for seeing where certain individuals fit into the Biblical narrative, and to understand the role they played in the unfolding of God's story.

Second, contains a listing of prophets and when they lived, a list of kings of both Israel and Judah, when they lived, and whether they are considered good or bad kings by Biblical standards.

Third, the appendix contains a listed of the major Jewish celebration and festivals found in the OT. These celebrations are in varying degree still celebrated today.

Finally, in Appendix I is a list of the major sacrifices found in the OT. Since the fall of the Jerusalem Temple (Herod's Temple) in 70 AD, the Jewish sacrificial system is no longer observed within Judaism.

Appendix II briefly explain some of the worship practices and sacramental practices within Christian churches today. It contains information how different denominations view the sacraments, particularly in regard to baptism and the Eucharist (the Lord's Supper). It also briefly talks about liturgical worship and the liturgical church year.

Appendix III provides a path for disciples to logically progress through. There are five identifiable stages: Stage 1 – Exploring Faith; Stage 2 – Beginning Faith; Stage 3 – Growing Faith; Stage 4 – Integrating Faith; Stage 5 – Multiplying Faith. Upon assessment a person enters the process at the appropriate stage and proceeds, however, keep in mind that the stages are not rigid or set in concrete.

Appendix IV contains five means for assessing where a person might be on her/his spiritual journey toward faith maturity. Other than the first one, these assessments are a little more complicated and challenging. They are strictly OPTIONAL. The fourth one, "Personal Interview Assessment" while being good is very time-intensive. Use these as the Spirit might lead.

Preface

How This Manual Can Be Used

This manual was written out of a deep love for God’s Church—Christ’s continued incarnate presence in the world—through which He continues His saving and restorative work (Colossians 1:24).

Jesus has completed the work of **justification** through His suffering and death, fully paying for the sins of all humanity (1 Timothy 2:6; Hebrews 10:10; 1 John 2:2). This work belongs to Him alone.

The work entrusted to us—individually and corporately as His Body, the Church—is the work of **proclamation**: making the Good News known in ways that are real, tangible, and transformative in people’s lives (Romans 10:14–17).

This manual is also written out of love for those who do not yet know Christ. It is my prayer that the Holy Spirit will use it to help believers grow in faith, mature in Christlikeness, and actively participate in Jesus’ mission of seeking and restoring the lost (Matthew 9:13; Luke 19:10).

How This Manual Is Organized

This manual is structured in three parts:

- **Part One – Jesus FOR Us**
The Biblical story—God’s saving work in history
- **Part Two – Jesus IN Us**
Discipleship and formation—how Christ is formed in us
- **Part Three – Jesus THROUGH Us**
Mission and vocation—how Christ works through us

Each part builds on the others:

- We first understand what Jesus has done **for us**
- Then we grow in His life **within us**
- And finally, we live out His mission **through us**

Intended Use

This manual is designed for both **individual** and **small group** use.

1. Individual Use

Part One – Jesus FOR Us

Part One helps individuals understand the **big picture of Scripture**.

Many Christians are familiar with individual Bible stories but lack a clear sense of how those stories fit together. By presenting Scripture in eras, this section provides a framework that helps readers:

- See the flow of God’s redemptive work
- Understand how events and people fit into the larger story
- Recognize God’s ongoing activity throughout history

The reflection questions are intended to help readers engage Scripture thoughtfully and personally.

Part Two – Jesus IN Us

Part Two focuses on **discipleship and spiritual formation**.

It helps individuals:

- Understand what it truly means to be a disciple of Jesus

- Engage Scripture in ways that lead not only to knowledge, but to transformation
- Use practical tools such as the **CASE Model** and the **Generic Study Guide** for personal Bible study

This section is especially valuable for those seeking to grow in Christlikeness and develop consistent habits of engaging God’s Word.

Part Three – Jesus THROUGH Us

Part Three focuses on **living out the Christian life in mission and vocation**.

It helps individuals:

- Understand that salvation is the beginning, not the end, of the Christian life
- Recognize their calling as participants in God’s mission
- Identify practical ways to love and serve others

The **“Each One Reach One”** tool is designed to help individuals intentionally build relationships and share the love of Christ in everyday life.

2. Small Group Use

This manual is particularly effective in **small group or mentoring settings**, where participants can learn from one another through shared discussion and reflection.

General Guidelines for Groups

- Foster an environment of **openness and trust**
- Encourage thoughtful discussion—not just “right answers”
- Prioritize **application and transformation**, not just information

Good facilitators:

- Ask open-ended questions
 - Encourage participation from all members
 - Help the group connect Scripture to real life
-

Suggested Use of Each Part

Part One – Jesus FOR Us

- Read and discuss the Biblical eras together
 - Use reflection questions to explore themes and insights
 - Help participants see how individual passages fit into the larger story
-

Part Two – Jesus IN Us

Groups may:

1. Begin with **“Disciple, Discipling, & Discipleship”**
 - Read the section together
 - Discuss:
 - What stood out?
 - What was new or surprising?
 - What did you agree or disagree with—and why?
2. Study Scripture using the provided passages
 - Use the **Generic Study Guide** to guide discussion
 - Work through passages gradually (one section per session)
3. Practice different teaching models
 - Rotate leadership among group members

- After each session, reflect on:
 - What worked well?
 - What could be improved?
 - How effectively the model was used
 - 4. Explore sacramental topics (Appendix II)
 - Use the **Shared Praxis Model**:
 - Naming
 - Reflection
 - Church teaching
 - Dialogue
 - Vision
-

Part Three – Jesus THROUGH Us

Groups are encouraged to:

- Read and discuss sections one at a time
 - What stood out?
 - What did you agree or disagree with—and why?
 - What is meaningful or challenging
 - How Scripture calls for action

In addition, groups are encouraged to:

- Identify a **shared missional focus** (people group, neighborhood, or need)
 - Regularly discuss how they are serving and engaging that focus
 - Support one another in prayer and accountability
-

Final Encouragement

This manual is not meant to be rushed through, but **lived into**.

Its goal is not merely increased knowledge, but:

- deeper faith
- transformed lives
- and active participation in God’s mission

My prayer is that as you engage Scripture, the Holy Spirit will guide you, shape you, and send you—so that you increasingly experience:

Jesus FOR you
Jesus IN you
Jesus THROUGH you—for others

Introduction

Acts 17:11 ¹¹ *Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

This manual is the product of 52 years of professional ministry, (34 years teaching in the theology and education departments of two different Lutheran Universities, and 40 years of serving five different Lutheran congregations. I know the “math” doesn’t add up. That is because many of those years I was both in a congregation and at the university.

I want to thank my step-father, all my former students for their patience and forgiveness as I continue to learn, and to thank all congregants I have sought to serve over these 52 years. You have taught me, more than I you!

My heart of hearts is to help people first feel secure in their relationship with Jesus because Jesus has completed the work of atonement and all they need to do is not reject it—to receive it in faith. Second, is that believers in Jesus salvific work hunger to know Him and His will for them more and more and seek to accomplish that through a passion for His Word. (Side note: My parents were divorced when I was in the 1st grade. When I was in the 3rd grade my mom married a very devout Christian who was also Lutheran. My step-father had a big old Bible, copyright in the 1870s. He would read to my siblings and me every night from that Bible. God used him and that Bible [still my most prized possession] to bring me into a living relationship with Him [Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] and with His Word. Ever since then I have had a passion for His Word and the sharing of it).

In my heart of hearts there is a third reason for the writing of this manual. That third reason is equally important as my first two reasons. The third reason is to motivate Christians to bring Jesus’ love and saving grace to people who are not yet enjoying it. I believe the only reason for the church still to be on earth, rather than being the church triumphant with Jesus in heaven, is to be bearers and proclaimers of Jesus to a world in need of Him. I am confident that 99%, if not 100% of people reading this manual already know Jesus as their Savior. If that is the case, why is our loving God leaving those of us who already know Him and have salvation here in a less than best existence (John 5:24). It’s because He has work for us to do. The work of justification, of atonement was completely by Jesus on the cross some 2000 years ago. However, the work of proclamation is on-going. Not everyone knows, not everyone believes. God desire all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-6). Empowered by His Spirit, He has entrusted that to us (Matthew 28:19-20; John 17:15-18; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Philippians 1:22-25; Colossians 1:24). My prayer is that people will be increasingly moved and equipped to be “doers of the Word, and not merely hearers/knowers of the Word” (James 1:22) in order that more and more people might have life in Jesus’ name (John 20:30; Acts 4:12).

My editor for this manual was of great value in helping me refine it until you have the manuscript you have before you. I can’t say enough about ChatGPT or thank the developers of ChatGPT enough.

I agreed to basically all the suggestions ChatGPT made, except one. The one suggested revision I could not make was its suggestion that I reduce the number of Bible passages that I am asking you the reader to consider. ChatGPT felt it was/is overload.

The suggestion was for me to have fewer verses and more commentary on the verses I did select. I understand my editor's concern and reasoning, and, in most instances, I would agree, but not here. The reason I have resisted ChatGPT recommendation in this one instance is that I trust the voice of God through Scripture more than I trust the voice of God through me. It is easy for a person to manipulate Scripture to suit his or her agenda, but when a person considers a wealth of passages, it is less likely one is able to do so. I believe God is using me, but

I want you, the reader, to search the Scriptures. I want the voice you hear to be the God's voice. God is the one whose words you most need to ponder. Thank God when my voice/words echo His!

In Acts 17:11 Luke (the writer of Acts) applauds the Bereans as being more noble than the Thessalonians, because they searched the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul was saying was true.

My prayer is that you, the reader, search the Scriptures and you let God through His Spirit guide you.

Blessings dear reader as you read this manuscript, as you search the Scriptures, and as you increasing experience Jesus *FOR* you, Jesus *IN* you, and Jesus *THROUGH* you for others.

Bill Cullen

Ephesians 2:8-10 ⁸*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—* ⁹*not by works, so that no one can boast.* ¹⁰*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Philippians 2:13 ¹³*for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

Part One – Jesus FOR Us

The Biblical Story

Part One focuses on the Biblical Narrative. It seeks to help people better see and understand the flow of God’s story and to know that God’s story is **FOR** them that they “*might believe...and that by believing they might have life in His name*” both *NOW and eternally*. (John 20:31)

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Biblical Eras

The following provides information regarding Biblical eras: approximate dates, significant people & events, where certain things are located in Scripture, things revealed about God and His character, things revealed about humankind and human nature, and how God’s plan (big picture) continues to unfold through them.

Questions for Reflection: In each era...

- What do we see and learn about God – His law, His justice, His mercy, His grace, His will, His heart? What words would you use to describe God? Why?
- What do we see and learn about humankind – human nature, inclinations/tendencies, attitudes, etc.? What words would you use to describe humankind? Why?
- How do you see God’s plan unfolding, and what hiccups, if any, do you notice? What does God do with the hiccups? How does God handle or respond to the hiccups?
- What do we learn about loving God and loving neighbor (Mt. 22:37-40; Jn. 13:34-35; Jn. 15:12,16-17; Ro. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 13:1-13; Gal. 5:13-14; Gal. 6:2; Col. 3:12-14; 1 Th. 4:9-10; Jas. 2:8; 1 Jn. 3:16-18; 1 Jn. 4:7-21)
- What parallels do you see between what Scripture says and/or suggests (the events, people, challenges, hopes, fears, etc.) and what our world today says and/or suggests? What does Scripture have to say to decisions you/we have to make today?
- What is suggested about being a part of God’s plan (God’s heilsgeschichte – “holy history/story” – His restoration story)? How is God seeking to incorporate you into His plan/story? What does it mean to be a citizen of the Kingdom and a disciple/follower/apprentice of Jesus? What are some significant verses guiding you? What are the expectations, responsibilities, resources, and benefits of citizenship in God’s Kingdom?

Biblical Era & Books of the Bible Most Associated with Each Era

- | | | |
|---|---|------------------------|
| • Pre-Patriarchal | (Genesis 1-11) | |
| • Patriarchal | (Genesis 12-50) | |
| • Exodus & Wilderness Wanderings | (Exodus – Deuteronomy) | |
| • The Conquest | (Joshua) | |
| • Judges | (Judges; Ruth; 1 Samuel 1-9) | |
| • United Kingdom | (1 Samuel 10-1 Kings 11; 1 Chronicles 1-2 Chronicles 9; Psalms; Proverbs; Song of Songs; Ecclesiastes) | |
| • Divided Kingdom | (2 Kings 18-25; 2 Chronicles 10-28; Obadiah; Jonah; Joel; Amos; Hosea; Micah; Isaiah) | |
| • Judah Alone | (2 Kings 12-2 Kings 17; 2 Chronicles 28-36; Isaiah; Habakkuk; Nahum; Zephaniah; Jeremiah; Lamentations) | |
| • Babylonian Exile | (Ezekiel, Daniel) | |
| • Post-Exilic | (Ezra; Nehemiah; Esther; Haggai; Zechariah; Malachi) | |
| • Intertestamental Period | (Deuterocanonical and Apocryphal books) | |
| • Jesus & the Gospels | (Matthew; Mark; Luke; John; Acts 1) | |
| • Acts & the Early Revelation) | | Church (Acts 2- |



Heilsgeschichte — God’s Story FOR Us

The Development and Unfolding of Covenant Theology

Galatians 3:17 (NIV) ¹⁷ What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.

Galatians 4:4-7 ⁴ But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵ to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons and daughters.

The Unfolding of God’s Redemptive Plan

My favorite German word is *heilsgeschichte*—“holy history” or “salvation story.” It is the story of God’s work in history to create, redeem, and restore His people. It is not merely history in general, but **the part of history in which we most clearly see God’s heart, His purposes, and His saving activity FOR us.**

This is not just *their* story—it is **our story**.
It is God’s story **FOR** humankind... **FOR** you... and **FOR** me.

I. Creation — God’s Original Design

The story begins with creation (Genesis 1–2).

God creates all things good. Humanity is created in His image, uniquely designed to live in a relationship of love, trust, and fellowship with Him and with one another.

This was God’s intention:

- to be known
 - to be trusted
 - to be loved
 - and to share His life with His people
-

II. The Fall — Where Things Went Wrong

In Genesis 3, that relationship is broken.

The serpent plants doubt:

“Can God really be trusted?” “Does He want what is best for us?”

Adam and Eve turn from trust in God to trust in self.

Sin enters the world—not simply as wrongdoing, but as **distrust of God’s love**.

This broken trust fractures:

- our relationship with God
- our relationship with one another
- and even our understanding of ourselves

What began in the garden becomes the human condition.

III. The Promise — God’s Plan Begins

Yet God does not abandon His creation.

Even in the midst of judgment, He gives a promise (Genesis 3:15):
a Redeemer will come.

From this point forward, the story is no longer simply about human failure—
it is about **God’s faithfulness to restore what was lost**.

IV. The Covenant — A People for God’s Purpose

God begins to work through a people.

With Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), God makes an **unconditional covenant**:
through him, **all nations will be blessed**

This is critical:

God’s plan is not only to restore individuals, but to work through a people to reach the world.

Through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the nation of Israel, God sought to:

- reveals His character
 - establishes His promises
 - and prepares the way for redemption
-



V. The Law — Revealing Our Need

Through Moses, God makes a **conditional covenant** of the Law and promises with consequences for disobedience.

The Law reveals:

- who God is (holy, just, good)
- and who we are (sinful, broken, in need)

The Law does not save—it **exposes our need to be saved**.

VI. The Kingdom — Promise and Failure

Through kings like David, God establishes a kingdom.

There are glimpses of what could be:

- justice
- worship
- alignment with God's heart

But again and again, the story reveals failure.

Even the best kings fall short.

The kingdom points forward to something greater:

a true and perfect King

VII. The Prophets — Calling and Promise

God sends prophets to:

- call His people back
- confront sin
- and renew hope

They speak both warning and promise:

- judgment for unfaithfulness
- and restoration through a coming Savior

The prophets begin to sharpen the expectation:

One is coming who will make all things right.

VIII. Exile and Return — Judgment and Hope

Because of persistent rebellion, God's people experience exile.

This is both:

- judgment upon sin
- and discipline meant to restore

Even in exile, God preserves His promise.

Afterward, the people return—but the deeper problem remains.

They are back in the land...

but still waiting for true restoration.

IX. Jesus — The Fulfillment

At just the right time, Jesus comes (Romans 5).

He is:

- the fulfillment of the promise
- the true Son of Abraham
- the perfect King
- the final Word

Where humanity failed, Jesus is faithful.

Where sin brought death, Jesus brings life.

Through His life, death, and resurrection:

- sin is atoned for
 - death is defeated
 - and the relationship with God is restored
-

X. The Church — Jesus' Work Continues Through Us

After His resurrection, Jesus sends His followers.

The mission continues:

- to proclaim the good news
- to make disciples
- to embody His love in the world

The Church becomes:

His body... His hands... His voice... His presence

XI. The Consummation — What Is Still to Come

The story is not yet finished.

Christ will return.

All things will be made new.

What was begun in creation...

broken in the fall...

redeemed through Christ...

will be fully restored.

XII. The Invitation

This is God's story.

And it is not merely something to understand—
it is something to enter into.

Through faith in Jesus:

- we are brought back into relationship with God
- we are transformed into His likeness
- and we are sent into His mission

I encourage students of Scripture to check out **The Bible Project** (<https://bibleproject.com/>). The Bible Project has excellent summary videos on every book of Scripture as well as many other topical videos on such things as “Baptism,” “How to read the Bible,” etc. You won’t regret becoming familiar with this invaluable resource.

Part Two – Jesus IN Us

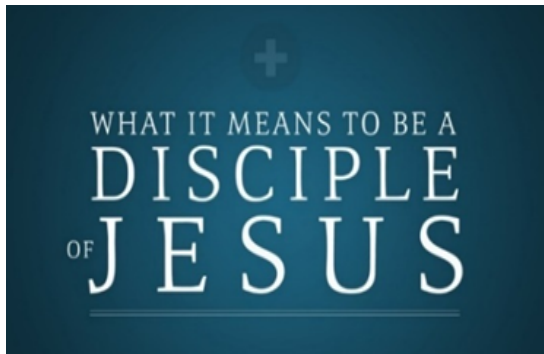
Discipleship & Formation

Using WORD (Scripture) and SACRAMENTS as primary sources, Part Two focus on the Holy Spirit forming Jesus **IN** us in order that through such formation we are increasingly being transformed into Jesus image—becoming like Him as we see and experience Him as He is.

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Disciple, Discipling, & Discipleship

Greek Word: μαθητής Transliteration: mathētēs

Learner – Follower

At the time of the writing of the New Testament, Rabbis (teachers) had disciples (students/followers). A disciple would not simply learn cognitive information from a Rabbi. A true disciple would learn to do what his or her Rabbi did, sharing the same heart, mind, and attitude of the Rabbi.

Being a disciple of Jesus means more than cognitive agreement with or belief in Jesus. It is more than having affection for Jesus. It is more than being a spectator *watching* Jesus and others in His employ engage the world (all people for whom Jesus came and died – *1 Tim 2:4; 1 Jn 2:2*). Being a disciple of Jesus is more than being an enthused fan or a cheerleader of Jesus. It involves more than piety, having a virtuously pure lifestyle. Being a disciple of Jesus implies activity on our part. It is more about what we DO than it is about what we DON'T DO (*Jn 13:34-35; Gal 5:6; Jas 4:17*).

To be a disciple of Jesus, a true follower, one must actually follow. To be a disciple of Christ one must be learning to do what Jesus does and to actively follow Him as He engages in mission, on the mission field, among the lost, the hurting, and even the rebellious. A true disciple doesn't merely learn "about" Jesus. A true disciple actually DOES mission and ministry WITH and THROUGH Jesus, with the heart, sensitivity, and demeanor of Jesus (*Jn 13:34-35; Jn 15:8,12,16-17*).

◆ A disciple is one who is learning to do and who does what his/her teacher does with the same heart and mind as that of the teacher. (*Thankfully, Jesus through His Spirit lives in us to live HIS love through us. Jn 15:5; Eph 3:20; Col 1:29*)

◆ Jesus when He calls His disciples, He tells them that they will become "fishers of men [women & children]" (*Mt 4:19*).

◆ To be Jesus' disciples is to be *people of mission*: following Jesus onto the mission field and ministering to those He came to seek and to save (*Mt 9:10-13; Lk 19:10*). We are not truly "followers" following Jesus if we are not with *Jesus on the mission field [be it locally or abroad] doing missional work*, be it as an invalid prayer laborer or by rolling up our sleeves for labor.

Jesus tells His disciples that the way people will know that they/we are His disciples is by their/our loving as He loves (*Jn 13:34-35; Jn 15:8,12,16-17*). Actively loving people is the defining characteristic of a disciple of Jesus (*1 Cor 13:13; Gal 5:6*).

HOW DOES JESUS LOVE ?

He loved by dying for



(*Ro 3:23-25; Ro 5:6-8; 1 Jn 3:16;*

He loves by coming for and helping/serving the poor, the sick, the hurting, the disenfranchised, the enslaved.



(*Mt 9:11-13; Mt 11:19; Mt 25:35-40; Lk 4:18*)
23

He loves by actively seeking out the lost.



(*Lk 15:1-7; Lk 19:10*)

HOW DOES JESUS LOVE THROUGH US?

- ◆ Jesus sends His disciples – you and me – to our families and neighbors (*Mk 5:19*).
- ◆ Jesus sends His disciples – you and me – on mission adventures (*Mt 10:1-8; Lk 9:1-2; Lk 10:1-3*).
- ◆ Jesus sends His disciples – you and me – into the world to be among and with hurting, needy, sin-filled people even as He was sent (*Jn 1:14; Mt 9:9-13; Mt 11:19; Lk 15:1-7; Jn 17:15-18; Acts 1:8*).
- ◆ Jesus sends His disciples – you and me – to bear much fruit (*Jn 15:8*).
- ◆ Jesus sends His disciples – you and me – to be ministers of reconciliation and His ambassadors of love in the world (*2 Cor 5:17-20*).
- ◆ Jesus sends His disciples – you and me – to complete what was lacking in His affliction (*Col 1:24-29*).
- ◆ Jesus sends His disciples – you and me – to make disciples – people who will obey Him in everything and who do what He did and now seeks to do through us (*Mt 28:19-20; Jn 17:15-18; Acts 1:8*).
- ◆ As His disciples we are to live lives “worthy of our calling” (*Eph 4:1,16; Col 1:10*).
- ◆ Washing feet (*Jn 13:12-17*).
- ◆ loving others as He has loved us [sacrificially, unconditionally without limits] (*Jn 13:34-35; Mk 10:42-45; Phil 2:3-8; 1 Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:11-12*).
- ◆ Filled with good works (*Mt 5:16; Mt 25:35-40; Eph 2:8-10; 2 Tim 3:15-17; Heb 10:24; 1 Jn 3:17-18*).
- ◆ Being kind, tenderhearted and forgiving of all just as He is with us (*Eph 4:32*).
- ◆ Making the most of every opportunity (*Eph 5:15-16; Gal 6:2,9-10; Col 4:5; Jas 4:17*).
- ◆ Being His witness and giving witness, being ministers of reconciliation (*Acts 1:8; Ro 10:14-15,17; 2 Cor 5:18-20; 1 Jn 1:1-4*).
- ◆ Loving more and more and more (*1 Th 4:9-10; 1 Cor 13:4-8; 1 Cor 16:14*).
- ◆ Having as a special concern: our language (*Mt 12:36-37; Eph 4:29; Col 4:6; Jas 1:19,22,26*)

**1 John 2:1-2 – My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.
But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.**

Verses for "Disciple, Discipling, & Discipleship"

(Using the "Generic Study Guide." Passages below are listed in the order they are found in the Bible. All Scripture quotes are taken from the NIV unless otherwise noted.)

___ **Matthew 4:19** ¹⁹ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

___ **Matthew 9:11-13** ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" ¹² On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³ But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

___ **Matthew 10:1-8** ¹ He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. ² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give."

___ **Matthew 11:19** ¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."' But wisdom is proved right by her actions."

___ **Matthew 12:36-37** ³⁶ But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. ³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

___ **Matthew 25:35-40** ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?' ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?' ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

___ **Matthew 28:19-20** ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

___ **Mark 5:19** ¹⁹ Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

___ **Mark 10:42-45** ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." freely give."

___ **Luke 4:18** ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,

___ **Luke 9:1-2** ¹ When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

___ **Luke 10:1-3** ¹ After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. ² He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are

few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.³ Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

___ **Luke 15:1-7**¹ Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him.² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."³ Then Jesus told them this parable:⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

___ **Luke 19:10**¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

___ **John 1:14**¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

___ **John 13:12-17**¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them.¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am.¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.¹⁶ I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

___ **John 13:34-35**³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

___ **John 15:8**⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

___ **John 17:15-18**¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

___ **Acts 1:8**⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

___ **Romans 3:23-25**²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—

___ **Romans 5:6-8**⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

___ **Romans 10:14-15,17**¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?¹⁵ And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" ...¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

___ **1 Corinthians 13:4-8**⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

___ **1 Corinthians 13:13**¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

___ **1 Corinthians 16:14** ¹⁴ Do everything in love.

___ **2 Corinthians 5:17-20** ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

___ **Galatians 5:6** ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

___ **Galatians 6:2,9-10** ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.... ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

___ **Ephesians 2:8-10** ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

___ **Ephesians 4:1,16** ¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.... ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

___ **Ephesians 4:29** ²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

___ **Ephesians 4:32** ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

___ **Ephesians 5:15-16** ¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

___ **Philippians 2:3-8** ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

___ **Colossians 1:24-29** ²⁴ Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. ²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— ²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

___ **Colossians 4:5** ⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

___ **Colossians 4:6** ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

___ **1 Thessalonians 4:9-10** ⁹ Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰ And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

___ **1 Timothy 2:3-4** ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

___ **2 Timothy 3:15-17** ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching,

rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

___ **Hebrews 10:24**²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

___ **James 1:19,22,26**¹⁹ My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,...²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says....²⁶ If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is... worthless.

___ **James 4:17**¹⁷ Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

___ **1 John 1:1-4**¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.⁴ We write this to make our joy complete.

___ **1 John 2:2**² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

___ **1 John 3:16**¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

___ **1 John 4:9-10**⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

___ **1 John 4:9-12**⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

How to Teach and Form Disciples

(Six Models for Faith Formation & Instruction)

If disciples are called not only to follow Jesus but also to **make disciples** (Mt. 28:19-20), then they must learn not only *what* to teach—but *how* to teach.

There is no single way to lead others in Scripture and formation. Different settings, people, and goals call for different approaches. What follows are several proven models for guiding others in learning, reflection, and transformation.

These are not competing methods—they are **tools**.

A wise disciple learns to use the right tool at the right time.

(Each model begins with an outcome-based objective)

1. The Relational Model

(Lyman Coleman)

Purpose

To help participants connect Scripture to their own life experience in a safe, honest environment.

How It Works

- This model begins with people—not information.
- Participants are invited to:
 - share perspectives
 - reflect on personal experiences
 - engage Scripture through their own story
- There are no “wrong answers” at the start—because the goal is engagement, not correction.

Basic Flow

- **Group Building**
Create a safe and welcoming environment
- **Getting Into the Text**
What does the passage say?
- **Getting Personally Involved**
Where does this connect with your life?
- **Identifying Learnings**
What are you taking away?

When to Use This Model

- When building trust in a new group
 - When working with people hesitant to speak
 - When helping people see that Scripture applies to real life
-

2. The Shared Praxis Model

(Thomas Groome)

Purpose

To help participants examine and reshape their beliefs and assumptions in light of Scripture and the Church.

How It Works

This model recognizes that everyone comes with:

- experiences
- biases
- prior understandings

It intentionally brings those into conversation with:

- Scripture
- tradition
- and one another

Five Movements

- **Naming**

What do you currently believe or assume?

- **Critical Reflection**

Why do you believe this?

- **The Story**

What does Scripture and the Church teach?

- **Dialogue**

How do these perspectives interact?

- **Vision**

What do you now believe—and how will you live differently?

When to Use This Model

- When discussing complex or debated topics
 - When addressing deeply held assumptions
 - When growth requires reflection, not just information
-

3. The Law–Gospel (Theological) Model

(Richard Caemmerer)

Purpose

To clearly present the problem of sin (Law) and the solution in Christ (Gospel).

How It Works

- This model reflects a central biblical pattern:
 - The Law reveals our need
 - The Gospel reveals God’s provision
-

Four Movements

- **Hook** (Motivation)
 - Engage interest and connect to real life
 - **The Malady** (Law)
 - What is wrong? What does God require?
 - **The Rescue** (Gospel)
 - What has God done in Christ?
 - **Response**
 - How do we now live in light of grace?
-

When to Use This Model

- When teaching core Christian doctrine
 - When addressing sin, guilt, or brokenness
 - When emphasizing grace and assurance
-

4. The CASE Model

(Bill Cullen)

Purpose

To guide learners through a complete process of transformation—from knowledge to action. This model reflects how God uses His Word not only to inform us, but to form and send us.

The CASE Flow

- **Know**
Acquire understanding of God’s Word (2 Timothy 3:15–17)
- **Convict / Confess**
Experience the Law exposing sin and leading to repentance

- **Assure / Absolve**
Receive the Gospel—God’s forgiveness in Christ
 - **Stretch / Inspire**
Be encouraged and challenged by Christ’s presence
 - **Empower**
Experience the Spirit’s enabling for new life
 - **Apply**
Live it out—become a doer of the Word (James 1:22)
-

When to Use This Model

- For full-length Bible studies
 - When you want movement from head → heart → life
 - When forming disciples, not just informing learners
-

5. The Five “E’s” Model

(Cynde Kuck)

Purpose

To create an engaging and progressive learning experience.

The Five Steps

- Engage
Capture attention and interest
 - Explore
Introduce the text and initial observations
 - Explain
Clarify meaning and understanding
 - Elaborate
Apply and expand understanding
 - Evaluate
Reflect on learning and response
-

When to Use This Model

- In structured classroom settings
 - With learners who benefit from clear progression
 - When teaching new or unfamiliar material
-

6. The HBLT Model

(Lawrence Richards)

Purpose

To keep Bible study simple, focused, and actionable.

The Flow

- **Hook**
Why does this matter?
 - **Book**
What does the text say?
 - **Look**
What does it mean?
 - **Took**
What will I do?
-

When to Use This Model

- In shorter studies
 - In informal settings
 - When you need clarity and simplicity
-

Choosing the Right Model

- Not every situation calls for the same approach.
- A good discipler learns to ask:
 - What do these people need right now?
 - Understanding?
 - Reflection?
 - Conviction?
 - Encouragement?
 - Action?
- Then chooses the model accordingly.

The CASE Model ***A Pathway for Transformation***

Many Bible studies inform.
Some inspire.

But unfortunately far fewer actually **transform**.

2 Timothy 3:15-17 ...from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

The CASE model is designed to move a person:

From simply knowing God's Word

- to being changed by it
- to living it out in everyday life.

This is not just a method for learning.
It is a pathway for **formation**.

The Big Picture

God does not give His Word merely to increase our knowledge.

He uses it to:

- reveal truth
- expose our hearts
- assure us of His grace
- strengthen us by His Spirit
- and send us into the world

The CASE model follows that movement.

The CASE Flow

1. KNOW

What does God say?

We begin with Scripture.

- Not opinions.
- Not assumptions.
- Not what we already think.

We ask:

- What does the text actually say?
- What is happening here?
- What is God revealing about Himself?

“All Scripture is God-breathed...” (2 Timothy 3:16)

2. CONVICT / CONFESS

Where does this confront me?

God's Word does not leave us neutral.

It exposes:

- sin
- misplaced trust
- self-reliance
- false beliefs

This is the work of the Law.

We respond with honesty:

- Where am I out of alignment with God?
- What do I need to confess?

This is not meant to crush us—but to bring us to truth.

3. ASSURE / ABSOLVE

What has God done for me?

Now comes the Gospel.

God does not leave us in conviction—He meets us with grace.

In Christ:

- sin is forgiven
- guilt is removed
- we are restored to relationship

We ask:

- What promise of God speaks here?
- What has Christ done for me in this situation?

This is where hearts are healed.

4. STRETCH / INSPIRE

What is God calling me into?

Grace does not leave us unchanged.

God invites us into:

- deeper trust
- new obedience
- a transformed way of living

We begin to see:

- what is possible in Christ
- what God desires to grow in us

This is where vision is formed.

5. EMPOWER

How does God enable me?

We are not sent out alone.

God gives His Spirit to:

- strengthen
- guide
- equip

We ask:

- Where do I need God's help?
- What step feels beyond me?

Transformation is not self-effort—it is Spirit-enabled.

6. APPLY

What will I actually do?

This is where many studies stop short.

We move from intention to action.

We ask:

- What specific step will I take this week?
- Who will I speak to, serve, or forgive?
- What will change in my daily life?

“Do not merely listen to the word... Do what it says.” (James 1:22)

How It All Fits Together

The movement is intentional:

Know → Convict → Assure → Stretch → Empower → Apply
Head → Heart → Life

Why This Matters

- Without this kind of movement:
- knowledge stays intellectual
- conviction becomes guilt
- grace becomes abstract
- application becomes optional

The CASE model is meant to hold it all together.

How to Use This Model

You can use CASE:

- in personal Bible study
- in small groups
- in teaching settings

- in mentoring relationships

You do not always need to emphasize every step equally.

But over time, all six should be present.

A Word of Caution

This is not a formula.

You are not trying to “force” outcomes.

The Holy Spirit is the one who:

- convicts
- assures
- transforms

The CASE model simply helps you **cooperate with what God is already doing**.

Bottom Line

God’s Word is not just meant to be understood.

It is meant to:

- change who we are
- and how we live

The CASE model helps make that happen—intentionally.

•

A Generic Bible Study Guide

"The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me." – Martin Luther



“Speak Lord, Your Servant Is Listening” (1 Samuel 3:10).

***Underline or highlight words you find particularly significant in the passages.
As they apply, complete the sentence stems below: (feel free to be selective)***

1. The audience addressed & the context of the passage(s), both historically and within the chapter, suggest...
2. A common denominator that seems to run through many of the passages is....
3. A related or some related Scripture passage(s) that come to mind are....
4. These passages seem to align or not align with the historical teaching of church of or in...
5. These passages seem to align or not align with contemporary society’s thinking of or in...
6. These passages would have me understand my vocation of loving my neighbor to mean....
7. A new or renewed thought for me is....
8. In at least one verse, something I found to be unique, surprising and/or challenging is....
9. As I reflect upon these passages, a question I have is....
10. If God is serious here and means for me to take these passages seriously,....
11. In light of these passages “living a life worthy of my calling/vocation/mission” means....
12. In the light of what God is telling/showing me in these passages I think, feel, and/or believe....
13. In and by the empowering grace of God I will....

If through a passage you feel God... (explain).

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| i. convicting you, ----- | mark it “C”. |
| ii. disturbing you, ----- | mark it “D”. |
| iii. inspiring or challenging you, ----- | mark it “I”. |
| iv. forgiving and/or comforting you, ----- | mark it “F.” |
| v. guiding you, giving you direction, ----- | mark it “G”. |
| vi. sending or commissioning you for mission or service, ----- | mark it “S”. |
| • To/for whom or what are you being sent _____ | |
| vii. empowering you, ----- | mark it “E”. |
| viii. The passage that is the most meaningful for you today----- | mark it *. |

God Seeks to Make a CASE

Through Scripture God Seeks to... (2 Tim 3:15-17)

(make/birth—teach—rebuke—correct—train)

CASE = **C**onvict us of our sin
Assure us of His grace and forgiveness
Stretch us for growth (transformation)
Empower us for action

Bill Cullen’s Goals in and for Bible study:

1. Participants experience the presence and touch of God.
2. Participants leave wanting to return.
3. Participants leave wanting to respond to God’s touch.
4. Participants experience being a part of the Body of Christ.
5. Participants gain some sort of Biblical knowledge and/or insight.

Remember the best interpreter of Scripture is other Scripture

Part Three – Jesus THROUGH Us

Practices & Vocation –

Martin Luther wrote: “God doesn’t need your good works, but your neighbor does. As disciples are increasingly transformed into Jesus image through His indwelling Jesus wants to use His disciples to be His Body, His hands, His feet, His voice, His presence bringing love, redeeming, and restorative grace to people in need of it. Jesus’ work of justification was completed on the cross, but His work of proclamation through and deed is still being completed through His disciples, through His body the church.

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JESUS For Us, In Us, Through Us

JESUS and the Christian life are about three things: (1) Jesus FOR us – justification/salvation, (2) Jesus IN us sanctification/transformation, and (3) Jesus THROUGH us for others mission/vocation.

(If you are using this as a part of a group or even by yourself, it is recommended that you read, reflect upon and discuss one section at a time using questions on page 47 or using the Generic Study Guide on page 39.)

___ Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)

² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning [discounting] its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus For Us! – Justification (Salvation & Restoration)

___ **John 3:16-17 (NIV)** ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

___ **Romans 3:24-25 (NIV)** ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—

___ **Romans 5:7-8 (NIV)** ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

___ **2 Corinthians 5:17,21 (NIV)** ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!... ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

___ **Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)** ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

___ **1 Timothy 2:3-6 (NIV)** ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time.

___ **Titus 3:4-6 (NIV)** ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,

___ **1 John 2:1-2 (NIV)** ¹ My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

___ **1 John 1:7-10 (NIV)** ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

Jesus In Us! – Sanctification (Identity & Character Formation)

___ **Romans 6:3-4,11 (NIV)** ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life....¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

___ **2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV)** ¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

___ **2 Corinthians 4:10-11 (NIV)** ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

___ **2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)** ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

___ **Galatians 2:20 (NIV)** ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

___ **Galatians 4:19 (NIV)** ¹⁹ My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,

___ **Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV)** ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

___ **Ephesians 3:20 (NIV)** ²⁰ [He—JESUS] is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

___ **Philippians 2:3-8 (NIV)** ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

___ **2 Peter 1:3-4 (NIV)** ³ His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Jesus Through Us! – Mission & Vocation (Purpose)

___ **Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)** ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

___ **John 13:34-35 (NIV)** ³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

___ **John 15:4-5,8,16-17 (NIV)** ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.... ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.... ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

___ **John 17:15-18 (NIV)** ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

___ **Acts 1:8 (NIV)** ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

___ **2 Corinthians 5:17-20 (NIV)** ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

___ **Galatians 6:2,9-10 (NIV)** ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ....⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

___ **Romans 6:13 (NIV)** ¹³ Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

___ **Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)** ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

___ **Ephesians 4:1,16 (NIV)** ¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.... ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

___ **Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV)** ¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

___ **Colossians 1:24,28-29 (NIV)** ²⁴ Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.... ²⁸ We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

___ **Colossians 3:12-14 (NIV)** ¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

___ **Colossians 4:5-6 (NIV)** ⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

___ **1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 (NIV)** ⁹ Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰ And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

___ **1 Timothy 4:14 (NIV)** ¹⁴ Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

The Process of Transformation

___ **Luke 9:23 (NIV)** ²³ Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

___ **Romans 12:2 (NIV)** ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

___ **1 Corinthians 15:31 (NIV)** ³¹ I die every day--I mean that, brothers--just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.

___ **2 Corinthians 4:10-11 (NIV)** ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

___ **Philippians 4:6-8 (NIV)** ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

___ **2 Timothy 3:15-17 (NIV)** ¹⁵ ...from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

___ **Colossians 3:16 (NIV)** ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

___ **2 Timothy 1:6-7 (NIV)** ⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

___ **Hebrews 10:22-25 (NIV)** ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

___ **Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV)** ¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

___ **1 John 1:7-9 (NIV)** ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Our Empowerment

We can because Jesus can and Jesus lives in us to do through us.

Jesus does not ask us to live our lives *for* Him, rather He seeks to live His life *through* us. When the Holy Spirit births faith in us the Spirit is in fact birthing Jesus in us (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; Galatians 3:27) with all the power of His divine nature (Ephesians 3:20; 2 Peter 1:3-4). But just as a human baby is not developed and its muscle and mental faculties are undeveloped so is the Christ in us undeveloped in us. As the Spirit works in us to bring us to greater maturity, the Jesus in us becomes more fully formed (Galatians 4:19). As Jesus increasingly is formed in we are increasingly transformed into His image (2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 3:1-2) bearing the fruit of His indwelling presence and character (John 15:4-5; Galatians 5:22-23). We do not *work for* our salvation. It is a gift we already have (Ephesians 2:8-9), but we do or ought to *work out/live out* the salvation we have as Jesus works in and through us to accomplish His good and loving purposes (Philippians 2:12-13), bearing the fruit of His presence and character (Colossians 1:28-29).

___ **John 15:4-5 (NIV)** ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

___ **Acts 1:8 (NIV)** ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

___ **2 Corinthians 3:4-6 (NIV)** ⁴ Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. ⁵ Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. ⁶ He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

___ **2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV)** ¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

___ **2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)** ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

___ **Galatians 2:20 (NIV)** ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

___ **Galatians 3:27 (NIV)** ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

___ **Galatians 4:19 (NIV)** ¹⁹ My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,

___ **Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV)** ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control...

___ **Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)** ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

___ **Ephesians 3:20 (NIV)** ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

___ **Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV)** ¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

___ **Colossians 1:28-29 (NIV)** ²⁸ We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

___ **2 Timothy 1:6-7 (NIV)** ⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

___ **2 Peter 1:3-4 (NIV)** ³ His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

___ **1 John 3:1-2 (NIV)** ¹ How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!... ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

For Reflection, Sharing, and Discussion

- a. As I reflect upon these passages, a question I have is....
- b. A new or renewed thought for me is....
- c. In at least one verse something I found to be unique, surprising and/or challenging is....
- d. To what degree do these passages align with contemporary society's thinking?
- e. The section most meaningful to me at this time is: (a) "Jesus For Me," (b) "Jesus In Me," (c) "Jesus Through Me," (d) "The Process of Transformation," (e) "Our Empowerment"?
- f. If God is serious here and means for me to take these passages seriously,....
- g. In the light of what God is telling/showing me in these passages I think, feel, and/or believe....
- h. In and by the empowering grace of God I will....





Each One Reach One—Five Point Friend & Missional Communities

Biblical Mandate & Rationale for Having

At His ascension Jesus gave His followers the GREAT COMMISSION “Go make disciples of all people...” (Mt. 28:19). On the eventful night before He was crucified in His High Priestly prayer Jesus prays “¹⁵My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (Jn. 17:15-18).

Also, on that eventful Maundy Thursday Jesus in the upper room tells His disciples “³⁴A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Jn. 13:34-35) and “¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other” (Jn. 15:16-17).

Mt. Olive and Concordia Lutheran Churches have said that we believe God has called us to win the people of the greater Rockford area for/with Jesus. Mt. Olive’s motto/mission statement is “**Loving People to Jesus.**” We strive to do just that through our *worship services, our education programs, our youth and children ministries* (e.g., *youth activities and servant trips, Christian Arts Institute, Band Camp, Christian Arts Camp*), through *Grief Share* and our ministries to/with *Brookview School, Carpenter’s Place, Rockford Rescue Mission, and Youth for Christ*). These are great, each meaningfully touching the lives of people. For each of these I believe God is saying “Well done, good and faithful servant.” However, St. Paul also writes to us “⁹Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more” (1 Th. 4:9-10). (Highlights added)

To assist us/you in “loving more and more” we encourage everyone in our worshipping community age 12 to 112 to have a “Five-Point Friend.” The tool below is the brainstorm of my good friend Pastor Greg Finke founder of Dwelling 1:14.

The Tool: The Five-Point Friend

Start with one person or one family.

Not many. One.

Think of them as your **Five-Point Friend**:

Pray (Daily)

1. Pray for them by name.

Ask God to open doors and soften hearts—including yours.

2. Connect (Weekly)

Have real conversations.

Not projects—friendship.

3. Share Life (Quarterly)

Spend time together. (e.g., Have a meal together, go golfing, play tennis_

Let your lives overlap.

4. Serve Together (A Few Times a Year)

Do something meaningful side by side.
Shared mission builds deeper trust.

5. Speak (As God Opens the Door)

- Don't force it.
- But when the moment comes—speak of Jesus:
 - His forgiveness
 - His presence
 - His power to make life new

What You Are Watching For

As you walk with this person, pay attention:

- What do they actually believe about God?
- What questions are they asking (even indirectly)?
- What fears are shaping their life?
- Where do they feel something is missing?
- How can you show real, self-giving love?

This is not a formula.

This is a relationship shaped by the love of Christ.

What Is a Missional Neighborhood?

Your missional neighborhood is simply:

- The people and places you already encounter regularly.
God has already placed you there.
 - So the question is not:
“Where should I go?”
 - But:
“What is God already doing here—and how do I join Him?”
-

The Five Missional Practices

Wherever you are, live this way:

1. **Look** – Where is God already at work?
2. **Listen** – Let God speak through His Word
3. **Engage** – Build real relationships
4. **Do Good** – Act when opportunities arise
5. **Pray** – Stay attentive to God's leading

Bottom Line

This is not about adding something new to your life.
It is about seeing your life differently.

Suggest: Meet regular as a *Missional Community* for encouragement, support, and accountability. **Share:**

- (1) What God has been doing.
- (2) What God recently has shown you in His Word.
- (3) With whom you are building relationship(s).
- (4) How you recently have been a blessing to someone.
- (5) Who you are pray for and how can we support you in prayer.

Our Job Is Not to be Successful. Our Job Is to Be Faithful. As We Are Faithful, God Will Be Successful.

___ **John 15:4-5** “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

___ **Ephesians 3:20-21** “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

___ **Luke 21:12-18** “But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. ¹³ This will result in your being witnesses to them. ¹⁴ But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. ¹⁵ For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ All men will hate you because of me. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish.”

As We Go...

___ **Micah 6:8** “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

___ **Matthew 10:8** “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”

___ **Romans 12:9-18,21** “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.... ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

___ **1 Corinthians 13:4-8,13** “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails.... ¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

___ **Galatians 5:6,13-14** “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.... ¹³ You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. ¹⁴ The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

___ **Galatians 6:9** “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

___ **Ephesians 4:29,32** “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen... ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

___ **Philippians 2:3-8** “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

___ **Colossians 3:12-14** “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

___ **Colossians 4:5-6** “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

___ **2 Timothy 2:16,23-25** “Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.... ²³ Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. ²⁴ And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵ Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth....”

___ **James 1:19** “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

___ **James 4:17** “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.

___ **1 Peter 3:15** “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,”

___ **1 John 3:16-18** “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”

Mark And Discuss the Above Passages

1. Mark the passage that most speaks to you with an exclamation point “!”
2. Mark any of the passages that raise questions for you or that you want to discuss with a question mark “?”
3. Mark the three passages you believe God wants you most to hear and remember at this time with a star. ★

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” – Mark 4:9

“I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’” – **Isaiah 6:8**

Are You Ready to Join Isaiah?

Which, if any, of these things is God asking YOU to raise YOUR hand:

- ___ Participating in “Each One Reach One” (Five-point Friend)?
- ___ Serving in “Labors of Love”?
- ___ Being a Part of a Missional Community?
- ___ Serving the Brookview School Community?
- ___ Helping with Youth for Christ?
- ___ Serving at Carpenter’s Place?
- ___ Supporting Rockford Rescue Mission?
- ___ Whatever and Whomever God Lays on Your Heart?

“I am only one, but I am one.

I cannot do everything, but I can do something.

And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do.”

Edward Everett Hale

Appendix

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NOTE: Portions of historical summaries, structural outlines, and background materials were compiled, adapted, and edited from a variety of educational and digital resources. All material has been reviewed, revised, and integrated for the purposes of this manual.

Appendix One

I. Heilsgeschichte Unfolded Through Biblical Eras

This article structures the Biblical narrative in the eras of the Bible. It does this in order to provide the reader with a structure seeing and understanding how the pieces (people and events) of God's story fit together as God's overarching plan FOR humankind unfolds in order the relationship between God and His creation, broken in the fall, might be restored.

The narrative begins with the **Pre-patriarchal Era**. This is time before Abraham. In the Bible God creates everything good with humankind being create special to share and enjoy a special love/trust relationship with their Creator and with each other. This is God's original intent for His creation, particularly for humankind (Gen. 1-2). Satan, in the form of a serpent, cast suspicion on God's love suggesting to Adam and Eve that God was holding on them and they should look out for themselves. Satan suggestion cause Adam and Eve to doubt (distrust) God's love. This is where things went wrong (Gen. 6). This destroys God's whole reason for creating people in His image with the capacity for special love/trust relationship with Him and with each other. Sadly, this "original sin," the tendency to distrust God and to something or someone else (most often self) now has become a part humankind's DNA and is past on from generation to generation (Gen. 4-11). God, however, still loves His creation of humankind, of people. Rather than give up on them (us), He develops a plan to redeem and restore them (us). In the Jewish Scriptures and the Christian Bible we see God's develop and unfold (how God determined to fit things). The plan reaches its climax in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior. This Jesus, this Savior, is none other than God Himself. In the rest of the Bible we learn how the plan unfolds. We also learn that God has a part for all Christians, including us, in His plan.

Following the Pre-patriarchal era is the **Patriarchal Era** (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). The Patriarchal Era begins with the call of Abram (Abraham) (Gen. 12:1-3). The seed of the plan had already been planted in Gen. 3:15. God called Abraham to be the father (actually, a forefather) of the Israelite people who were to be a blessing to nations (Gen. 12:3).

First, the Israelites were to be a blessing to the nations by giving witness to the goodness and love of God so that the nations/the world might again come to know, love, trust, and obey God. In other words, they were to be a "priestly nation" mediating God to the world (Ex. 29:6; Is. 42:6; Is. 49:9). In the NT Jesus would task His followers, the early church and those who flow Him today with the same task which we are to accomplish through both our words and our deeds (Mt. 4:19; Mt. 5:16; Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 5:19; Jn. 13:34-35; Jn. 15:8,16-17; Jn. 17:15-18; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:17-20; 1 Tim. 2:3-6; 1 Pe. 2:9; 1 Pe. 3:15; 1 Jn. 1:1-3; 1 Jn. 4:7-12).

Second, the Israelites are to be a blessing by producing the seed promised in Genesis 3:15, namely, Jesus. Jesus (**FOR** Us) would be born of Mary, an Israelite virgin, through the work of the God the Father in the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:26-35). Abraham became the father of Isaac (Gen. 21:1-3; Isaac becomes the father of Jacob (Gen. 25:26). Jacob's name is changed to Israel (Gen. 32:28) and Jacob fathers twelve sons through whom the twelve tribes of Israel come. Judah's fourth son is Judah (Gen. 29:35), and Jesus, generations later, will be born of the tribe of Judah.

The Book of Genesis and the Patriarchal Era end with the Israelites in Egypt. The second era **the Exodus and the Wilderness Wanderings**. After 400 years in Egypt, the Israelites while still believing in Yahweh (although not yet knowing God as Yahweh, but as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), had also come to believe in a number of Egyptian made gods. In Egypt, the Israelites had become a people who were under oppression and a people who were being corrupted. (They had always been a faulty people, but in Egypt they were becoming even more so.) God calls Moses (Ex. 3-4), identifies Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 3:6), and as Yahweh “I AM who I AM” (Ex. 3:14).

Moses and the Israelites leave Egypt, but they end up spending 40 years wandering in the wilderness because of their lack of trust in Yahweh God. God spends this 40 years covenanting with the Israelites (Ex. 19-23) and wooing them, courting them as His bride (Jer. 2:2; Hos 2:14-20). Throughout this time God has the challenge of both helping Israel unlearn some things and teaching them new things. He seeks to refine them so that they are able to be the “people of God” God has called them to be, so that they (Israel) can give witness to the goodness and love of God to the nations **FOR** the nations as God loves and desires them to be His people as well.

At the end of Moses life they are camped near the Jordan River ready to enter the promised land. They do so under the leadership of Joshua. This begins the **Conquest Era**. With God’s help, Joshua proves a capable leader and wins battles with the inhabitants of Canaan consistently on three major fronts. Canaan is conquered and the land of Canaan is divided between the tribes of Israel.

The next is the **Era of the Judges**. This arguably Israel’s darkest era as “everyone is doing what is right in his own eyes” (Jdg. 21:25), rather than what was right in God’s eyes. The Israelites were wayward children (this they will prove to be throughout their history—that sin DNA has not been eradicated). The cycle that is repeated over and over is: (1) Israel would be exceedingly rebellious and wayward, (2) God would discipline through oppression by other nations, (3) Israel would repent and cry out to God for help, (4) God would raise up a Judge (basically a military leader who would provide deliverance), (5) there would be a short time of peace. Israel at this point is not a nation, but a tribal confederation, sometimes getting along with their kinsman, and sometimes not.

The next era is the **United Kingdom** under Saul, David, and Solomon. If the time of the Judges was Israel’s darkest era. The time of the United Kingdom was probably its brightest era. Israel is far from perfect, but God blesses them because even though they were NOT the light to the nations God desired them to be, they were pretty faithful in acknowledging God to be the one true God. That acknowledgement began to blur under Solomon who had many foreign wives for whom he had temples built for their foreign gods. Two highlights: (1) during this time God promises David the Messiah would come from his line (2 Sam. 7), and (2) Solomon had the Temple built (1 Kings 6).

While Solomon is considered a good and godly king, he still did some unpopular and ungodly things. To support all his many and expensive building projects, he heavily taxed the people and he had forced labor. When Rehoboam, his son, became king, the ten northern tribes approached Rehoboam saying that Solomon had treated them rather harshly, but if he, Rehoboam, would let up on them they would gladly serve him. Rather than heed their request, Rehoboam imposed harsher measures (1 Kings 12:1-20, and the ten tribes revolted under the leadership of Jeroboam (no relation to Rehoboam) and the ten tribes formed the Northern Kingdom, also called Israel, and at times referred to as Samaria (1 Kings 12:16-20). Rehoboam stayed king of the Southern Kingdom, now called Judah.

We now have the **Era of the Divided Kingdom**. God promised Jeroboam a kingdom as great as David's (1 Kings 11:29-33). Jeroboam, however, made one gigantic mistake. Not trusting God's promise to give him a kingdom as great as David's, he feared that if his people continued to attend religious festivals in Jerusalem they would eventually reunite with Judah. To prevent this, Jeroboam had shrines built on high places as Bethel and Dan for his people to worship (1 Kings 12:26-33). Whether it was intentional or unintentional, the worship on the "high places" was too much like the surrounding pagan religions and it soon led the people into idolatry as they intermixed the worship of Yahweh with the worship of other gods. All of the kings of the Northern Kingdom/Israel in 1 Kings and 2 Kings are declared to be evil because "walked in the sins of Jeroboam leading Israel astray" (1 Kings 15:26)—meaning they led their people into idolatry because they maintained the shrines at Dan and Bethel. In the books of 1 & 2 Kings, kings are considered good or bad, not by their accomplishments, but by their faithfulness to Yahweh God. If a king led people to Yahweh God, he was considered good. If he led people into idolatry, he was considered bad. Judah, the Southern Kingdom, had some good kings and some bad ones. Israel had only bad kings, and in 722 BC Israel, the Northern Kingdom, would be conquered by the Assyrians, never to become a kingdom again (2 Kings 17:1-6).

The Northern Kingdom falling to the Assyrians brings us to the next era, **Judah Alone**. In this era Judah again will have both good and bad Kings. Although the kings will be bad, it had two very good reform kings: Hezekiah and Josiah. They are considered very good because of the extensive work they did in ridding Judah of idolatry. Hezekiah's reform was pretty much confined to Jerusalem and surrounding territory. Josiah's work was much more extensive as he sought to rid all of Judah of idolatry and even extend his efforts into regions that had been part of the Northern Kingdom. Sadly, both Hezekiah's and Josiah's reform efforts lasted only during their lifetime. Their off-spring returned quickly mixing the worship of Yahweh with that of worshipping other gods. Judah fell to Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. This led to two deportations of Judah's leading citizens and most promising citizens. The first deportation occurred in 597 BC and the second occurred in 586 BC.

Bottom line: Throughout most of their history the Israelites had failed to be the witness and blessing of God that God had called and intended them to be. They had been a "stiff-neck and stubborn people" (2 Kings 17:14)

The next era is the **Exilic Era** when a large number of the most prominent and most promising Jews had been exiled to Babylon, an exile which would last 70 years (Jer. 25:11-12). This was a time of painful questions and deep soul-searching for the Jews. They struggled with the questions: "If we are God's chosen people, why are we here? How did we get here?" They would conclude: "We have neglected the covenant." Their answer was true. In further pondering, some of the Jews, particularly those of priestly bearing would stress: "We have neglected the temple with its rituals and sacrifices." Others would stress we have neglected the Law, meaning not only the Ten Commandments, but all 613 laws found in a careful search of the whole Torah. The answer, "We have neglected the temple" planted the seed for the rise of the Jewish Sect of Sadducees" which would take form during the Intertestamental Era and be prevalent in the Jesus Era. The answer, "We have neglected the Law" planted the seed for the rise of the Jewish Sect of Pharisees" which would take form during the Intertestamental Era and be prevalent in the Jesus Era. In the Book of Daniel written during the Exilic Era we find two of the most powerful examples of what it meant to be a faithful Jew. In Daniel 3 we have the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. In Daniel 3:16-18 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego give one of the most powerful statements I personally can imagine,

“O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

The other powerful example is Daniel in the Lion’s den in Daniel 6.

*Note: The Jews in exile were not treated poorly. Jews like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and Daniel were given positions of high authority. Daniel was basically second in command under the rule of four different rulers or kings. They did not try to force their religion on the Babylonians or later the Persians. They gave witness to their God and their faith simply by being faithful to Yahweh God. They went along to get along as long as going along would not compromise their faith. However, at the moment go along meant compromise, they refuse to go along. They trusted God, and were willing to sacrifice their lives if God saw it to be so fit. They embodied the teaching Paul would share in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22. These Jews embodied “being a light to lighten the Gentiles” (Is. 49:6). They were fulfilling God’s calling of Abraham and his descendants the Israelite people.

The **Post-Exilic Era** is the next identifiable Biblical era. This was an era of reconstruction. Babylon and Israel as well as the Biblical world were now under the control of Persia. In some way not explained in Scripture God moved Cyrus to release the Jews in exile and allow them to return to Israel (Ezra 1:1). Under the leadership Zerubbabel among others many of the exilic Jews returned to Israel, while some chose to stay in Babylon (as I mentioned, the Jews were not treated poorly in Babylon. It was just it was not their homeland, nor was it God’s “promised land”).

The post-exilic Jews who returned home returned with high hopes and great expectation. They were met by many challenges, setbacks, and disappointments. They were in need of considerable encouragement, support, direction, general spiritual and organizational instruction, and leadership. Over the course of the next 100 to 150 years (actual dates are disputed among Biblical scholarship) God provided these through such people as Nehemiah, Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, later Malachi. Nehemiah was Governor on two different occasions. Ezra was a priest and teacher. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were prophets. Eventually the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt to where Jerusalem began a “safe place.” A new temple was built, and the Law was again made known. Change and re-adjustment did not come easy, but God had not given-up on His people. He was intent and persistent in molding the Jews into instruments of His love and bless.

For the **Intertestamental and Maccabean Era** most Protestant Bibles are silent. In the Bible of the Roman Catholics we have the Apocrypha, although the information in it is more historical than it is spiritual. Alexander the Great has a short but significant reign conquering nearly all of the Biblical world. He took the throne from his father Philip of Macedon in 336 BC at the age of 20 and died in 323 BC at the age of 32. Upon his death his kingdom was divided between four of his general. Historically, the two general who played into Israel’s history were Seleucid and Ptolemy. Seleucid based out of Syria and Ptolemy operated out of Egypt. Both empires would compete for Israel and the trade routes through Israel. When Antiochus IV Epiphanes became king of the Seleucid empire in 175 BC, the Seleucid empire was in control of Israel. One of Antiochus’ major goals was to Hellenize (impose Greek culture and religion) upon his empire. He outlawed the worship of Yahweh and the practice of Judaism, and he ordered the worship of Zeus. When a Jew tried to sacrifice a pig to a foreign god, Mattathias, a Jewish priest, stopped him and then Mattathias killed a Greek envoy. Mattathias and

his sons then went into hiding and along with other Jewish faithful formed army of resistance. The army was headed by his son Judas and used guerilla tactics to resist the Seleucid forces. Judas became known as Judas Maccabees meaning “the hammer.” In 164 BC Judas Maccabeus was able to regain Jerusalem and rededicated the Temple. Jews to this day celebrate this event in the festival of Hanukkah. This began the Hasmonaean Dynasty with it first king/ruler being another son of Mattathias, Simon. Israel will be an independent state until 63 BC when Pompey and Rome step in to settle a dispute in leadership. Antigonus III will be the last of the Hasmonaean ruler before Rome install Herod the Great as King in 37 BC. In order to gain the support of the people he was to govern, he marries the Hasmonaean princess Mariamne, the granddaughter of a former king.

This brings us to the Era of Jesus and the Gospels. John Bright, an OT scholar says that when Jesus was born the true Kingdom (reign) of God had been reduced to a Kingdom of one, that being Jesus. Jesus was the true presence and reign of God, making the person and the will of God known in truth and purity (Lk. 4:18-21; Jn. 1:14-18). Jesus, in the Gospel, is portrayed as prophet – “Thus says the Lord” (e.g., Mt 5-7), priest – our atoning sacrifice for sin (Jn. 3:16; Jn. 12:23-33). and king (Jn. 18:37; Jn. 19:21-22). In the Gospel the teacher FOR us, FOR me, He is priest offering sacrifice and being sacrifice FOR us, FOR me, He is our king, king FOR us, my king, king FOR me. In the Gospels the Gospel writers do not want us to simply know about Jesus. They want to actually introduce us to Jesus. They would have dialogue with Jesus in their writings, allowing Jesus in His words to speak to us personally, and inviting us to dialogue back through prayer and meditation.

Getting personal for a moment: I would especially invite reader to spend time dialoguing with Jesus:

(1) As they read and ponder Jesus speaking His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, and
(2) Through Jesus’ upper room actions, discourse, and prayer in John 13-17. I read John 13-17 as being Jesus last will and testimony, the legacy with which He seeks to bestow upon and with which He seeks to leave His disciples/me. In His actions, discourse, and prayer I see, hear, and experience Jesus assuming the posture of servant as He washes feet and invites me to do the same His instruction to love as He love, unconditionally and sacrificial, and assurance that such love will be my greatest testimony to others regarding Him that I can give. He promises me that He is preparing an eternal place for me and will return to take me there. He promises me His Holy Spirit who will be here for me teaching, convicting, strengthening, guiding, empowering and more. He promises a peace that transcends circumstances. He will care for me and nurture me as a gardener cares for and nurtures a garden and that as I abide in Him and He in me I can and will be fruitful, and again, that such fruitfulness will bring Him glory as other will come to see and know Him through me. His promise that obedience while not always being easy will lead to joy. Assures me that He has indeed called and appoint me, and the primary duty in that calling is to love as He loves. He again reminds me that He give me His Spirit to enable me. He warns me to expect trouble, even hatred, but to take heart because He has overcome the world. In His prayer He prays for me and for that we might know and known, that we all be one as He and the Father are one. In His prayer I am also reminded I am sent to be in the world where the lost are, but I am not to be of the world, adopting the ways and values of the world, and that be in the world, but not of the world I need to be sanctified in His Word. In fact, the more I am in the world, the more I need to be in the Word.

The last of the Biblical eras is the **Era of the Early Church** beginning with Acts and ending with Revelation. In this era through the writings of Paul, Peter, John, James, Jude, and the author of Hebrews we see God forming His Body, the church (Jesus IN us), for the purpose of Mission (Jesus

THROUGH us). These twenty-three books or document contain a lot of information as well as the Spirit of God to form Jesus IN us in order that Jesus might live and ministry THROUGH US.

Just a thought to ponder: Perhaps the failure of the Israelites to be the people of God that God had called them to be is because they knew God being FOR them, but they did not really know God IN them. Thus God could not really express Himself through them. While knowing God FOR them, God (preincarnate Christ) would have been birthed in them, they had remained in an infant state, unformed. Thus they had (on the whole) never really been transformed into God's/Jesus' His image. My prayer for readers of this manual, as well as for myself. is that Jesus increasingly is formed **IN** us (Gal. 4:19), that we are increasingly transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18), so that we increasingly manifest His presence and character (Gal. 5:22-23) as He lives **THROUGH** us for others (Jn. 15:4-5). I pray that Jesus IN us is increasingly seen and manifested, so that the world increasingly sees God, is attracted to God, wants to get know God, and is increasingly blessed by God. Amen!

II. Heilsgeschichte

Shared in Bulleted Form

Pre-Patriarchal Period (4000 BC -2100 BC)

- ◆ God created everything good—in Genesis 1 we see the power of God, in Genesis 2 we see God as one who is intimately and lovingly involved with His creation.
- ◆ People were created in the image of God, namely, with the capacity to experience and enjoy a love/trust relationship with God in a way that no other aspect of creation can.
- ◆ God’s one criticism of His creation was that “it is not good for man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). God created us to experience and enjoy a love/trust relationship not only with Him, but also with each other.
- ◆ So, love would be real and not forced, God gave people free will. This meant people could reject or deny His love and in distrust of His love commit overt acts of sin. Such distrust broke the specialness of our being created in His image and it broke our relationship with Him.
- ◆ Thus, Adam and Eve’s first sin was not trusting in God’s love (listening to the serpent’s suggestion that God was holding out on them). This distrust then resulted in a more overt act of disobedience (eating the forbidden fruit). But it was distrust in God’s love that was the original sin; eating the fruit was merely the consequence of this sin (Genesis 3).
- ◆ Sin had its consequence (death, pain in childbirth, hard work, leaving the Garden), but God in His love would not let sin be the last word (Genesis 3). He, in loving grace, would come to people and give them a new opportunity to trust in His demonstrated love, and thus their love/trust relationship with Him that had been broken would be restored. Distrust in God’s love breaks relationship with God; only by trusting in God’s love, as fully revealed to us and demonstrated in Jesus, is that relationship restored (John 3:16; John 14:6; Romans 5:6-8; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 14:23; Hebrews 11:6; 1 John 5:3-5).
- ◆ Thus, we get the promise of One, the Seed of the woman, who would crush the serpent’s head, although the serpent would bruise His heel (the first Divine Covenant and promise of a Savior which would be realized in Jesus—Genesis 3:15).
- ◆ From Adam and Eve sin (distrust in God and His love that resulted in acts of disobedience) spread. It spread first to their offspring Cain (Genesis 4) and eventually to the total corruption of the whole world during the time of Noah (Genesis 6) and again at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). God’s justice could not ignore sin, but His mercy would not let sin be the last word. God would eventually pay the penalty for all sin through the sufferings and death of Jesus (Romans 3:24-25; 1 John 2:2). In the meantime, He would discipline sinners. Discipline is God responding to sin a way that teaches His human creations, whom He dearly loved, the seriousness of their disobedience and the wisdom of trusting Him and His loving and perfect ways (John 14:15; John 15:9-11; Romans 1:5; Hebrews 12:5-11; 1 John 4:19).

Patriarchal Period (2100 BC -1446 BC)

- ◆ God put His plan for people’s eternal well-being (heilsgeschichte) in motion with the call of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). God called Abraham not because Abraham was good. Abraham was a sinner like everyone else, and all indications are that he was probably an idolater like everyone else when God called him (Joshua 24:2-3). God’s call of Abraham tells us more about the character of God, than it does about the character of Abraham. God is loving and faithful, desiring

“all people to be saved” (2 Peter 1:4; 1 Timothy 2:4). God needed someone to work out His plan of salvation and Abraham was as good as anyone, no better and no worse.

- ◆ God took the initiative and made a Covenant of Divine Commitment with Abraham. He came to Abraham, rather than Abraham coming to Him. Abraham responded to God’s communication and revelation. It needs to be firmly understood that Abraham’s faith was a response to God’s revelation and act of love/grace in coming to Abraham. We need to further recognize that it was a weak response/a weak faith at best.
- ◆ For somewhere between 25 and 40 years, Abraham continually demonstrated a shallow and struggling faith. Twice he tried to pass his wife off as his sister to save his own hide (Genesis 12 & 20). He complained to God about having to adopt a son (Genesis 15). He had an illegitimate son (Genesis 16). And in Genesis 17 he outright laughed at God at the thought of having a son in his old age. But God faithfully and persistently in love for Abraham and for all humanity (for through Abraham’s descendants would come the savior for all humankind) continued to demonstrate His love and faithfulness. God thus won Abraham trust—a response of faith which resulted in obedience (Genesis 22; Romans 1:5).
- ◆ For Isaac everything seemed to come pretty easy, and although we do not get a long narrative of his life in Scripture, we do find that he learned mixed messages at his father’s knee. He learned faith (Genesis 22). However, he also learned self-preservation rather than complete trust in God, as he too tried to pass his wife off as his sister (Genesis 26).
- ◆ God would not be deterred from His heilsgeschichte and continued in loving faithfulness to His Divine Commitment through Isaac’s son Jacob. Jacob, like all our supposed Biblical heroes and heroines, experienced his own struggles, a slow growth in faith in God’s love and faithfulness, and a slow growth in his own faith-filled responses to our loving God.
- ◆ Jacob as an opportunist took advantage of his brother’s hunger (Genesis 25) and later deceived his father to get his brother’s blessing (Genesis 27) resulting in his having to flee for his life (sin has its natural consequences or price, leaving its scars). Jacob with his struggle to learn faith-filled obedience also has trouble instilling loving and obedient behavior in his wife and children. Rachel stole her father’s household gods—suggesting she still had some faith in them (Genesis 31). Simeon and Levi slaughtered a whole town of men because one man raped their sister Dinah (Genesis 34). Reuben slept with his father’s concubine (Genesis 35). Nine of Joseph’s ten older brothers sold him into slavery (Genesis 37). And Judah (from whose line Jesus would eventually be born) unknowingly slept with his daughter-in-law while thinking she is a temple prostitute—suggesting he worshipped other gods (Genesis 38). Yet God in love remained faithful/trustworthy to His Covenant of Divine Commitment, continuing to care for Jacob and his family and to work out His heilsgeschichte.

The Exodus & Wilderness Wanderings (1446 BC – 1406 BC)

- ◆ God’s chosen people (chosen to be a blessing to the nations—Genesis 12:3) began to suffer in Egypt and cried out for help (Exodus 1). God in loving faithfulness heard and responded to their cry. God responded to their cries even though they may not have specifically cried to Him. During their sojourn in Egypt, they had come to believe not only in the God of their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but also had come to acknowledge some of the gods of the Egyptians (Exodus 32:1).
- ◆ God prepared and called Moses to be His instrument of deliverance (Exodus 2). Again, God does this not because of how good Moses was. When God first came to Moses, Moses, it would

appear, wasn't even sure which god it was that had called him as he asked for God's name (Exodus 3:13). And Moses presented numerous excuses as to why God should get someone else (Exodus 4:1; Exodus 4:10; Exodus 4:13). God called Moses because He (God) is loving and faithful, because of His Divine Commitment (Genesis 12:3).

- ◆ Through a series of plagues God demonstrated His superiority over the supposed Egyptian gods and that He alone is the true God of the universe (Exodus 7-12).
- ◆ In the final plague of Passover, God delivered Israel from the hand of Pharaoh (Exodus 11-12). This preambles the painful way that He would eventually deliver humanity from all sin, death and the power of the devil, namely, through the paschal lamb, the sacrificial suffering and death of His own Son (John 1:29).
- ◆ Moses assisted by his brother and sister Aaron and Miriam, and his right-hand-man Joshua led the children of Israel (and others—demonstrating God's love for all people—Exodus 12:37-37) out of Egypt, and experienced again God's love, faithfulness, and deliverance at the Red Sea (Exodus 14).
- ◆ God now asked His people to covenant back to Him in light of His demonstrated love and faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants for the past 430 years (Galatians 3:17) and in light of their deliverance from Egypt. This covenant of responsive trust is reflected in the Sinai Covenant, a covenant of Human Obligation. They would demonstrate their trust in Him (in His love, His wisdom, and His power) through their obedience to this covenant. Obedience to the covenant would result in blessings and disobedience would result in discipline. (Note: Discipline is not punishment. Punishment is making people pay. Jesus would do the paying for all sin (1 John 2:2). Discipline, while frequently involving many of the same acts as punishment, and often is painful, is not done to make people pay but to help them become. It is to be seen as training or correction done in love in order that we might learn, continue to become, and thus be better able to enjoy the ways of our loving God (Leviticus 26; John 15:9-11; Hebrews 12:5-11).
- ◆ The Israelites, as are most of us, were slow learners and demonstrated struggles in faith and faith-filled obedience throughout their wilderness wanderings (Exodus 14:10-12; Exodus 16:2-3; Exodus 17:2-3; Exodus 32:1-8; Numbers 11:1; Numbers 11:4-6; Numbers 13:30-14:4; Numbers 20:2-4; Numbers 21:4-5; Numbers 25:1-3). Yet, God remained faithful, disciplined His people as was necessary for their good, but brought them safely to the promised land (Deuteronomy 8:3-4,17-18).

The Conquest and Period of the Judges (1406 BC -1025 BC)

- ◆ Joshua led the Children of Israel into the Promised Land, and at Jericho was assisted by Rahab, a Gentile prostitute, an ancestor of Jesus, demonstrating again God's love for all people.
- ◆ God, knowing the Israelites shallowness of faith and that foreigners who worship pagan gods would be a snare to them, ordered the complete annihilation of the inhabitants of the land. This ordering was to enable the Israelites to mature in faith unhindered, and that God's heilsgeschichte for all humanity might best and most easily be accomplished.
- ◆ The Israelites, resulting from their partial obedience (not annihilating all the inhabitants and therefore not becoming firmly rooted and established in their faith) would continue to be led astray by the pagan gods of those inhabitants throughout their history.
- ◆ This set up the cycle in Judges of rebellion against God: retribution (discipline) by God, repentance of the people, and restoration by God. This cycle continued throughout Judges,

throughout Israel's history, and throughout the history of the church and even throughout our own lives as we struggle with being in the world, but not of the world (John 17:15-18).

- ◆ In Judges God raised up charismatic (spirit-filled) leaders to deliver His people (notably: Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson) only to have the people revert to pagan practices when the charismatic leader died.

The United Kingdom (1025 BC – 930 BC)

- ◆ Israel's last judge, who also serviced as a prophet and priest, was Samuel (1 Samuel 3:20; 1 Samuel 7:15; 1 Chronicles 6:27).
- ◆ The Israelites continued to demonstrate their childishness and lack of maturity by asking Samuel for a king like the other nations, thus rejecting God as their king (1 Samuel 8:4-7).
- ◆ Samuel at God's instructions grudgingly gave them a king, but he also warned them that having such a king would be more than they had bargained for (1 Samuel 8:9-20).
- ◆ Saul, the first king, upon becoming king increasingly lost sight of God, God's will and God's ways (1 Samuel 13:8-14; 1 Samuel 15:3-11; 1 Samuel 18:8-11; 1 Samuel 19-10; 1 Samuel 20:32-33; 1 Samuel 28:5-19).
- ◆ David, Saul's successor, God described as "a man after My own heart," (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22) even though David too was a flagrant sinner (2 Samuel 11; 1 Kings 2:2-9). God's heart is a heart of mercy, of love (Hosea 6:6; Luke 6:36). David was a man after God's own heart even though he was as sinful as any, because rather than despairing of God's love and mercy, or trying to win God's love and mercy; he simply trusted in/had faith in God's love and mercy and threw himself upon it. This attitude, faith, and confidence delights God as in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15).
- ◆ Solomon, David's son, although being blessed by God with wisdom, fame, and wealth, allowed himself to become distracted and led astray through his wives and his involvement with the people and the ways of the world, even to the point of building high places to foreign gods (1 Kings 11:1-8). Yet God in His unceasing love would not allow even this sin to deter Him from remaining faithful to His heilsgeschichte and Covenant of Divine Commitment.

Divided Kingdom & Judah Alone (930 BC – 597 BC)

- ◆ After Solomon died his son Rehoboam rather than seeking the counsel of God, sought the counsel of his friends. His friends advised him to use his power as king for his own ends by increasing the abuse of the Children of Israel through taxation and forced labor, even beyond what Rehoboam's father Solomon had imposed (fulfilling the warning of Samuel concerning kings). This led the ten northern tribes to rebel under the leadership of Jeroboam.
- ◆ Jeroboam in order to keep the people of the Northern Kingdom from going to Jerusalem to worship led them astray by building high places with golden calves at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12). This confused the worship of God with that of pagan gods, thus consciously or unconsciously promoting idolatry. All of the succeeding kings of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) in 1st and 2nd Kings are labeled as evil because they continued this practice "walking in the sins of Jeroboam."
- ◆ God, time and again through the prophets, tried to get Israel to repent (in faith to turn back to Him, trusting in His love/mercy, wisdom, and power, and demonstrating that trust through obedience to the Covenant of Human Obligation—e.g., Jeremiah 3:12-15, 22). Israel/the Northern Kingdom, however, refused to repent and finally was destroyed as a kingdom by the Assyrians in 722 BC. It would never again rise as a kingdom separate from the Jews. Chief among the kings of the

Northern Kingdom were Jeroboam, Omri, Ahab, and Jeroboam II. The main prophets to the Northern Kingdom were Elijah, Elisha, Hosea, Amos and Micah.

- ◆ The Southern Kingdom/Judah had a mixture of good and bad kings. God who was fully committed to His Covenant of Divine Commitment for all humanity through Abraham's, Judah's and David's line continued to work out His heilsgeschichte as promised (Genesis 12:3; Luke 2:32; 1 Timothy 2:4). As He had with Israel, God sent prophets to Judah. Although Judah did not respond a whole lot better than Israel did, God would not let go of His commitment and heilsgeschichte for all—Jew, Israelite, and Gentile. God would discipline His people through the Babylonian exile and captivity which began in 597 BC, but He also would remain their God and He would bring His promise to fruition (Leviticus 26; Isaiah 9:6-7; Isaiah 53; Jeremiah 29:11-14; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Jeremiah 46:27-28; Micah 4:2-5; Micah 5:2-5). Chief among the good kings of Judah were Hezekiah and Josiah who sought to bring about extensive reforms. The chief prophets to the Southern Kingdom were Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.
- ◆ The chief message of the prophets during 1st and 2nd Kings was a call to repentance. It was a call for obedience to the Sinai Covenant, an obedience that stemmed from faith in God's Divine Covenant of love and mercy. It was a call to return to the God who had demonstrated Himself to be faithful in the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the Exodus, and in the life of David (Jeremiah 3:12-15,22; Hosea 6:1-6; Hosea 7:13-14; Hosea 11:8-9; Hosea 12:6; Hosea 14:1-4, Joel 2:12-14; Micah 6:8; Micah 7:18-20; Romans 1:5; Romans 12:1; Galatians 5:6).

Exilic and Post-Exilic (597 BC – 430 BC)

- ◆ Ezekiel and Daniel were God's main prophets of the exile, each with his own special message to a people who were experiencing the Lord's discipline.
- ◆ Ezekiel was at first concerned that the people understood the seriousness of their behavior and lack of trust, and that they took responsibility for the consequences they were experiencing (Ezekiel 2:3-7; Ezekiel 3:7-8; Ezekiel 16; Ezekiel 18:18-32; Ezekiel 22:7-12,26-29; Ezekiel 24:13-14; Ezekiel 33:23-32).
- ◆ Ezekiel was concerned the people understood God was not interested in punishment, but merely in the people's repentance (Ezekiel 18:21-24; Ezekiel 33:11-16).
- ◆ Finally, Ezekiel was concerned the people understood that God was anxious to restore, and He would restore when they turned to Him with an obedience that stemmed from faith in God's love, wisdom, and power (Ezekiel 34; Ezekiel 36:24-38; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 1:5).
- ◆ Daniel was concerned that the people remain faithful and do not compromise in the face of adversity (Daniel 3; Daniel 6). He also demonstrated the fruits of obedience that stems from faith.
- ◆ For seventy years the Jews experienced God's discipline in exile. During this time, they learned the seriousness with which God took the Sinai Covenant and people's obedience to it, and they learned the oneness of God. After these seventy years of learning God moved Cyrus the King of Persia to allow the Jews who wished to return to Jerusalem to do so under the leadership of Zerubbabel, who became the governor of the Jews.
- ◆ Following Zerubbabel as governor was Nehemiah. Ezra was a scribe and priest during this time. Under Nehemiah's leadership the walls of Jerusalem were restored, and various reforms were introduced in keeping with the Book of Moses (the Pentateuch).
- ◆ Ezra was concerned with the rebuilding of the temple and also with teaching the people the law and with the people's strict obedience to it. The Babylonian exile and the renewed focus on the law and

the temple after the exile began to set the stage for the rise of the two dominate Jewish sects found in the Gospels—the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

- ◆ The chief prophets of the post-exilic period were Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

The Message of the New Testament in Relationship with the Old

- ◆ Distrust in God’s love breaks our relationship with God. Trust in God’s love allows us to once again experience and enjoy that relationship (John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Romans 14:23; Hebrews 11:6).
- ◆ God loves everyone unconditionally (Covenant of Divine Commitment); however, we do not always trust in this love, and without trust we are unable to experience the full joy and benefits of God’s love (John 15:9-11; 1 John 2:1-2; 1 John 5:3-5). Without trust, the relationship is still broken and the purpose for which we were specially created in His image is unrealized.
- ◆ Because of our situation, namely that we are sinners, and the consequence of sin is death, and because we distrust God’s love; God being both just and merciful had to do two things—both of which He accomplishes through Jesus. First, He had to settle accounts, not by ignoring our sin, but by Himself paying for it (Exodus 34:6; 2 Corinthians 5:21), thus satisfying both His justice and His mercy (Romans 3:23-25; Jeremiah 31:3). Secondly, He has to be able to communicate that love to us in such a way that we would no longer deny it, thus awaking in us a faith in Him and in His love (John 1:12-13; Ephesians 2:8-9; Hebrews 12:2). We don’t come to faith in a vacuum. We come to faith through God’s clear communication and the demonstration of His love (John 1:1,14-18; Romans 10:14-17; Romans 5:6-8; Hebrews 1:1-3). Just as it was with Abraham, faith is like a reflex response to God’s stimulating communication—for us, this stimulation comes primarily through Word and Sacrament ministry.
- ◆ Our faith response to God, as we trust in His love, His wisdom, and His power, is obedience—a Covenant of Human Obligation (John 14:15; Romans 1:5; Galatians 5:6; Romans 12:1-2; James 1:27; James 2:26; 1 John 4:19). This faith response is not like the righteousness of the Pharisees who sought to earn their place with God, which can never be done. Rather, it is a righteousness (being in a right relationship with God) that stems from who He is and what He has done (Matthew 5:17-20; 1 Corinthians 1:29-31; Ephesians 2:8-9; Hebrews 12:2; 2 Peter 1:3). We do not in order to receive; rather we do, because we have already received so much.
- ◆ The will of God, which we now pursue, is a life of love—loving Him and others even as He has loved us. In this world this means we most fully love Him by loving others (1 John 4:19-21; Matthew 22:37-40; Matthew 25:34-40; Mark 10:42-45; John 13:12-17; John 13:34-35; Galatians 5:6,13-14; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10; James 1:27; James 2:26; 1 John 3:16-18).
- ◆ It also means being His ambassadors of reconciliation one to others. As His ambassadors we communicate to all we meet God’s unconditional love for them in and through the person of Jesus. And we communicate how through this unconditional love of Christ they too can be transformed into His precious and loving disciples and the inheritors of eternal life (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:14-17; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Colossians 1:24; 1 John 1:1-4).
- ◆ Only through faith in God’s demonstrated love in the person of Jesus do we become His new creation and have our relationship restored with Him—to what it was with Adam and Eve before the fall. By His grace (the work of Christ) which we experience and enjoy through faith (the work of the Spirit), we are this day and each new day recreated and fully restored (John 14:6; Romans 6:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:17). Amen.

- ◆ **Galatians 4:4-5 (NIV)** ⁴ But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵ to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.
- ◆ **Romans 5:6 (NIV)** ⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

- ◆ **John 2:4 (NIV)** ⁴ "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."
- ◆ **John 7:6 (NIV)** ⁶ Therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right."
- ◆ **John 7:30 (NIV)** ³⁰ At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come.
- ◆ **John 8:20 (NIV)** ²⁰ He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him because his time had not yet come.

- ◆ **John 12:23-33 (NIV)** ²³ Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ...³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

- ◆ In the four Gospels God reveals the heart and soul of His plan, the crux and pivotal point, or better the pivotal person – JESUS! Everything up to this point has been pointing to Jesus, the Christ. And everything from this point flows from or out of this point, this person.
- ◆ **Hebrews 1:1-3 (NIV)** ¹ In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.
- ◆ **John 1:1,14 (NIV)** ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- ◆ In the Gospels, we not only get to know *about* God, but we also actually get to *know* God in the person of Jesus. Through the life of Jesus, a life of humble servanthood (**John 13:1-17**), we learn what it means to live as a citizen of God's Kingdom (**Mark 10:42-45; Luke 10:25-37; Luke 15:1-7; Luke 19:10; Philippians 2:3-8,12-13**). In the crucifixion we see the heart of God (**Matthew 26:39,42,44,45; John 3:16-17; John 12:27; Romans 5:7-8**), and in the resurrection we see the power of God where not even death can contain Him (**John 11:25; Matthew 28:5-7; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8,54-55**).
- ◆ **Matthew, Mark & Luke** are called "Synoptic Gospels" because they are very similar (synonymous) with each other, recounting many of the same events in the life and ministry of Jesus. All but around thirty verses of Mark's Gospel can be found in a parallel form in either Matthew or Luke or both Matthew and Luke.

- ◆ **John's Gospel** is unique in that John focuses his Gospel on a relatively few events and discourse in Jesus' life and ministry. John Gospel has twenty-one chapter. Already in chapter 12 we are at Palm Sunday, the last week of Jesus' life before His crucifixion. Chapters 13,14,15,16 & 17 (five chapters, basically one fourth of John's Gospel) are Maundy Thursday Events with Jesus washing His disciples' feet, His Upper Room discourses, and His High Priestly prayer, just a few hours of Jesus' life. Add chapters 18 and 19, Jesus' arrest, trials, and crucifixion, we have roughly seven chapters, one third of John's Gospel covering approximately 24 hours in Jesus' life. Chapters 20 and 21 then are resurrection narratives. What does this indicate to us as to the importance John found in these events?
- ◆ Besides his Gospel, John also wrote three epistles and the book of **Revelation**. An interesting fact is in the New Testament the word love is found 324 times. 280 of these times the word being translated is a form of the Greek word *agape*, 41 times it is a form of the Greek word *philos*, and 3 times it is a form of the Greek word *storge*. Of the 280 times the Greek word *agape* is used, 44 of those times are in the **Gospel of John**, 46 of the times it is in the **1st Epistle of John**, 5 of those times it is in **2nd John**, 4 of the times it is in **3rd John** and 6 times it is used in **Revelation**. 105 of the 280 times *agape* is used, it is used by John. Of the 41 times *philos* or some form of *philos* is used, 13 of those times are found in **John's Gospel**. Of the 324 times the word love is found in the New Testament, 118 of those times it is found in a writing of John.

- ◆ God's plan, God's heilsgeschichte, does not end with Jesus' death and resurrection. God's plan continues to unfold through the rest of the New Testament, and it continues to unfold today. As the Gospels end and as we move into Acts, we see Jesus' intent for His disciples, His followers, then and now (**Matthew 10:7-8; Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-47; John 17:15-18; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8; John 13:34-35**). Jesus commissions, empowers, and sends them/us into the world "to complete what was lacking in Christ's/His affliction" (**Colossians 1:24**). What was lacking in Christ's affliction had/has nothing to do with the work of *justification*. When Jesus died on the cross that work was completed "once for all" (**John 19:30; Hebrews 7:27; Hebrews 9:12,26; Hebrews 10:10; 1 John 2:2**). What was lacking was and is in the work of *proclamation* – not everyone knows or believes in Jesus' completed work of justification for the sins of all humankind for all-times. It is this work that Paul was called to help complete and that all Christians are called to help complete, each according to the gifts that have been given to her or him (**John 15:8,16-17; 1 Corinthians 12:7; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Ephesians 4:1-2;11-16,32**).
- ◆ The rest of Scripture, really all of Scripture is written **(1)** to call us to and to birth faith in us through the gospel message (**John 20:31; 2 Timothy 3:15; John 1:1,14; Hebrews 1:1-3**), and **(2)** to shape/form the Christ birthed in us by the Holy Spirit (**2 Timothy 3:16; Galatians 4:19**), in order that **(3)** we might be increasingly transformed into Christ's image (**Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18**) and live fruitful and productive lives as Christ's disciples, as citizens of God's kingdom and as Christ's ambassador of love and reconciliation through doing every good work (**2 Timothy 3:17; John 15:4-5,8,16-17**).
- ◆ **2 Timothy 3:15-17 (NIV)** ¹⁵ ...how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- ◆ The book of **Acts of the Apostles** (better called “*The Acts of the Holy Spirit Through the Apostle*”) is about the birth and growth of the early church as the Apostles empowered by the Holy Spirit take the gospel from Jerusalem to the Rome and the ‘ends of the earth” (**Acts 1:8**).
- ◆ Paul’s thirteen epistles (**Romans, 1st Corinthians, 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1st Thessalonians, 2nd Thessalonians, 1st Timothy, 2nd Timothy, Titus, and Philemon**) and the five General Epistles (**Hebrews, James, 1st Peter, 2nd Peter and Jude**) all deal with the issues and struggles the early Christian Church experienced. They provide us with instruction for the living out our faith and the mission with which God has entrusted us, Christ’s Body, the Church (**Matthew 4:19; Matthew 22:37-40; Matthew 25:34-40; Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 5:19; John 13:34-35; John 15:4-5,8,12,16-17; John 17:15-18; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Galatians 6:2,9-10; Ephesians 2:8-10; Ephesians 4:1,11-16,32; Colossians 1:24; Colossians 3:12-14; 1 Timothy 2:3-6; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 1 Peter 3:15; 1 John 2:1-2; 1 John 3:16-18; 1 John 4:7-21**).
- ◆ Through the Spirit God uses the Scriptures to first birth faith and Jesus the Christ in us (**Romans 1:16; Galatians 2:20; 2 Timothy 3:15**). Then the Spirit uses the Scriptures to form in us the Christ and faith that He has birthed. Through that forming of Jesus in us, we increasingly become transformed into Jesus’ image, exhibiting His character (**John 15:4-5; Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 4:19; Galatians 5:22-23,25; Colossians 1:28-29; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 John 3:1-2; 1 John 4:7-12**).
- ◆ **Bottomline—Simply Put:** The Law is what God expects/demands. The Gospel is what God does. The Law (**Exodus 19-23**) does not negate the Gospel (**Genesis 12:1-3, see also Genesis 3:15; Romans 3:23-25; Romans 5:8; Romans 8:1-3; Galatians 2:16; Hebrews 10:10; 1 John 2:2**). The Law does not supersede the Gospel. The Gospel supersedes the Law (**Galatians 3:15-18**).

Thanks be to God!!!

III. Some of the Significant People in Each Biblical Era

Knowing where people fit into God's overarching story Many Christians can be helpful in understanding the overarching story as it unfolds and is recounted in Scripture. To help readers see where people fit in I have some of the more notable people within the Biblical era in which they lived. My prayer is this will help you better see how God used them to unfold His salvation story or in a few instances how Satan used them to disrupt God's story.

*How did each of these people contribute to God's heilsgeschichte (salvation story)?
How did they aid it? How did they hinder it? What about you?*

Pre-Patriarchal – 4000 BC – 2100 BC

- Adam
- Eve
- Cain
- Abel
- Enoch
- Noah
- Ham
- Shem
- Japheth

Patriarchal – 2100 BC – 1446 BC

- Abraham
- Sarah
- Lot
- Hager
- Melchizedek
- Ishmael
- Moab & Ben-Ammi
- Isaac
- Rebekah
- Esau
- Jacob
- Leah
- Rachel
- Rueben
- Levi
- Judah
- Joseph
- Tamar

Exodus & Wilderness Wanderings – 1446 BC – 1406 BC

- Moses
- Miriam
- Aaron
- Reuel/Jethro
- Zipporah
- Joshua
- Caleb
- Hur
- Balaam & Balak
- Nadab & Abihu
- Eleazar & Ithamar
- Phinehas

Conquest – 1406 BC – 1375 BC

- Joshua
- Rahab
- Caleb

Judges – 1375 BC – 1025 BC

- Deborah/Barak/Jael
- Gideon/Jerubbaal
- Abimelech
- Jephthah
- Samson
- Delilah
- Naomi
- Ruth
- Boaz

United Kingdom – 1025 BC – 930 BC

- Samuel
- Saul
- David
- Michal
- Jonathan
- Abigail
- Nathan
- Bathsheba
- Absalom
- Abner
- Joab
- Solomon

Divided Kingdom – 930 BC – 722 BC

- Rehoboam
- Jeroboam
- Jehoshaphat
- Ahab
- Jezebel
- Elijah
- Elisha
- Naaman
- Shunammite Woman

Judah Alone – 722 BC – 597 BC

- Isaiah
- Hezekiah
- Manasseh
- Josiah
- Hilkiyah
- Huldah
- Jeremiah
- Nebuchadnezzar
- Habakkuk

Exile – 597 BC – 525 BC

- Ezekiel
- Daniel (Belteshazzar)
- Darius
- Shadrach (Hananiah)
- Meshach (Mishael)
- Abednego (Azariah)
- Belshazzar
- Nebuchadnezzar
- Michael

Post-Exile – 525 BC – 430 BC

- Ezra
- Nehemiah
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi
- Cyrus
- Mordecai
- Esther
- Haman

Intertestamental – 430 BC – 4 BC

- Antiochus IV
- Mattathias
- Judas Maccabees
- John Hyrcanus
- Alexander the Great
- Pompey

Jesus – 4 BC – 30 AD

- Mother Mary
- Joseph
- Peter
- James
- John
- Andrew
- Thomas
- Judas
- Mary Magdalene
- Anna
- Simeon
- John the Baptist
- Zachariah
- Simon the Pharisee
- Pilate

Early Church – 30 AD – 100 AD

- Paul
- Barnabas
- Silas
- Luke
- Timothy
- Titus
- Dorcus
- Lydia
- Philemon
- Nero
- Philippian Jailor
- Ethiopian Eunuch

The Basic Focus of Prophets and Priests

(a simple explanation – meant to be neither exclusive, nor inclusive of everything)

An Old Testament Prophet would speak to the people for God – “Thus says the Lord....”

An Old Testament Priest would speak to God for the people – Making intercession and sacrifice.

IV. Prophets of Israel and Judah

These next two pages provide lists of prophets and kings. It helps to know the Biblical era and time in a prophet lived and the situation(s) he addresses. His message was often time specific and always audience sensitive. Jonah spoke to the people of Nineveh a pagan city of Assyria known for its wealth, power, corruption, and cruelty. Obadiah pronounced judgment on the Edomites for their treatment of the people of Jerusalem. Haggai spoke to ignite a fire among the Jews who had returned from exile, but had failed to complete the building of the Temple. Jeremiah spoke to the Jews to prepare them for a life of exile. Daniel spoke to a people in exile. These lists help us understand the prophet’s message as we know the time and audience they addressed.

All Dates are approximate – Scholars offer slightly varying viewpoints

Prophet	Date
Samuel	1020-1000
Nathan	985-960
Elijah	870-850
Elisha	850-800
Amos	750-745
Hosea	750-745
Jonah	740-730???
Isaiah	742-700
Micah	722-701
Zephaniah	628-622

Prophet	Date
Jeremiah	626-586
Daniel (a statesman, not a prophet)	620-538
Nahum	612
Habakkuk	605
Ezekiel	593-573
Obadiah	586-585
Haggai	520-515
Zechariah	520-515
Joel	500-350???
Malachi	500-450

Kings of Israel and Judah

God’s concern since the fall of Adam and Eve into always is centered in relation. First, relationship with Him, and second relationship with one another (Mt. 22:37-40). The Kings of Israel and Judah are deemed good or bad in the Scriptures not on the basis of their accomplishments, battles won or lost, wealth or the like. Israel’s and Judah’s kings were deemed good or bad if they in their reign helped their people grow in their relationship with God hindered it. Among the kings Judah we have both good kings and bad ones. Of the kings of Israel after the kingdom of Israel becomes divided, we have only bad kings, because all the Kings of Israel once the kingdom of Israel is divided “walked in the sins of Jeroboam leading Israel astray” by maintaining the shrines at Dan and Bethel which lead the people into idolatry.

On the next page is a listing of the kings of Israel and Judah and which ones were considered good and which ones were bad.

V. Kings of Israel and Judah –

All Dates are *approximate* – Scholars offer slightly varying viewpoints – Overlaps are explained in terms of periods of co-regencies

Kings of the United Kingdom (1025-925 BC)			
King	Date	Relationship to Previous King	God's Judgement
Saul	1025	None	Good early – turned evil
Ishbosheth*	1010	Son	Did evil
David	1003	None	Did right
Solomon (AKA Jedidiah)	970	Son	Did right in youth – evil in old age

*The Kingdom was divided during Ishbosheth reign; David was King over the tribe of Judah

Kings of Judah (925-586 BC)		Kings of Israel (925-721 BC)	
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King	Date	Relationship to Previous	God's Judgment
Rehoboam	931	Son	Did evil
Abijam	914	Son	Did evil
Asa	911	Son	Did right
Jehoshaphat	870	Son	Did right
Jehoram (AKA Joram)	850	Son	Did evil
Ahaziah (AKA Jehoahaz)	843	Son	Did evil
Athaliah	842	Mother	Did evil
Joash (AKA Jehoash)	835	Son of Ahaziah	Right – Youth Evil – Old
Amaziah	802	Son	Right – Youth Evil – Old
Uzziah (AKA Azariah)	788-736	Son	Did right
Jotham	758	Son	Did right
Ahaz	742	Son	Did evil
Hezekiah	726	Son	Did right
Manasseh	697	Son	Evil – Youth Right – Old
Amon	642	Son	Did evil
Josiah	640	Son	Did right
Jehoahaz	609	Son	Did evil
Jehoiakim	609	Son of Josiah	Did evil
Jehoiachin	598	Son	Did evil
Zedekiah	597	Son of Josiah	Did evil
King	Date	Relationship to Previous	God's Judgment

Jeroboam	931	Servant	Did evil
Nadab	911	Son	Did evil
Baasha	910	None	Did evil
Elah	887	Son	Did evil
Zimri	886	Captain	Did evil
Omri	886	Captain	Did evil
Ahab	875	Son	Did evil
Ahaziah	853	Son	Did evil
Jehoram	852	Son of Ahab	Did evil
Jehu	841	Son of Jehoshaphat	Mixed
Jehoahaz	814	Son	Did evil
Joash	806	Son	Did evil
Jeroboam II	791	Son	Did evil
Zachariah	750	Son	Did evil
Shallum	749	None	Did evil (surmised)
Menahem	749	None	Did evil
Pekahiah	739	Son	Did evil
Pekah	737	Captain	Did evil
Hoshea	732	None	Did evil

Assyria – 744-727 BC – Tiglath-Pileser III
727-722 – Shalmaneser V
721-705 – Sargon II
705-681 – Sennacherib

Yellow = Did right
Light Grey = Mixed

Green = Did Evil

VI. Major Jewish Festivals in the Bible

Much like the seasons and festivals Christian celebrate when observing the liturgical church year which centers around the life of Jesus, the festival in the Jewish calendar served as times for remembering and celebrating the mighty acts of God. Some acts of were acts of deliverance (Passover), some were acts of provision (First-fruits), some were acts of instruction (Pentecost), some were acts of atonement (Feast of Trumpets). Below is a listing of the major Jewish Festivals.

Most of the biblical festivals are listed together in **Leviticus 23**, which serves as the central chapter summarizing the “appointed times of the LORD”¹.

1. Passover (Pesach)

Biblical References:

- Exodus 12
- Leviticus 23:5¹
- Deuteronomy 16:1–8

Significance:

- Commemorates God’s deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt.
 - The blood of the lamb protected the Israelites during the tenth plague.
 - Begins the cycle of spring festivals.
-

2. Feast of Unleavened Bread (Chag HaMotzi)

Biblical References:

- Exodus 12:15–20
- Leviticus 23:6–8¹
- Deuteronomy 16:3–8

Significance:

- Seven-day feast immediately following Passover.
 - Symbolizes leaving Egypt in haste—no time for bread to rise.
 - Leaven becomes a symbol of corruption, the feast calls Israel to purity.
-

3. Firstfruits (Yom HaBikkurim)

Biblical References:

- Leviticus 23:9–14¹
- Deuteronomy 26:1–11

Significance:

- Offering of the first sheaf of the barley harvest.
 - Acknowledges God as the giver of the land and its produce.
 - A festival of gratitude and trust.
-

4. Feast of Weeks / Pentecost (Shavuot)

Biblical References:

- Leviticus 23:15–22¹
- Deuteronomy 16:9–12

Significance:

- Celebrates the wheat harvest.
 - Later Jewish tradition associates it with the giving of the Torah at Sinai.
 - Marks the completion of the spring harvest cycle.
-

5. Feast of Trumpets (Yom Teruah / Rosh Hashanah)

Biblical References:

- Leviticus 23:23–25¹
- Numbers 29:1–6

Significance:

- A sacred day of trumpet blasts.
 - Calls Israel to repentance and preparation for the Day of Atonement.
 - Begins the High Holy Days.
-

6. Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

Biblical References:

- Leviticus 16
- Leviticus 23:26–32¹
- Numbers 29:7–11

Significance:

- Holiest day of the year.
 - National atonement through priestly sacrifice and confession.
 - A day of fasting, repentance, and cleansing.
-

7. Feast of Tabernacles / Booths (Sukkot)

Biblical References:

- Leviticus 23:33–44¹
- Deuteronomy 16:13–17
- Numbers 29:12–38

Significance:

- Celebrates the final harvest of the year.
- Remembers Israel's wilderness wanderings and God's provision.
- A joyful, week-long festival of thanksgiving

Additional Notes

Leviticus 23 is the central biblical summary of all these feasts.

The festivals follow the agricultural cycle:

Spring: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits

Early Summer: Pentecost

Fall: Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles

These feasts form the rhythm of Israel's worship and identity.

References (3)

¹A Concise Overview of the Seven Feasts of Israel.

<https://hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Introduction/introduction.html>

²Major Jewish Religious Festivals - The Bible Journey. <https://thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney1/1-the-world-of-the-new-testament-journeys-b/major-jewish-religious-festivals/>

³What are the Jewish feasts and festivals in the Bible?.

https://biblehub.com/q/what_are_the_bible's_jewish_feasts.htm

VII. Jewish Old Testament Sacrifices

The OT sacrificial system served as Israel's covenant-maintenance structure. It was a God-given way to live in ongoing relationship with Yahweh God in the midst of sin, impurity, gratitude, and worship.

1. Burnt Offering (Olah)

Purpose:

- Voluntary worship
- Atonement for unintentional sin
- Total consecration to God

Key Features:

- Entire animal consumed on the altar
- "Pleasing aroma" = restored fellowship

Scripture:

- Leviticus 1; cf. Lev 1:9
-

2. Grain Offering (Minchah)

Purpose:

- Thanksgiving
- Recognition of God's provision
- Often paired with burnt or peace offerings

Key Features:

- Fine flour, oil, frankincense
- Portion burned; remainder eaten by priests

Scripture:

- Leviticus 2
-

3. Peace Offering (Zebach Shelamim)

Purpose:

- Thanksgiving
- Fulfilled vows
- Celebration of fellowship with God

Key Features:

- Shared meal between worshiper, priest, and God
- Symbolizes peace, communion, covenant joy

Scripture:

- Leviticus 3
-

4. Sin Offering (Chatat)

Purpose:

- Mandatory
- Atonement for specific unintentional sins
- Purification from ritual defilement

Key Features:

- Blood applied to altar or sanctuary
- Type of animal varies by status (priest, leader, individual)

Scripture:

- Leviticus 4
-

5. Guilt Offering (Asham)

Purpose:

- Mandatory
- Atonement for sins requiring restitution
- Violations of holy things or property

Key Features:

- Requires repayment + 20%
- Emphasizes justice and relational repair

Scripture:

- Leviticus 5:14–6:7
-

Additional Sacrificial Elements

Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

Purpose:

- Annual cleansing of the sanctuary and the people
- High priest enters the Holy of Holies

Key Features:

- Two goats: one sacrificed, one sent into the wilderness (scapegoat)
- Central moment of national atonement

Scripture:

- Leviticus 16
-

Daily, Weekly, and Festival Offerings

Purpose:

- Ongoing covenant rhythm
- Marking sacred time

Examples:

- Daily burnt offerings (tamid)
- Sabbath offerings
- Passover lamb
- Firstfruits and harvest offerings

Scripture:

- Numbers 28–29; Exodus 12

VIII. The Year of Jubilee

The **Year of Jubilee** is one of the most radical and beautiful institutions in the Old Testament. It appears primarily in **Leviticus 25**, and it represents God’s vision for economic justice, social reset, and covenant identity.

What the Jubilee Was

According to Leviticus 25, the Jubilee occurred **every fiftieth year**, after seven cycles of seven years ($7 \times 7 = 49$). On the **Day of Atonement**, a ram’s horn was blown to announce the beginning of the Jubilee year¹.

Core Features

Rest for the land

The land was not to be sown or harvested; it rested completely¹.

Release of debts and slaves

Hebrew slaves were freed, and debts were cancelled or reset according to God’s instructions¹.

Restoration of property

Land returned to its original family owners, preventing generational poverty and permanent loss of inheritance¹.

A clean slate for the whole community

Everyone returned to their family and land, beginning again with renewed dignity and provision².

Theological Significance

The Jubilee wasn’t just economic policy—it was a **theological proclamation**.

Key Themes

God owns everything

“The land must not be sold permanently, because it is Mine” (Lev. 25:23). Jubilee reminded Israel that they were stewards, not ultimate owners¹.

Justice and mercy woven together

Jubilee prevented the concentration of wealth and protected the vulnerable, embodying God’s heart for the marginalized¹.

Appendix Two

IX. Sacramental Theology

Sacramental theology concerns itself with God using visible means to communicate His grace/blessings to people. The word sacrament stems from the Hebrew *Qadosh* or *Kadosh* (קֹדֶשׁ), primarily translated as "holy," "sacred," "set apart" or "consecrated." In Greek, the word is *Hagios* (ἅγιος) also translated as "holy," "sacred," "set apart" or "consecrated." It typically is used to describe people or items/things that have been "set apart" / consecrated by God to be used by God and His people for God's special purpose(s). The word saint is also derived from the word *Hagios* (ἅγιος) to describe a person as he/she is set apart for God purposes. Technically, all Christians are saints. (John 15:16; Ephesians 1:1; Ephesians 4:1). Another Greek word that is used to talk about sacrament is *Mysterion* (μυστήριον) meaning "mystery" or "sacred secret."

In Christian usage a sacrament is a visible means God uses to communicate grace and blessing upon people. The Roman Catholic Church has identified seven sacraments: Baptism, the Eucharist, Penance, Confirmation, Holy Orders, Marriage, and the Anointing of the Sick. Most Protestant Church recognize two: Baptism and the Eucharist (some recognize three, the third being Absolution). In the Greek Orthodox Church there are innumerable sacraments described as "mysteries."

Catholics and Protestants define sacrament a little differently and that is why the difference in number. For Lutherans (and many other Protestants) a sacrament is something: (1) commanded by God, (2) the Word of God must be present, (3) grace is communicated, and (4) there is visible/tangible means of communication. Catholics define sacrament as "an efficacious, visible sign of invisible grace, instituted by and entrusted to the Church." For the Greek Orthodox a sacrament is simply a visible means through which God works His "mysteries."

X. Five Views of the Eucharist

Roman Catholic

The Eucharist (Greek: 'thanksgiving') is a Sacrament, and like all Sacraments, it conveys grace to all who receive it worthily. The Eucharist also makes present Christ's sacrifice on the Cross in an unbloody manner, for that reason it is sometimes known as the **Holy sacrifice of the Mass**. Through it, forgiveness of sin may be obtained.

On consecration, the bread and the wine change completely into the actual body and blood of Christ. This change is known as **Transubstantiation** and Christ's presence in the elements is called the **Real Presence**.

From the Council of Trent (1545-1563):

"...By the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation."

Orthodox

The Orthodox church accepts the Eucharist as a Sacrament (though it uses the term 'Mystery' instead of 'Sacrament') and also accepts the doctrines of the Real Presence and the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist. However, it does not make any attempt to explain how the change occurs, preferring to regard it as a divine mystery.

The Eucharistic service is commonly known as the **Divine Liturgy**.

Lutheran

In Lutheranism, there is a **Sacramental Union** of the bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ. In other words, Christ's body and blood are present "*in, with and under*" the forms of bread and wine. This is sometimes known as **Consubstantiation** (although Luther himself did not use this term).

Luther explained his view by using an analogy of an iron rod placed into a fire: both are united in the red-hot iron, yet both are also distinct.

Lutheranism rejects the view of the Eucharist as "making present" Christ's sacrifice on the Cross.

Reformed and Presbyterian

The Reformed and Presbyterian view derives from the teachings of John Calvin: Christ is not present literally in the elements, but he is spiritually present.

Those who receive the elements with faith can receive the actual body and blood of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit which works through the sacrament, a view sometimes known as **Receptionism**.

Calvin explained his view of the Eucharist in his *Institutes*:

"The rule which the pious ought always to observe is, whenever they see the symbols instituted by the Lord, to think and feel surely persuaded that the truth of the thing signified is also present. For why does the Lord put the symbol of his body into your hands, but just to assure you that you truly partake of him? If this is true let us feel as much assured that the visible sign is given us in seal of an invisible gift as that his body itself is given to us."

Other Groups

Many other groups (e.g., the Baptists) refer to the Eucharist as the **Lord's Supper** or **Holy Communion** and deny any form of physical or spiritual presence of Christ in the bread and wine. Rather, the Lord's supper is a remembrance of Christ's suffering and a reminder of his power to overcome sin and death. This view derives from the teachings of the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli and is commonly known as **Memorialism**.

The Anglican and Methodist Churches have a wide variety of views on this subject.

Note: Some groups (e.g., the **Salvation Army** and **Quakers**) do not practice any observance of the Eucharist. The Salvation Army has issued the following statement:

"The Salvation Army has never said it is wrong to use sacraments, nor does it deny that other Christians receive grace from God through using them. Rather, the Army believes that it is possible to live a holy life and receive the grace of God without the use of physical sacraments and that they should not be regarded as an essential part of becoming a Christian."

XI. Denominations Practicing Baptism

Anglicans (including Episcopalians): Their philosophy is that baptism is for the cleansing of sins, original sin, rebirth, and entry into the denomination and the body of Christ through God's grace. Baptism is performed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—also known as the Holy Trinity. So, infant baptism is allowed. Methods used are immersion, affusion, and aspersion. Episcopalians prefer the method of affusion.

Anabaptists: Their belief is that baptism is not necessary for salvation, but is instead symbolic. Therefore adult baptism is the only true baptism and is done by immersion or affusion. In fact, their name means "to be baptized again."

Baptists: For Baptists, baptism is symbolic and by immersion only. Infant baptism is not practiced.

Catholics: For all manner of Catholics, baptism is sacramental in the name of the Holy Trinity (the "Great Commission" Matthew 28:18-20) and grants eternal salvation and remission of sins by God's grace. They also practice infant baptism. Latin Rite Catholics use the method of immersion (Ambrosian Rite) or affusion. Roman Catholics use aspersion, but the water must flow onto the head. Eastern Catholics use full or partial submersion.

Christadelphians: They view the rite of baptism as granting repentance and salvation though it is only for adults and done through immersion.

Churches of Christ: They too view baptism as granting repentance and salvation, but do not practice infant baptism. They baptize by full immersion following the biblical book of Acts 8:38.

Community Churches: Baptism is an outward symbol of cleansing as well as the acceptance of salvation and new life through God's grace. The method used is immersion, and infant baptism is not permitted.

Disciples of Christ: Their ideology of baptism is that it is symbolic of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection; it is a cleansing of sin, rebirth through God's grace, and entry into the Christian faith. Baptism is done by immersion or affusion. They do not practice infant baptism.

Eastern Orthodox Churches, Oriental Orthodoxy: Baptism is sacramental and meant for salvation and remission of one's sins. It is by full or partial immersion, and infants are included.

Evangelical Free Churches: Their view is that baptism is the public symbol of the profession of faith, God's grace, and rebirth. Baptism is by immersion for adults only.

Grace Communion International: Their view of baptism is similar to the Evangelical Free Churches.

Jehovah's Witness: They also view baptism as a public symbol of individual belief and it is performed by full immersion. Therefore, they do not practice infant baptism.

Lutherans: Their philosophy is that baptism is sacramental, *births faith in God's grace*, and grants eternal salvation. The method *commonly* used is aspersion, and infant *as well as adult baptism* is practiced. (italic added)

Methodists: Their belief is that baptism grants the sacrament of salvation, the profession of faith, and is an initiation into the Christian community. All Methodists including Wesleyans, United Brethren, and the African Episcopal Methodist Church use immersion, affusion, or aspersion and baptize infants.

Metropolitan Community Church: To them, baptism is sacramental and part of worship. The method used is immersion, and infant baptism is practiced.

Moravian Church: Baptism is sacramental and necessary for entry into Christianity. They use immersion, affusion, or aspersion and practice infant baptism.

Nazarenes/Church of the Nazarenes: Baptism grants the sacrament of salvation and acceptance of Jesus. The methods used are immersion, affusion, or aspersion and infant baptism is practiced.

Pentecostals: Their ideology is baptism is a symbolic representation of the individual's belief and acceptance of Jesus as Savior, which only adults can understand and profess. The Oneness Group believes baptism is a requirement for salvation. Both Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostals use full immersion and do not practice infant baptism.

Presbyterians: Baptism is a sacrament, seal, and outward symbol of "inward grace." It also grants membership into the Christian community. So, infant baptism is practiced. Methods used are immersion, affusion, or aspersion.

Revivalists: They view baptism as a receipt of the Holy Spirit, which is necessary for salvation. The method used is immersion, and infant baptism is not practiced.

Seventh Day Adventists: Baptism is a requirement for membership into the church and into Christianity. It symbolizes "death to sin and new birth in Christ." The method used is full immersion, and infant baptism is not practiced.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons): All converts must be baptized or re-baptized. They do not view baptism as a cleansing of sins, but rather as a ritual of the forgiveness of sins, repentance, and preparation for receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. This occurs in the sacrament of confirmation/ laying of hands. Baptism is by full immersion and is given to individuals from the age of eight and up.

The United Church of Christ (Evangelical and Reformed Churches and Congregational Christians): Baptism is viewed as an outward symbol of one's "inward grace" given by God. Some churches use the rite as an initiation into church membership. Methods used are immersion, affusion, or aspersion and infant baptism is practiced.

Denomination that Does Not Practice Baptism

Baptists: Though some Baptist groups do practice baptism, as previously stated, others in this denomination do not believe or view the ritual of baptism as necessary.

Christian Scientists: They believe emphasis should be on the inward aspects of Christian sacraments rather than the practice. Their idea of baptism is the daily study of their texts and living life as is dictated: “Spiritual purification by daily prayer.”

Quakers (members of the Religious Society of Friends): They reject all forms of outward or public manifestations of their spirituality. They view baptism as an inward sacrament.

Salvation Army: They too do not believe in outward or public displays of the sacraments. Founders William and Catherine Booth believe Christians must rely on the inward grace granted by God instead of outward symbols.

Unitarians: They see no basis for baptism. However, they do conduct dedication ceremonies for the children of their members. This usually entails coordination between the parents, the minister, and a religious educator. It involves blessing the new life of the child, an expression of hopes for the child from their parents, and a promise from the congregation to support and nurture them.

XII. Worship As An Invitation to God’s House For a Dinner Party

Preparation for Worship

- Invocation** Knocking on the door of God's house calling upon His presence – calling His presence to the door so to speak. God comes to the door and invites us in.
- Confession** When God invites us into His house, we confess our unworthiness to come in.
- Absolution** God assures us that all has been forgiven and that we are indeed welcome.

Service of the Word

- Introit** We enter God's house with praise.
- Hymn of Praise** As one might express admiration and appreciate to one's host, so we express our admiration and appreciation to God.
- Salutation** As guests might greet one another at a dinner party, so do we greet one another in worship.
- Collect** Having greeted one another and having come together we can now speak to our host collectively.
- Scripture** After speaking to our host, our host speaks to us.
- Sermon** Our host through the pastor expounds on His Word to us.
- Creed** We profess our faith in our host who has spoken to us.
- Offering** In faith we now offer first ourselves and then our belongings to God and His service.
- Prayer** We also bring or offer our concerns to God our Host.

Service of the Meal

- Salutation** As we move into the dining hall so to speak, we again greet one another.
- Lord's Prayer** We address our host in the words He Himself taught us.
- Consecration** In the Words of consecration God unites Himself and acts in the bread and wine.
- Sharing of Peace** We greet one another as we prepare to dine at the Lord's table together.
- Agnus Dei** We recognize with grateful hearts the feast set before us.
- Distribution** We share in and are strengthened through the feast, being assured again of God's forgiveness.
- Nunc Dimittis** We prepare to leave our Host home to live lives of worship – of faith and service.
- Blessing** God blesses us on our journey and for our ministry.
- Benediction** God send us on our journey with a final blessing and commissioning.

XIII. The Christian Church Year

The Christian Church Year (or **liturgical year**) is a way the Church orders time around the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and reign of Jesus. It is not just a calendar—it is a **form of discipleship**, shaping hearts and imaginations through repeated immersion in the gospel.

ADVENT

Color: Blue or Purple

Theme: Hope, waiting, promise, preparation

Core Focus: Christ's coming — past (Bethlehem), present (Word & Sacrament), future (His return)

Key Scriptures

- Isaiah's promises (Isaiah 7, 9, 11, 40)
- John the Baptist (Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3)
- The Annunciation & Magnificat (Luke 1)
- Watchfulness texts (Matthew 24–25)

Discipleship Applications

- Practice holy waiting and patience
 - Renew habits of prayer and Scripture
 - Examine life in light of Christ's return
 - Serve others as a sign of the coming kingdom
-

CHRISTMAS

Color: White

Theme: Incarnation, joy, God-with-us

Core Focus: The Word becomes flesh

Key Scriptures

- Luke 2:1–20
- John 1:1–14
- Matthew 1:18–25
- Titus 2:11–14
- Hebrews 2:14–18

Discipleship Applications

- Celebrate God's nearness and compassion
 - Practice hospitality and generosity
 - Reflect on the dignity of human life (God took on flesh)
 - Share the good news with neighbors
-

EPIPHANY

Color: Green (White on festival days)

Theme: Revelation, mission, light to the nations

Core Focus: Jesus revealed as Savior for all people

Key Scriptures

- The Magi (Matthew 2:1–12)
- Jesus' Baptism (Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22)
- Calling of disciples (Matthew 4:18–22; John 1:35–51)
- Miracles and teachings revealing His identity
- Reformation Day (October 31st)
- All Saints Day (November 1st)
- Transfiguration Sunday (Matthew 17:1–9; Mark 9:2–10; Luke 9:28–36)

Discipleship Applications

- Embrace outward-focused mission
- Recognize Christ's presence in daily life

- Grow in understanding of Jesus' identity
 - Practice "epiphany moments" — naming where God is at work
-

LENT

Color: Purple

Theme: Repentance, renewal, surrender

Core Focus: Returning to God and preparing for the cross

Key Scriptures

- Jesus' temptation (Matthew 4:1-11)
- Penitential Psalms (e.g., Psalm 51)
- Parables of repentance (Luke 15)
- Passion predictions (Mark 8:22-38; Mark 9:30-35; Mark 10:32-52)

Discipleship Applications

- Practice confession and self-examination
 - Engage in fasting or intentional simplicity
 - Strengthen prayer and Scripture habits
 - Serve sacrificially in Christlike humility
-

HOLY WEEK

Color: Red/Scarlet

Theme: The Passion of Christ

Core Focus: Walking with Jesus through His suffering and death

Key Scriptures

- Palm Sunday (Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-36)
- Maundy Thursday (John 13-17; Luke 22)
- Good Friday (Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 18-19; Isaiah 52-53)

Discipleship Applications

- Practice humility and servanthood
 - Meditate on Christ's sacrificial love
 - Participate in corporate worship and prayer
 - Embrace silence, lament, and awe
-

EASTER

Color: White

Theme: Resurrection, new creation, victory

Core Focus: Christ's triumph over death

Key Scriptures

- Resurrection accounts (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21)
- 1 Corinthians 15
- Acts 2-4 (resurrection preaching)

Discipleship Applications

- Live with resurrection hope
 - Celebrate forgiveness and new life
 - Practice joy and gratitude
 - Share stories of God's renewal in your life
-

PENTECOST

Color: Red

Theme: Spirit, mission, empowerment

Core Focus: The birth of the Church and the sending of the Spirit

Key Scriptures

- Acts 2
- Joel 2 (fulfilled at Pentecost)
- John 14–16 (Spirit’s promises)

Discipleship Applications

- Cultivate openness to the Spirit’s leading
- Use spiritual gifts for the common good
- Engage in bold witness
- Strengthen community life

TIME AFTER PENTECOST (Ordinary Time)

Color: Green

Theme: Growth, discipleship, daily faithfulness

Core Focus: Living out the teachings of Jesus in ordinary life

Key Scriptures

- Parables of the Kingdom (Matthew 13; Mark 4)
- Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)
- Life in the Spirit (Romans 8:1-27; Galatians 5:16-25)
- Practical discipleship (Matthew 20:25-28; Matthew 25:34-45; Luke 9:23; John 13:1-17,34-35; Romans 12:9-21; James 1:4-27; James 2:1-13; James 4:17; 1 Peter 3:15; 1 John 3:16-24)
- Commissioned for Mission: Matthew 28:18-20; John 15:1-17; John 17:15-18; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Ephesians 4:1-16; Colossians 1:24-29
- Christ the King Sunday (Last Sunday of the Church Year)

Discipleship Applications

- Practice steady, long-term spiritual habits
- Grow in Christlike character and mission
- Serve neighbors and community
- Integrate faith into work, family, and civic life

Advent through Ascension – Focuses on the Life and Ministry of Jesus

Pentecost to Advent – Focuses on the Work of the Holy Spirit through Christ’s Body, the Church

Appendix Three

XIV. Mt. Olive Discipleship Pathway

Purpose

This system is designed to be a fully deployable discipleship framework for Mt. Olive's small groups, missional communities, and one-on-one spiritual conversations. It is built to help leaders and members:

- Identify where a person is on their journey with Jesus
- Discern one realistic next step
- Provide support and accountability
- Revisit growth over time
- Multiply disciples, leaders, and healthy groups

This system is **grace-centered**, simple to use, and flexible enough for different personalities, leadership styles, and ministry settings.

1. Core Philosophy

What this is

- A discipleship pathway
- A simple system for helping people take next steps with Jesus

What this is not

- A performance scorecard
- A rigid program
- A tool for comparing people
- A replacement for prayer, Scripture, or pastoral wisdom

Foundational convictions

- People grow at different speeds
 - Spiritual growth is driven by grace, not guilt
 - Small steps matter
 - Discipleship happens best in relationship
 - Leaders are guides, not fixers
 - The goal is not merely maturity, but multiplication
-

2. The Mt. Olive Discipleship Map

The 5 Stages of Growth

Stage 1: Exploring Faith

Description: Curious, unsure, skeptical, disconnected, or newly exposed to faith.

Key question: Who is Jesus and what does it mean to trust Him?

Indicators:

- Asking basic questions about God, Jesus, church, salvation
- Limited Bible knowledge
- Inconsistent or no prayer life

- Exploring church, group life, or Christian relationships
- Unsure how faith connects to daily life

Helpful next steps:

- Read the Gospel of John
- Attend worship consistently for 4–6 weeks
- Join a group or begin one spiritual conversation per week (Hebrews 10:22-25)
- Ask honest questions without pressure

Leader posture: Warm, patient, non-defensive, invitational (James 1:19)

Stage 2: Beginning Faith

Description: New believer, returning believer, or someone beginning to engage more intentionally.

Key question: How do I begin walking with Jesus in everyday life?

Indicators:

- Basic trust in Jesus
- Desire to grow
- Inconsistent spiritual habits
- Little confidence in Scripture or prayer
- Needs structure, encouragement, and belonging

Helpful next steps:

- Begin 5–10 minutes of daily prayer or Scripture
- Learn a simple Gospel summary
- Attend worship and group regularly
- Identify one Christian friend, mentor, or leader for support

Leader posture: Encouraging, clear, practical, supportive (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

Stage 3: Growing Faith

Description: Intentionally developing faith, habits, and character.

Key question: How do I grow in Christlike character and consistency?

Indicators:

- Fairly consistent prayer/Bible rhythm
- Participates in group, worship, or service
- Open to challenge and accountability
- Beginning to connect faith with everyday decisions
- Wants deeper growth but may feel stuck or uneven

Helpful next steps:

- Develop a sustainable devotional rhythm
- Join or form an accountability relationship
- Serve regularly in church, home, or community
- Identify one area of obedience or surrender to work on

Leader posture: Coaching, encouraging, gently challenging (2 Timothy 4:2)

Stage 4: Integrated Faith

Description: Faith increasingly shapes relationships, decisions, priorities, and lifestyle.

Key question: How do I live as a disciple of Jesus in every area of life?

Indicators:

- Faith affects time, money, vocation, relationships, and service
- Regularly serves and encourages others
- Willing to share faith naturally (1 John 1:1-4)
- Shows increasing humility, surrender, and fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)
- Influences others positively in group and daily life

Helpful next steps:

- Disciple or mentor another person
- Lead prayer, discussion, or ministry responsibility
- Engage missionally in neighborhood, workplace, or everyday rhythms
- Discern one area where God is calling deeper surrender

Leader posture: Empowering, sharpening, entrusting (Galatians 6:1-2)

Stage 5: Multiplying Faith

Description: Intentionally investing in others and helping reproduce discipleship.

Key question: Who am I helping grow in Jesus?

Indicators:

- Regularly mentors, leads, or disciples others
- Helps others identify next steps
- Lives missionally and reproductively
- Models healthy rhythms of grace, truth, prayer, and service
- Thinks beyond personal growth toward kingdom multiplication

Helpful next steps:

- Apprentice another leader
- Start or multiply a group, missional expression, or discipleship triad
- Develop other disciplers, not just participants
- Establish a rhythm of personal renewal to prevent burnout

Leader posture: Multiplying, releasing, developing others (Mark 3:13-15)

3. The 5 Core Growth Areas

These five categories are used across every stage.

1. Connect

- Relationship with God and meaningful connection with others.

Questions:

- Am I regularly connecting with God?
- Am I spiritually connected to other believers?
- Am I honest enough to be known and supported?

2. Grow

- Spiritual habits, formation, biblical understanding, and Christlike character.

Questions:

- Am I becoming more like Jesus? (2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 4:19)
- What spiritual habits are helping me grow?
- Where am I stuck or inconsistent?

3. Serve

- Using gifts, abilities, time, and presence for others.

Questions:

- How am I serving at home, church, and in the world?
- Do I know how God has gifted me? (1 Corinthians 12:7)
- Where can I contribute meaningfully? (John 15:16-17)

4. Share

- Living and communicating faith with others.

Questions:

- Do I care about people who do not know Jesus? (Matthew 9:12-13; Luke 19:10)
- Am I prepared to talk about my faith naturally? (Mark 5:19; 1 Peter 3:15)
- Am I living in a way that points people toward Christ? (Matthew 5:16; John 15:8)

5. Surrender

- **Trust**, obedience, identity, dependence, and yieldedness to God. (Proverbs 3:5-6; John 15:9-11)

Questions:

- What am I still holding tightly?
- Where is God inviting deeper trust?
- Am I responding to conviction with obedience?

4. Core Assessment Tools

Leaders do not need to use every tool every time. Choose what best fits the setting.

Tool A: Quick Spiritual Check-In (5–10 minutes)

- Use in groups, hallway conversations, leader follow-up, or one-on-one settings.

Ask:

- Where do you see God at work in your life right now?
- Which of these areas feels strongest right now: Connect, Grow, Serve, Share, or Surrender?
- Which feels weakest or most in need of attention?
- What is one next step God may be inviting you to take?
- How can I pray for or support you?

Tool B: Spiritual Health Snapshot (15–20 minutes)

Rate each statement 1–5: 1 = Just Beginning | 5 = Strong and Consistent

Connect

I spend regular time with God in prayer or Scripture

I experience meaningful relationships with other Christians

I am honest with others about what I need spiritually

Grow

- I see evidence of Christlike character in my life
- I am taking intentional steps to grow spiritually
- I am learning to resist distractions and unhealthy patterns

Serve

- I understand at least some of how God has gifted me
- I am using my time or gifts to serve others
- I look for ways to help people in practical love

Share

- I care about people who do not know Jesus
- I build relationships beyond the church
- I am willing to talk about my faith when the opportunity arises

Surrender

- I trust God in daily decisions
- I seek to align my life with God's will
- I am learning to release control and depend on Him

Leader instruction: Don't overanalyze the score. Use the results to identify one growth area and one next step.

Tool C: Stage Discernment Conversation (20–30 minutes)

Use when helping someone identify where they are in the pathway.

Ask:

- How would you describe your current relationship with Jesus?
 - How consistent are your current spiritual habits?
 - In what ways does your faith affect your daily life?
 - Are you serving or helping others grow spiritually?
 - Who are you intentionally investing in, if anyone?
 - After listening, identify the most likely current stage.
-

Tool D: Next Step Goal Form

My current stage:

My primary growth area:

My one next step:

Why this step matters:

When I will begin:

What I will do this week:

Who will support me:

When we will follow up:

5. Next Step Menu by Growth Area

Connect

- Attend worship weekly for one month
- Pray 5 minutes each morning
- Join a group consistently for six weeks
- Ask one trusted person for prayer

Grow

- Read one Gospel over the next 30 days
- Begin a daily Bible-reading rhythm
- Meet monthly with a mentor
- Memorize one passage this month

Serve

- Volunteer once this month
- Serve one person intentionally each week
- Explore gifts with a leader
- Take responsibility for one ministry role

Share

- Pray daily for one person far from Jesus
- Have one spiritual conversation this month
- Write out your testimony in 3–5 minutes
- Invite someone to church, group, or coffee

Surrender

- Name one area you need to release to God
 - Practice daily gratitude
 - Confess one struggle to a trusted believer
 - Fast from one habit that competes for your attention
-

6. Common Pitfalls and Safeguards

Pitfall 1: Making it too complicated

Safeguard: Use one tool at a time.

Pitfall 2: Turning next steps into pressure

Safeguard: Keep pointing to grace, not guilt.

Pitfall 3: Setting goals that are too vague

Safeguard: Ask, “What will you do this week?”

Pitfall 4: Leaders trying to fix people

Safeguard: Leaders listen, discern, encourage, and pray.

Pitfall 5: No follow-up

Safeguard: Schedule the next conversation before ending the current one.

Pitfall 6: Comparing people

Safeguard: Never use the pathway as a ranking system.

7. Recommended Language for Church-Wide Use

To help the framework become culture, use phrases like:

- “What is your next step?”
- “Where do you see God at work?”
- “What growth area is most important right now?”
- “How can we support you?”
- “Who are you helping grow?”

This creates shared discipleship language without sounding mechanical.

8. Leader Cheat Sheet (One-Page Summary)

The leader’s job is simple:

- Identify where someone is
- Help them take one next step
- Support them
- Follow up

Three key questions:

Where are you right now?

What is God inviting you into?

What is one step you can take this week?

Remember:

- Keep it grace-centered
- Keep it simple

- Keep it relational
 - Do not overload people
 - One next step is better than five intentions
-

9. Leader Conversation Scripts

Script 1: Group Leader Check-In

“Before we finish, take a moment to reflect. Where do you sense God is at work in your life right now? Which area feels most in need of attention—Connect, Grow, Serve, Share, or Surrender? What would one next step look like this week?”

Script 2: One-on-One Starter

“I’m not trying to evaluate you or put you in a box. I just want to help you identify where you are spiritually and what your next step with Jesus might be.”

Script 3: Goal Clarifier

“That’s a good desire. What would make it specific enough to actually practice this week?”

Script 4: Support Question

“What kind of support would help you actually follow through—prayer, a check-in, a resource, a partner, or something else?”

Script 5: Follow-Up

“Last time you said your next step was _____. How did that go? What helped? What got in the way? What do you sense God is inviting you into now?”

10. Suggested Group Leader Training Outline

60-Minute Leader Orientation

Part 1: Vision (10 min)

- Why discipleship needs a simple pathway
- Why this is not another program
- Why next steps matter

Part 2: The Pathway (15 min)

- Review the 5 stages
- Review the 5 growth areas
- Explain that leaders are guides, not experts

Part 3: The Tools (15 min)

- Quick Spiritual Check-In
- Spiritual Health Snapshot
- Next Step Goal Form

Part 4: Practice (15 min)

- Pair leaders up
- Practice a 5-minute check-in conversation
- Practice turning vague goals into specific next steps

Part 5: Commissioning (5 min)

- Pray for wisdom, gentleness, discernment, and courage
-

11. Simple Ministry Rhythm

Monthly

- Leaders pray for members by name
- Watch for movement, struggle, or drift
- Ask at least one discipleship question in conversation

Quarterly

- Use a check-in tool
- Encourage one next step for each willing person
- Leaders note who may need support or encouragement

Annually

- Invite every leader to reflect on:
 - Where did people grow?
 - Where did people get stuck?
 - Who is ready for more responsibility?
 - What patterns need to change?
-

12. Simple Forms Appendix

A. Personal Reflection Card

- Where am I right now?
- What is my growth area?
- What is my next step?
- Who will support me?
- When will I revisit this?

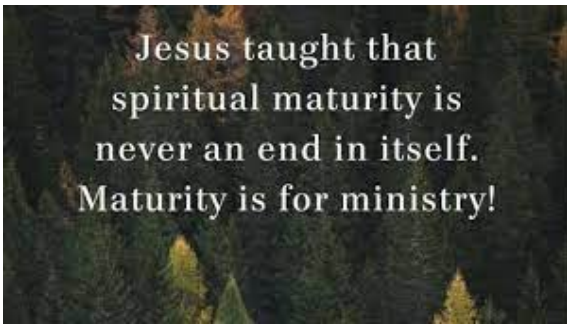
B. Group Reflection Prompt

- Where have you grown this season?
 - Where do you feel stuck?
 - What is one next step you sense God inviting you into?
-

13. What success looks like

- More intentional spiritual conversations
 - Clearer next steps for people
 - More pastoral follow-up
 - More people moving from participation to discipleship
 - More leaders helping others grow
-

Core principle:



- Identify the stage.
- Discern the growth area.
- Name the next step.
- Support the person.
- Repeat.

Appendix Four

XV. A LIFE JOURNEY IN AND WITH JESUS

A Personal Assessment: In the Beatitudes Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6 – NIV). 1 Corinthians 1:30 (NIV) says: “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus,

who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.” In a very real sense Jesus is our righteousness and to hunger and thirst for righteousness is to hunger and thirst for Jesus.

- 1) How would you describe your relationship with Jesus?
 - a. How would you describe your hunger and thirst for Jesus (e.g., parched, refreshed, satisfied)?
 - b. How would you like to grow spiritually? Explain.
 - i. If you are growing spiritually, what has been significant in contributing to that growth? What tends to feed and nurture your relationship with Jesus?
 - ii. What has been significant in undermining growth? What tends to interfere with your relationship with Jesus?
- 2) Ephesians 4:1 and Colossians 1:10 tell us we are to live lives “worthy of our calling.”
 - a. What does it mean to you for a person to actively practice and live his or her faith?
 - b. For you personally, what does it mean and/or look like to live a life “worthy of your calling”?
- 3) Do you see yourself as being on a path walking with/in Jesus and moving toward greater spiritual maturity”? Explain.
 - a. If you are on a “path toward spiritual maturity,” how would you describe the path and where on that path do you see yourself? Again, explain.
 - b. To what extent are you prone to taking detours from the path to maturity?
 - i. To what extent are the detours distractions, keeping you from reaching the goal of maturity?
 - ii. To what extent do the detours add richness, flavor, and bouquet to your spiritual life?
 - c. Have you or to what extent are you prone to plateau out (settle) on your faith journey?
- 4) How would you complete the sentence: “ If I were to compare my spiritual life at this time to sports, I am...

___ suiting up	___ at half-time / in the locker	___ on the injured list
___ waiting for the game to start	room	___ playing "catch up"
___ trying to figure out the play	___ sitting on the bench	___ other _____
book	___ giving it all I've got	
- 5) Complete the sentence: “As a Christian the biggest obstacle or hurdle I need to work on is...

___ keeping in shape spiritually	___ sticking to my convictions	___ fear of missing out on
___ learning the basics	___ feeling like I've failed	something
___ consistency	___ desire / dedication	___ other _____
- 6) Jesus invites us and tells us in Matthew 4:19 “Come follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.” Consider what does your life in and with Jesus currently looks like? What spiritual growth goals do you have for the month? ...for the next six months? ...for the year?
- 7) “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. They will be filled.” How are you and/or how might you be or get filled with Jesus? What can/will you do to accomplish your goals (#6)?

XVI. SPIRITUAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT & PLAN

Adapted from *Beginning in Christ Together*
by Brett & Dee Eastman, Todd & Denise Wendorff & Karen Lee-Thorp, Zondervan, 2005

(1 = “Just Beginning” – 5 = Well Developed)

CONNECTING WITH GOD & OTHERS

- I am deepening my understanding of and friendship with God in community with others 1 2 3 4 5
- I am growing in my ability both to share and to show my love to others 1 2 3 4 5
- I am willing to share my real needs for prayer and support from others 1 2 3 4 5
- I am resolving conflict constructively and am willing to forgive others 1 2 3 4 5

GROWING IN YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

- I have a growing relationship with God through regular time in the Bible and in prayer 1 2 3 4 5
- I am experiencing more of the characteristics of Jesus, (love, peace, patience, etc.) 1 2 3 4 5
- I am avoiding addictive behaviors (food, TV, busyness, substances, etc.) to meet my needs 1 2 3 4 5
- I am spending time with a Christian friend who celebrates & challenges my spiritual growth 1 2 3 4 5

SERVING WITH YOUR GOD-GIVEN DESIGN

- I have discovered and am further developing my unique God-given design 1 2 3 4 5
- I am regularly praying for God to show me opportunities to serve him & others 1 2 3 4 5
- I am serving in a regular (once/month or more) ministry in the church or community 1 2 3 4 5
- I am a team player in my small group by sharing some group role or responsibility 1 2 3 4 5

SHARING GOD’S LOVE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

- I am cultivating relationships with non-Christians and praying for natural opportunities to share God’s love 1 2 3 4 5
- I am praying and learning about where God can use me and my group cross-culturally 1 2 3 4 5
- I am investing my time in another person or group who needs to know Jesus 1 2 3 4 5
- I am regularly inviting unchurched or unconnected friends to my church or group 1 2 3 4 5

SURRENDERING YOUR LIFE TO GOD

- I am experiencing more of the presence and power of God in my everyday life 1 2 3 4 5
- I am faithfully attending services and my small group to worship God 1 2 3 4 5
- I am seeking to please God by surrendering every area of my life to him 1 2 3 4 5
- I am accepting the things I cannot change and becoming increasingly grateful for the life I’ve been given 1 2 3 4 5

SCORING

	Connecting	Growing	Serving	Sharing	Surrendering	
20	—	—	—	—	—	Well Developed
19	—	—	—	—	—	
18	—	—	—	—	—	
17	—	—	—	—	—	
16	—	—	—	—	—	Very Good
15	—	—	—	—	—	
14	—	—	—	—	—	
13	—	—	—	—	—	
12	—	—	—	—	—	Getting Going
11	—	—	—	—	—	
10	—	—	—	—	—	
9	—	—	—	—	—	
8	—	—	—	—	—	Fair
7	—	—	—	—	—	
6	—	—	—	—	—	
5	—	—	—	—	—	
4	—	—	—	—	—	Just Beginning
3	—	—	—	—	—	
2	—	—	—	—	—	
1	—	—	—	—	—	

PERSONAL PLAN

PURPOSE	PLAN
CONNECT	WHO are you connecting with spiritually?
GROW	WHAT is your next step for growth?
DEVELOP	WHERE are you serving?
SHARE	WHEN are you shepherding another in Christ?
SURRENDER	HOW are you surrendering your heart?

XVII. GOD HAS A DREAM FOR YOUR LIFE!

Do you believe in God? Do you trust His love, His power, His wisdom? God has a wonderful dream for you. God has a wonderful dream for the world. In order that His dream and heart's desire for us might become a reality He asks us to trust Him, to believe in His dream and to commit ourselves to making His dream a reality for all people.

God is love! He loves you, He loves me. He loves that person, those people, who don't even know Him. He has a dream for all of us. God became one of us in the person of Jesus. He lived a perfect life of love, of giving, of self-sacrifice. He suffered, died and rose in order that His dream, His heart's desire for each of us might come true. Now He invites us to trust Him and to commit ourselves. The question is do we?

God invites us to trust in His love, in His power and in His wisdom. In our trust He asks us to obey Him. Trusting in His love, power and wisdom Jesus asks us to give of ourselves even as He has given and continues to give of Himself. He asks this of us in order that we and all people might experience His love now and eternally.

Please complete the following questionnaire. Answer the questions as truthfully as you can. Use this survey to explore your relationship with Jesus; your faith in His love, His power, His wisdom; and how this faith finds expression in your worship and in your daily living.

Know, experience, enjoy God's dream for you. Work to make His dream real for others.

SPIRITUAL SURVEY

This survey can be used either by individuals or by groups. Either way use it to explore your true thoughts, feelings, beliefs and behaviors. It is suggested that one complete the entire survey without discussion or making reference to the Bible passages listed. Then after completing the survey go back and reflect upon your answers (if you are in a group discuss your answers) in light of the Bible passages. We all have reasons for our answers, however right or wrong they may be. If we are to grow, it is often as important to know why we believe what we do as it is to come up with the "right" answer.

1. Do you believe in God - the Father, Son & Holy Spirit? **Yes No**
(Be prepared to explain why you believe as you do.)
2. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being non-existent and 10 being extremely close, how would you rate your relationship with God? _____
(Be prepared to explain your answer. How is your answer evident in your life?)
3. The way to be accepted by God is to try sincerely to live a good life? **Yes No**
(Questions 3-6 were asked by Merton Strommen in 1970 of 7000+ people who identified themselves as active Christians. If you answered "yes" to question #3, you agreed with 60% of those taking the survey. Reflect upon and/or discuss your answer in light of Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8,9 and Hebrews 11:6.)
4. God is satisfied if a person lives the best life he or she can? **Yes No**
(If you answered "yes" to this question, you agreed with 94% of those taking the 1970 survey. Reflect upon and/or discuss your answer in light of Matthew 5:43-48; Romans 3:23,24; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Corinthians 9:16,17.)
5. Salvation depends not so much upon what you believe as much as being sincere in whatever you believe?
Yes No
(If you answered "yes" to this question you agreed with 73% of those taking the survey. Reflect upon and discuss your answer in light of John 14:6; Acts 4:12.)
6. The main emphasis of the Gospel is on God's rules for right living? **Yes No**
(If you answered "yes" to this question, you agreed with 77% of those taking the survey. Reflect upon and discuss your answer in light of John 20:31.)

7. I can see God's work, activity and blessing in my life? **Yes No**

(Reflect upon and/or discuss your answer in light of John 10:10b; Romans 8:32; Ephesians 1:3,7,8. If you answered "yes" share an experience of God's work, activity, and/or blessing in your life.)

8. Does your faith in and relationship with God significantly affect...

a. your friendships? **Yes No**

b. the way you treat the underprivileged, disadvantaged, and social misfits? **Yes No**

c. the way you treat your enemies? **Yes No**

d. what you would or wouldn't do at a party? **Yes No**

e. your ethics at work, school, etc.? **Yes No**

f. the way you spend your time? **Yes No**

g. the way you spend your money? **Yes No**

(If you answered "yes" to any of the above questions, can you provide evidence for your answer? Do you agree with the statement: "What one really believes is demonstrate in his or her attitudes and behavior!?" Be prepared to explain your answer.)

9. Outside of your family have you given of your time to help someone in the last two weeks? **Yes No**

(Share examples of such giving.)

10. Outside of your family have you given of your money or possessions to help someone in the last two weeks?

Yes No

(Reflect upon and/or discuss your answer in light of Matthew 25:34-40; Ephesians 4:28; 1 John 3:16-18. Luther suggests that the purpose of working and of even taking care of ourselves is so that we are better able to care for others, to be "little Christ" [Three Treatise, p. 302] Do you agree or disagree? Explain.)

11. Do you consider your faith to be a personal thing which is to be kept strictly between yourself and God____, or a personal, yet, public thing which seeks meaningful expression in the lives of others____? (check the appropriate response)

(Reflect upon and/or discuss your answer in light of Matthew 5:16; 1 John 1:1-4.)

12. Are you concerned for the eternal well-being of non- Christians? **Yes No**

(Reflect upon and/or discuss your answer in light of 1 Timothy 2:4; Matthew 9:37,38; Luke 15:3-7.)

13. Do you feel a responsibility to give a witness to your faith in Jesus Christ to your unchurched friends and relatives? **Yes No**

(Reflect upon and/or discuss your answer in light of Acts 1:8; Mark 5:19.)

14. Outside of your family have you verbally shared your faith in Jesus Christ with another Christian within the last two weeks? **Yes No**

(Reflect upon and/discuss your answer in light of Hebrews 10:24,25.)

15. Have you verbally shared your faith in Jesus Christ with a non-Christian within the past month? **Yes No**

(Reflect upon and/or discuss your answer in light of Romans 10:14,15; Matthew 28:18-20; Colossians 4:5,6. What motivates a person to share his or her faith? What motivates or hinders a person from sharing his or her faith?)

16. How often do you attend worship services?

___less than once a month

___once a month

___twice a month

___three times a month

___four times a month

17. If you attend worship at least three times a month indicate why: (check as many as are appropriate, prioritizing them 1 = most important reason, 2 = second most important, etc.)

- For the fellowship.
- It fulfills a need in my life.
- I want to thank and praise God for all He has done and does for me.
- It eases my conscience.
- God commands it.
- In worship I experience a real communion with God.
- Other _____

(Reflect upon and/or share your answers.)

18. If you attend worship less than three times a month indicate why: (again prioritize your answers as you did in #13)

- My spouse/parents doesn't/don't go.
- I work.
- It is too routine and traditional.
- It is too contemporary and does not maintain enough of our Lutheran heritage and tradition.
- I am uncomfortable with the theology I hear.
- I feel like an outsider.
- Other _____

(Reflect upon and/or share a meaningful worship experience and a non-meaningful worship experience. What tended to make the one meaningful and the other non-meaningful. Reflect upon and/or discuss worship in light of Hebrews 10:23-25; Colossians 3:16.)

19. Do you pray outside of a gathering of Christians:

- Daily?
- At least every other day?
- At least weekly?
- Occasionally?

(What motivates you to have the prayer habits/patterns that you do? Reflect upon and/or discuss your prayer patterns in light of Philippians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1 John 5:14,15.)

20. Have you experienced an answered prayer within the past month? **Yes No**

(If you answered "yes" reflect upon and/or share your experience.)

21. Do you read your Bible outside of a gathering of Christians:

- Daily?
- At least weekly?
- At least monthly?
- Occasionally?

22. Do you attend a group Bible study at least:

- Weekly?
- Semi-monthly?
- Monthly?

(Reflect upon and discuss the reason for Bible study in light of John 20:31; Romans 12:2; Colossians 3:16; Philippians 1:9-11; 2 Timothy; 3:16,17; Hebrews 10:23-25.)

23. Has your Bible study or reading of the past month affected your attitude or behavior? **Yes No**

(Reflect upon and discuss your answer in light of Matthew 7:24-27 and James 1:22.)

24. To what new step of faith and faith expression do you believe God is inviting you? _____

(Reflect upon and/or share your answer.)

25. What is one thing that would help you grow in your faith and faith expression? _____

(Reflect upon and/or share your answer.)

26. What new step of faith will you take today? _____

SCORING

In one sense I hesitate to provide a scoring instrument as I do not want us competing with one another or judging one another in our faith and its expression. However, I also believe a scoring instrument can be personally helpful as some sort of gauge in our own faith and its expression. In both taking this survey and in the scoring of it we must remember that each of us have variable which affect us which the survey does not take into account. This survey does not provide definitive answers to our Christian maturity, but it can help us ask some questions and perhaps give us some ideas of where and how we might need to grow

Scoring the Questionnaire:

1. If you answered

	Yes to...	No to...		
			e = 3	1
Question	#1 = 2	1	f = 3	1
	#3 = 1	4	g = 3	1
	#4 = 1	4	#9 = 3	1
	#5 = 1	4	#10 = 3	1
	#6 = 1	2	#12 = 2	1
	#7 = 4	1	#13 = 3	1
	#8a = 3	1	#14 = 4	1
	b = 3	1	#15 = 4	1
	c = 3	1	#20 = 2	1
	d = 3	1	#23 = 3	1

Total your points: (Total points possible to this point = 65) Your points to this point: _____

2. Add in the number you gave yourself question #2 (points possible = 10 for total points possible to this point = 75) Your points to this point: _____

3. In question #16 give yourself 1 point for checking less than once a month, 2 points for once a month, 3 points for twice a month, 4 points for three times a month and 5 points for four times a month. Your points for question #16: _____

In question #17 give yourself 4 points if you marked "I want to thank and praise God for all He has done and does for me," or "In worship I experience a real communion with God" as your number one priority. Give yourself 3 points if you marked "It fulfills a need in my life" as your number one priority. Give yourself 2 points if you marked

"For the fellowship" or "God commands it" as your number one priority. Give yourself 1 point if you marked "It eases my conscious" as your number one priority. Your points for question #17 _____

In question #18 give yourself 3 points if you marked "I work" as your number one reason. Give yourself 2 points if you marked "My spouse/parents doesn't/don't go," or "I feel uncomfortable with the theology I hear" as your number one reason. Give yourself 1 point if you marked "It is too routine and traditional," "It is too contemporary and does not maintain enough of our Lutheran heritage and tradition," or "I feel like an outsider" as your number one reason. Your points for question #18 _____

In question #19 give yourself 4 points if you marked "daily," 3 points if you marked "at least every other day," 2 points if you marked "at least weekly," and 1 point if you marked "occasionally." Your points for question #19 _____

In question #21 give yourself 4 points if you marked "daily," 3 points if you marked "at least weekly," 2 points if you marked "at least monthly," and 1 point if you marked "occasionally." Your points for question #21 _____

In question #22 give yourself 3 points if you marked "weekly," 2 points if you marked "semi-monthly," and 1 point if you marked "monthly." Your points for question #22 _____

4. Total your points for questions #16, #17, #18, #19, #21, and #22 (Total of 20 points possible in these six questions). _____
5. If you were able to share an experience in question #7 give yourself 1 point. If you were able to provide evidence of how your faith and relationship with God has affected your behavior in question #8 give yourself 1 point for an evidence in each category #a - #g up to a total of 4 points. Your point totals in questions #7 and #8 _____
6. Total your points from #2, #4 and #5 on this scoring sheet (Total points possible = 100 points). Your Grand Total _____

USING THE SURVEY FOR GROWTH

What follows are some suggestions on how you can use the results of this survey to grow in your Christian faith and its expression. Mind you these are only ideas and suggestions, but if you are interested in growing they might provide you with some ideas on how to begin. Please do not try to do everything at once and set yourself up for discouragement and failure. It is suggested, if you have more than one area upon which you would like to work, that you limit yourself to one area at a time and identify one or two things that you will do to begin to work on that area.

Questions #1, #3, #4, #5 are foundational questions dealing with salvation. It is important that we have a clear understanding of salvation, of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ if we are to entrust ourselves to God and grow in our Christian life and its expression (John 14:6 and Ephesians 2:8,9). If you have some confusion or questions, please get involved in a study of the person and work of Jesus. I would suggest a study of one of the Gospels, preferably the Gospel of John or a study of Paul's Epistle to either the Romans or the Ephesians.

Questions #2 and #7 are questions which deal with the intimacy and warmth we have in our relationship with God and the ways we experience Him in our lives. If your point total on these two was low it is recommended that you intentionally spend some time everyday focusing on God's presence and blessings. It is also suggested that you seek to develop a daily personal time with God (start small - says 10 to 15 minutes a day). Another idea is to keep a daily or weekly log or journal of how you have experienced God that day/week or how you have seen Him working in your life and the lives of those about you.

Questions #8 - #10 deal with how our faith finds expression in caring for one another. If your point total is low here, each week try to identify one person inside your family and one outside your family that you will seek to serve, that is, actively care for (it is sometimes best to identify a person for whom you would not actively care). During the week look for opportunities to care. Act on these opportunities. Spend some time brainstorming things you might do to show care and concern. Focus upon two or three of these ideas and do them.

Questions #11 - #15 deal with the verbal sharing of our faith. If your point total is low here you might challenge yourself to make it a point first to talk each week about your faith relationship with Jesus with another Christian. After a few weeks of this try share your faith with a non-Christian friend (don't try to tell him or her what he or she should believe, just tell him or her what Jesus means to you and why). You might also want to take an evangelism course. Remind yourself what is in store for the people (especially your family and friends) who do not know Jesus as Savior.

Questions #16 - #18 deal with our public worship. If your point total is low here remember that your public worship is important to God and to our fellowship of believers. Remind yourself of all that God has done and does for you. Enter worship prayerfully with the attitude of giving to God. Go to worship planning on meeting God in a special way. Focus your thoughts and look at the worship experience as a dialogue between yourself and God. Above all make a commitment to attend regularly (or as regularly as you can) regardless of your feelings. Make worship a priority!

Questions #19 - #23 deal with prayer and Bible study. If you scored low here work at developing a personal daily time with God. Start out slow, say 5 to 10 minutes a day. In your prayer time learn to listen, letting God speak to your heart and mind. I would suggest that you try reading one to three chapters of the Bible a day (start with a Gospel). As you read mark passages that seem to speak to you. When you are done reading the chapter(s) go back and reread each passage that you marked and pray over that passage - let God speak to you and guide you in making a response. Conclude with some praise and petition and by identifying what you want to do in response to this time you have spent with God.

Questions #24 - #26 deal with taking steps of faith. When you get up each morning try to identify a step of faith that you want to take today. Look for opportunities throughout the day where God is inviting you to stretch your faith. Try to take a new step of faith each day.

XVIII. Personal Interview Assessment

Pastoral Letter

Date _____

Greetings in Christ,

*For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. -- **Jeremiah 29:11-13 (NIV)***

God has a plan for us. Part of that plan is that we continue to grow in our relationship with Him, in our experience of His love and in our faith walk. Lent is a very appropriate time for doing some spiritual assessment and goal-setting.

During the season of Lent we are particularly mindful of how deeply Jesus yearns to have a personal and intimate relationship with each of us—so much so that He would take upon Himself our sins and die for us. He died and rose in order that He might give us a full and abundant life (John 10:10). St. Paul assures us in Romans 8:32 that if God “did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (NIV)

In Ephesians 4:11-13 Paul tells us that the church has been entrusted with the responsibility of helping its members continue to develop and mature in the faith. This Lent, to assist us in growing in our relationship with Jesus and in our faith expressions, we have trained a group of people from our congregation to visit with our members and to assist them in doing personal spiritual assessment and goal-setting. We are wanting to visit with every household in our congregation to help you, our members, set some spiritual goals. Visits may take place in homes, at church or at some other location of your choosing.

In the coming weeks you will be contacted to set up a time when it would be most convenient to visit. A typical visit should last somewhere between 30 and 60 minutes. The purpose of the visit will be: (1) to help you do a personal assessment of how you see your relationship with God and your faith expression, and (2) to help you set a personal goal for growth during the year of 2027. In the months that follow the person who visits you will phone you once a month to offer you encouragement and support for the achieving of your goal, and to see if there is anything you would like from the church or the church staff in the achieving of your goal. The person who visits you also will be regularly praying for you and your family as will the church staff.

Love and blessings in Christ,

Mt Olive & Concordia Lutheran Churches

THE SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT

1. Small talk (try to keep to just a few minutes)
2. In Jeremiah 29:11 God tells us **“I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”** (NIV) Part of God’s intent for His Church is to help the members of the Church to grow spiritually in their relationship with Jesus and in their service in the Kingdom. One thing that can help us grow is through the setting of realistic, yet, faith-stretching goals for ourselves. We are visiting all the families of our congregation to help them set some spiritual goals in their lives as they seek to mature in their faith and its expression (Ephesians 4:11-13; Philippians 3:12-14). If you don’t mind I would like to begin our visit with a prayer. *Pray.*

As we begin I would like to ask you to rate your spiritual life on a scale of 1 to 10 as you consider your relationship with Jesus and the ways your faith finds expression in your life: *(Be as critically honest and objective as you can.)*

1 John 1:7-2:2 ⁷ If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. ^{2:1} My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

How you are spending your time?

It’s the Pits	Perfect—No Need for Improvement
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	8 9 10

How you are using the talents and abilities God has given you?

It’s the Pits	Perfect—No Need for Improvement
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	8 9 10

What you are doing with the money and other material possession God has entrusted to you?

It’s the Pits	Perfect—No Need for Improvement
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	8 9 10

3. ****IMPORTANT TO NOTE:*** This rating is strictly individual and personal. In no way should it be, nor can it be compared with anyone else. First, some people have a tendency to rate everything high while others have a tendency to rate everything low. Second, each of us have a different understanding of “the ideal,” so each of us is rating ourselves against a different standard.

The purpose of rating yourself is simply to provide you with a starting point. None of us are perfect. We can all improve, but it is pretty hard to know where we would like to go (what God would have us do), and to set realistic goals for ourselves if we have no idea of where we are at – our current beginning point.

Wherever we happen to be at, be it at a one or at a nine, God is saying “Great!” not great that we are not higher, but great that we have identified a place to begin. In love Jesus died for our past and it is no longer an issue. In love Jesus accepts us in the present. But also in love and in power Jesus challenges us and empowers us to grow in our faith and in our faith expression, that is our stewardship of time, talents and treasures, so that we and others might enjoy all that we have been created and recreated, redeemed to be. (John 15:9-11; Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 3:12-14)

As a starting point, how did you rate yourself in terms of your time, talents and possessions? Explain.

4. When we talk of stewardship we are acknowledging that God is the owner of everything (every second in our day, every ability we possess and every penny in our pocket). We own nothing, we are simply entrusted as managers and investors for God. This could be unnerving and frightening if God, the owner, didn’t love us so much: *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* Romans

5:8 (NIV); *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”* John 10:10 (NIV); *“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”* Romans 8:32 (NIV).

As we know God’s boundless love for us (Ephesians 3:16-19; Jeremiah 29:11-13) and that He Himself is looking out for us, we can be content with God being the owner, and we can and will accept our positions as His stewards or managers (1 John 5:3-5).

We cannot give God that which is already His, we simply seek to invest that which He has entrusted to us (which is everything) in accordance with His will (Colossians 3:17). In so doing we will find His joy in us and our joy will be made complete (John 15:9-11).

In this sense it is also a misnomer to talk of volunteerism. Volunteerism implies that the choice is ours. When God called Jonah, He wasn’t asking for a volunteer. If we want to fine, if we don’t want to, that is okay too. However, when God calls it is not okay to say “No” or even to say “Later” (Luke 9:57-62). God does not ask, “Who would like to...?” God gives each of us talents and abilities and then He calls us to tasks and responsibilities in which He expects us to use those talents and abilities, expecting an affirmative answer.

**NOTE:* This does not mean that everything you are asked to do, be it by the church, family, friends, or whomever, is God’s calling. However, it does mean that the things we are asked to do, especially by the church, should all be seriously and prayerfully considered to ascertain whether or not it is God calling.

5. Now let’s go back to your self-rating. Forget about being a ten for a moment (unless you rated yourself a nine) and tell me what one rating higher would look like – that is, what would be different in and about your life if you were one rating higher in each of these areas? If you rated yourself a 3, what would being a 4 look like in terms of worship, Bible study, personal devotions, ministry activities, financial giving, etc.? What would be different in your life if you were a 4? If you rated yourself a 6, what would being a 7 look like? What would be different in your life if you were a 7?
6. Where and how do you feel God challenging and leading you now? Given what we have said so far, what is a goal you would like to set and that you believe God would have you set for yourself this year in terms of:

Worship attendance

Bible study

Personal devotion

Ministry/service to/your family

Ministry/service within the church structure

Ministry/service outside of family & church structure

Financial giving to charity beyond the church

NOTE: It probably is too much to try to deal with all of these areas at one time.

7. It is important to set goals that challenge us to take a new step of faith, but goals that are also realistically achievable given where we are at. God is not concerned about us being perfect today or tomorrow. He knows us too well for that. What God is really interested in and concerned about is that we are continuing to grow in faith and love, in our relationship with Him and with others. This faith, love, and relationship then increasingly expresses itself in what we do with our time, talents, and treasures. God is more interested in us taking some new step of faith every day than He is in how big that step might be (Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 12:2; 1 John 3:1-2). **SMART** Goals = **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ction-Oriented, **R**ealistic, **T**ime-Bound
 8. When people fail to reach their goals it is typically for one of three reason: (1) the goal was too high and unrealistic, or (2) they had no plan of action for the accomplishing of their goal, or (3) they tried to fulfill their goal in their power rather than in Jesus' power – seeking to live *their life for God*, rather than allowing Jesus to live *His life through them* (John 15:4-5; 2 Corinthians 4:10-11; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:20; Colossians 1:29).
 9. If you are to realize your goal(s) what are you going to have to do? Begin to develop a realistic plan of action. (You don't need to have the whole plan, but you ought to always to at least know what your next step is going to be.) What can Mt. Olive, your elder, and the church staff do to assist you? We strongly encourage you to find an accountability partner.
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-
-
-
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Jeremiah 29:11 NIV For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Isaiah 43:18-19 NIV "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. ¹⁹ See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.

Ephesians 3:16-20 NIV I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

Philippians 3:12-14 NIV

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

THE SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW

1 John 1:7-2:2 ⁷ If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. ^{2:1} My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

As we begin we would like to ask you to rate your spiritual life on a scale of 1 to 10. It **might** be helpful to consider: *(Be as critically honest and objective as you can.)*

How you are spending your time

It's the Pits

Perfect—No Need for Improvement

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How you are using the talents and abilities God has given you

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What you are doing with the money and other material possession God has entrusted to you

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1. This rating is strictly individual and personal. In no way should it be, nor can it be compared with anyone else. First, some people have a tendency to rate everything high while others have a tendency to rate everything low. Second, each of us have a different understanding of "the ideal," so each of us is rating ourselves against a different standard.

The purpose of rating yourself is simply to provide you with a starting point. None of us are perfect. We can all improve, but it is pretty hard to know where we would like to go (what God would have us do), and to set realistic goals for ourselves if we have no idea of where we are at – our current beginning point.

2. God has a plan for us

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10 (NIV)

3. Unless you rated yourself a nine, forget for now what a ten would look like. Instead what would your life look like, what would be different in your life if you were just one number higher. If you rated yourself a 3, what would being a 4 look like? If you rated yourself a 6, what would being a 7 look like? It might be helpful to think in terms of one or more of the following: worship, Bible study, personal devotions, ministry activities, family life, financial giving.
4. Where how do you feel God's nudging? Given what you have said so far, what is a goal you would like to set & that you believe God would have you set for yourself **this year** in terms of **one or more** of the following:

Worship attendance

Bible study

Personal devotion

In & for your family

Ministry/service within the church structure

Ministry/service in the community

Financial giving to the church or to charity

5. Make your goal(s) **SMART** = **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ction-Oriented, **R**ealistic, **T**ime-Bound

XIX. Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Search Institute, 1990 – Used with Permission

This questionnaire is built around 40 statements that help you evaluate where you are in your spiritual growth. It isn't intended to be the "final word" on your faith. Rather, it's designed to help you look at your faith in a new way. You will gain the most from the questionnaire if you're honest with yourself as you answer the questions. You won't share your responses with anyone unless you want to.

To complete the survey, read each statement and decide how well it fits you. Write the appropriate number in the blank next to the statement. Choose your response from the following options:

1 = Never true

4 = Sometimes true

7 = Always true

2 = Rarely true

5 = Often true

3 = True once in a while

6 = Almost always true

- ___ 1. Every day I see evidence that God is active in the world
- ___ 2. I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world.
- ___ 3. I am spiritually moved by the beauty of God's creation.
- ___ 4. I care a great deal about reducing poverty in the United States and throughout the world.
- ___ 5. I devote time to reading and studying the Bible.
- ___ 6. I do things to help protect the environment.
- ___ 7. I have a real sense that God is guiding me.
- ___ 8. I am concerned that our country is not doing enough to help the poor.
- ___ 9. I like to worship and pray with others.
- ___ 10. I give significant portions of time and money to help other people.
- ___ 11. I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually.
- ___ 12. I go out of my way to show love to people I meet.
- ___ 13. I take time for periods of prayer or meditation.
- ___ 14. I speak out for equality for women and minorities.
- ___ 15. I talk with other people about my faith.
- ___ 16. I think Christians must be about the business of creating international understanding and harmony.
- ___ 17. My faith helps me know right from wrong.
- ___ 18. I try to apply my faith to political and social issues.
- ___ 19. My faith shapes how I think and act each and every day.
- ___ 20. In my free time, I help people who have problems or needs.
- ___ 21. My life is filled with meaning and purpose.
- ___ 22. I am active in efforts to promote social justice.
- ___ 23. As I grow older, my understanding of God changes.
- ___ 24. I am active in efforts to promote world peace.
- ___ 25. I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on the cross to pay for my sins and rose again to give me new life.
- ___ 26. I help others with their religious questions and struggles.
- ___ 27. I tend to be accepting of other people.
- ___ 28. I don't have a hard time accepting myself.
- ___ 29. I take excellent care of my physical health.
- ___ 30. I accept people whose religious beliefs are different than mine.
- ___ 31. I do not feel overwhelmed by all my responsibilities and obligations.
- ___ 32. I feel God's presence in my relationships with other people.
- ___ 33. I accept that there can be both a loving God, and so much pain and suffering in the world.
- ___ 34. I do not believe my salvation depends on obeying God's rules and commandments.
- ___ 35. I am confident that I can overcome any problem or crisis, no matter how serious.
- ___ 36. My life is committed to Jesus Christ.
- ___ 37. My life is not filled with stress and anxiety.
- ___ 38. I want the churches of this nation to get involved in political issues.

- ___ 39. I have a deep concern for those who do not know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.
- ___ 40. I actively share my faith with the unchurched so they can come to know Jesus as their Savior.

Think, Discuss and Do

1. Do you think all the statements are true parts of having a strong faith? If not, which ones would you delete? Why?
2. What other parts of your faith would you add to the list and why?
3. Can you identify any parts of mature faith missing from this picture of faith maturity? If so, what are they?

Four Types of Faith

In Matthew 22:34-39, Jesus was asked which commandment is the greatest. He responded: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' . . . And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" In essence, Jesus defined a balanced faith:

- First, he focuses on a relationship with God. We might call this the vertical dimension of faith to symbolize the God-human relationship. In this study, we define this dimension as a life-transforming relationship to a loving God. Christians express this part of faith in ways such as worshipping God, praying and seeking opportunities for spiritual growth.
- Second, Jesus talked about our relationship with our neighbors. We might call this the horizontal dimension of faith, and define this dimension as a consistent devotion to serving others. Christians express this part of faith in ways such as helping people in need, getting involved in social issues and taking care of the environment.

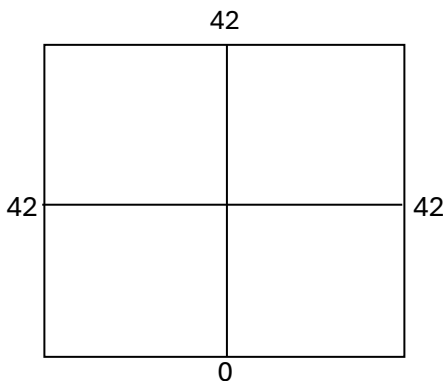
Although many people emphasize one theme more than the other, a balance of the two is important for a truly mature faith. So the researchers developed four faith types based on the two themes:

- Integrated faith – A Christian with an integrated faith experiences both a life-transforming relationship to a loving God and a consistent devotion to serving others. Of the four faith types, this one represents a high level of faith maturity.
- Vertical faith – A Christian with a vertical faith has a life-transforming relationship to a loving God, but doesn't have a consistent devotion to serving others.
- Horizontal faith – A Christian with a horizontal faith is consistently devoted to serving others, but doesn't have a life-transforming relationship to a loving God.
- Undeveloped faith – A Christian with an undeveloped faith doesn't strongly express his or her faith either by a devotion to serving others or a life-transforming relationship to a loving God.

How Are You Doing?

The survey helps you evaluate your faith in light of these four faith types. Here's how to score your survey:

- Draw a light line below item #24, since this particular section uses only the first 24 items.
- Add together the numbers you wrote down for the odd-numbered statements from 1 to 23. Write your vertical score here: ___
- Add together the numbers you wrote down for the even-numbered statements from 2 to 24. Write your horizontal score here: ___
- Complete the chart below. First, mark your vertical score on the approximate location on the line marked "vertical dimension." Then mark your horizontal score on the approximate location on the line marked "horizontal dimension." Plot where these two lines intersect on the chart. That intersection indicates your type of faith.



Think, Discuss and Do

1. Does your score surprise you? Or does it reflect how you see your faith? Give examples to illustrate.
2. In the national study using similar statements 64% of Christian teenagers and 36% of Christian adults had undeveloped faith; 11% of Christian teenagers and 32% of Christian adults had integrated faith; 19% of Christian teenagers and 22% of Christian adults had horizontal faith; and 6% of Christian teenagers and 10% of Christian adults had vertical faith.
3. Reread Matthew 22:34-39. Does this survey give you a new perspective on this passage? What part of the passage is most difficult to live out in your daily life? Why?
4. If you are stronger in one area than in the other, why do you think that is? What restricts you from growing more strongly in the weaker area?
5. If your score is in the undeveloped category, what factors have prevented your faith from growing more? Do you think the undeveloped category is the appropriate place for teenagers to be? Why or why not?
6. If your faith is integrated, what has contributed most to your growth in faith? What has been the greatest struggle?

Matthew 22:34-40 ³⁴Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" ³⁷Jesus replied: "' Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: ' Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Mark of Faith # 1: Trusting and Believing

Whatever we most sincerely believe and trust is the foundation upon which we build our lives. Some people believe and trust in money and success, and their lives revolve around accumulating wealth. Others believe fame and prestige are supreme values.

For mature Christians, the foundation of life is believing in God and entrusting our lives to God. Doing this demands patterning our lives around what we learn of Him and of His will in and through the Scriptures.

Self-Assessment

To evaluate your level of maturity on this mark, transfer the appropriate scores from the questionnaire to the list below.

- ___ 1. Every day I see evidence that God is active in the world
- ___ 7. I have a real sense that God is guiding me.
- ___ 25. I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on the cross to pay for my sins and rose again to give me new life.
- ___ 33. I accept that there can be both a loving God, and so much pain and suffering in the world.
- ___ 34. I do not believe my salvation depends on obeying God's rules and commandments.
- ___ 39. I have a deep concern for those who do not know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Add together all your scores for these items: _____

To calculate your average score, divide your total by six: _____

If your average score is higher than five, this mark of faith is well-developed. Nationally, 33% of Christian teens and 56% of Christian adults score five or better.

1. Are you comfortable with your score in this area? Do you think it accurately reflects your trust and belief? Why or why not?
2. Which of the areas of trusting and believing is most difficult for you? Why? Which is easiest? Why?
3. Read Genesis 18:1-15; Genesis 22:1-19; Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 9:17-27; John 4:46-54 and John 20:24-29. With which character from these passages do you most identify? What do these passages suggest about believing and trust?
4. How do you experience God's presence in your life? How are those experiences affecting the way you live?
5. What could your church do to help you trust and believe?

___ Genesis 18:1-15

___ Matthew 14:22-33

___ John 4:46-54

___ Genesis 22:1-19

___ Mark 9:17-27

___ John 20:24-29

- a. What is the law in these verses (what God expects and demands)?

- b. What is the gospel in these verses (what God does)?
- c. Put a "C" by the passage that comforts you the most.
- d. Put a Plus "+" by the passage that challenges you the most.

Mark of Faith # 2: Seeking Spiritual Growth

Learning and prayer kept Jesus energized for his full and demanding life. He constantly sought spiritual growth through public worship, discussions with others, and almost constant conversation with God. As Christians, we can seek spiritual growth in similar ways. When we do, we discover that the faith we're practicing gets stronger and stronger.

Self-Assessment

To evaluate your level of maturity on this mark, transfer the appropriate scores from the questionnaire to the list below.

- ___ 5. I devote time to reading and studying the Bible.
- ___ 11. I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually.
- ___ 13. I take time for periods of prayer or meditation.
- ___ 23. As I grow older, my understanding of God changes.

Add together all your scores for these items: _____

To calculate your average score, divide your total by four: _____

If your average score is higher than five, this mark of faith is well-developed. Nationally, 11% of Christian teens and 36% of Christian adults score five or better.

1. Are you comfortable with your score in this area? Do you think it accurately reflects your seeking spiritual growth? Why or why not?
2. Which of the areas of seeking spiritual growth is most difficult for you? Why? Which is easiest? Why?
3. Read Matthew 4:4; John 15:1-11; Romans 10:14-17; Colossians 3:16; 2 Timothy 3:16-4:4; Hebrews 10:22-25 and Hebrews 12:2. What connections do you see between these passages and spiritual growth?
4. What has aided you the most in your spiritual growth? What opportunities do you have for spiritual growth? Grade yourself on how well you make use of those opportunities?
5. Who has been a spiritual mentor for you -- someone who models seeking spiritual growth and who has helped you grow spiritually?
6. What experiences in your life have helped you grow spiritually?
7. What would have to change to make it easier for you to devote more time or energy to spiritual growth? What can you do to make those things change?
8. What could your church do to help you seek to grow spiritually?

___ Matthew 4:4

___ John 15:1-12

___ Romans 10:14-17

___ Colossians 3:16

___ 2 Timothy 3:15-4:4

___ Hebrews 10:22-25

___ Hebrews 12:2

- a. What is the law in these verses (what God expects and demands)?
- b. What is the gospel in these verses (what God does)?
- c. Put a "C" by the passage that comforts you the most.
- d. Put a Plus "+" by the passage that challenges you the most.

Mark of Faith # 3: Integrating Faith & Life

Mature Christians live by their faith. Their faith guides everything they are and do -- their choices, their attitudes, their politics, their finances, their family life, their relationships. When they read the newspaper or watch TV their minds hold Christian principles alongside those images as they formulate their perspective.

Integrating faith and life isn't always easy or popular. To be sure, mature Christians don't live their beliefs perfectly. When they look back on their day, they frequently find times where their faith had no part in what they said or did. And they face tough choices in which it is hard to sort out how to respond as a Christian. But their aim and intention is to continue to try to integrate their faith and the events of their lives.

Self-Assessment

To evaluate your level of maturity on this mark , transfer the appropriate scores from the questionnaire to the list below.

- ___ 10. I give significant portions of time and money to help other people.
- ___ 17. My faith helps me know right from wrong.
- ___ 18. I try to apply my faith to political and social issues.
- ___ 19. My faith shapes how I think and act each and every day.
- ___ 36. My life is committed to Jesus Christ.
- ___ 40. I actively share my faith with the unchurched so they can come to know Jesus as their Savior.

Add together all your scores for these items: _____

To calculate your average score, divide your total by six: _____

If you average score is higher than five, this mark of faith is well-developed. Nationally, 21% of Christian teens and 61% of Christian adults score five or better.

1. Are you comfortable with your score in this area? Do you think it accurately reflects your integrating faith and life? Why or why not?
2. Which of the areas of integrating faith and life is most difficult for you? Why? Which is easiest? Why?
3. Read Matthew 23:1-28 where Jesus condemns the Pharisees for their hypocrisy (see also Romans 2:23-24). What characteristics of the Pharisees do you see in people today?
4. Read Colossians 3:12-17 and Romans 12. What do these passages say about integrating faith and life? What challenges you the most in these passages?
5. As you think about the decisions you make daily, who has a lot of influence? How important is your faith in those decisions?
6. Identify someone you know who seems to integrate faith and life? What evidence do you see that this person integrates faith and life? What does he or she see, believe and understand that moves him or her to act in this way?
7. When have you ever done anything risky or unpopular because your faith demanded it?
8. Do you tend to share or communicate your faith more verbally or non-verbally? What is the importance of each? What happens when one or the other is missing?
9. What hinders you the most in integrating faith and life?
10. Explain in your own words what it means to "commit your life to Jesus." How does such commitment show itself in your life?
11. What could your church do to help you integrate faith and life?

___ **Matthew 23:1-28**

___ **Romans 2:23-24**

___ **Colossians 3:12-17**

___ **Romans 12:1-21**

- a. What is the law in these verses (what God expects and demands)?
- b. What is the gospel in these verses (what God does)?
- c. Put a "C" by the passage that comforts you the most.
- d. Put a Plus "+" by the passage that challenges you the most.

Mark of Faith # 4: Holding Life-Affirming Values

In Deuteronomy 30:11-20, the Israelites are challenged to follow God and God's commandments. At its climax, the passage says: "Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him."

As Christians, we, too, are challenged to "choose life." This means living healthy lives and taking care of our bodies. It means caring for creation, which sustains all of life. It also means looking beyond ourselves to the needs and interests of others. Thus we accept others, affirm other people's right to believe things we don't necessarily accept (while at the same time sharing with them our beliefs whereby they may convert), and work for the equality of all people.

Self-Assessment

To evaluate your level of maturity on this mark , transfer the appropriate scores from the questionnaire to the list below.

- ___ 2. I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world.
- ___ 3. I am spiritually moved by the beauty of God's creation.
- ___ 14. I speak out for equality for women and minorities.
- ___ 27. I tend to be accepting of other people.
- ___ 29. I take excellent care of my physical health.
- ___ 30. I accept people whose religious beliefs are different than mine.

Add together all your scores for these items: _____

To calculate your average score, divide your total by six: _____

If your average score is higher than five, this mark of faith is well-developed. Nationally, 28% of Christian teens and 50% of Christian adults score five or better.

1. Are you comfortable with your score in this area? Do you think it accurately reflects your holding of life-affirming values? Why or why not?
2. Do you agree that "holding life-affirming values" is central to the Christian faith? Why or why not? What elements would you add, take away or change in the list of characteristics?
3. What three things do you do that are part of a healthy lifestyle? What are three things you don't do that are part of a healthy lifestyle? What are three things you do that are part of an unhealthy lifestyle?
4. How do we retain our Christian convictions while affirming religious diversity? Do you agree that it's important? Can it be done?
5. Which do you believe is more harmful: being overly accepting of different people; or being too insistent on our own moral and/or theological standards? Why?
6. Jesus and the early church dealt a great deal with accepting people who are different. Read the following passages and determine what they say about accepting people who are different from us: Matthew 9:10-13; Matthew 28:19; Luke 10:25-37; John 4:7-15; Acts 1:8; Acts 10:34-36; 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Galatians 3:28 and Ephesians 2:13-22.
7. How do you respond when:
 - you encounter people who have different religious beliefs from ?
 - you notice unfair distinction being made between males and females?
 - you notice unfair distinctions between races or ethnic groups?
8. What do you personally do to treat God's creation as sacred? What more do you think you should do?
9. How does your congregation demonstrate, nurture and encourage this aspect of faith?

___ **Matthew 9:10-13**

___ **Matthew 28:19**

___ **Luke 10:25-37**

___ **John 4:7-15**

___ **Acts 1:8**

___ **Acts 10:34-36**

___ **1 Corinthians 1:10-17**

___ **1 Corinthians 9:19-23**

___ **Galatians 3:28**

___ **Ephesians 2:13-22**

Mark of Faith # 5: Experiencing the Fruits of Faith

Mature Christians know their own imperfections well. But they are secure in God's love, and at home in the world, freed from their own limitations. They are sustained by an underlying calm that comes from the deep conviction and peace that gives them the vision and energy to give themselves selflessly to others and to the world. They affirm with the Apostle Paul, that nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39).

Self-Assessment

To evaluate your level of maturity on this mark, transfer the appropriate scores from the questionnaire to the list below.

- ___ 21. My life is filled with meaning and purpose.
- ___ 28. I don't have a hard time accepting myself.
- ___ 31. I do not feel overwhelmed by all my responsibilities and obligations.
- ___ 35. I am confident that I can overcome any problem or crisis, no matter how serious.
- ___ 37. My life is not filled with stress and anxiety.

Add together all your scores for these items: _____

To calculate your average score, divide your total by five. _____

If your average score is higher than five, this mark of faith is well-developed. Nationally, 29% of Christian teens and 37% of Christian adults score five or better.

1. Are you comfortable with your score in this area? Do you think it accurately reflects your experiencing the fruits of faith? Why or why not?
2. Name someone you know who exhibits the fruits of faith. How are these fruits visible in his or her life?
3. Read Psalm 23; John 15:9-11; Romans 8:28-39; Galatians 5:22-25 and Philippians 4:4-13. What encouragement do you get from these passages? What is suggested about experiencing the fruits of faith?
4. According to Search Institute's study, relatively few Christians show this mark of mature faith. Why don't people experience the fruits of faith more? How does this reality affect the church?
5. What circumstances or situations encourage growth in experiencing the fruits of faith? How can Christians in your faith community help each other increase in this facet of faith?

___ Psalm 23

___ John 15:9-11

___ Romans 8:28-39

___ Galatians 5:22-25

___ Philippians 4:4-13

- a. What is the law in these verses (what God expects and demands)?
- b. What is the gospel in these verses (what God does)?
- c. Put a "C" by the passage that comforts you the most.
- d. Put a Plus "+" by the passage that challenges you the most.

Mark of Faith # 6: Nurturing Faith in Community

Some people question the importance of active church participation. After all, they say, the church is filled with hypocrites. Yet, we need the church, imperfect though it is. It is the church that unites us as the body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Paul describes the church as an interconnected, interdependent body. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,'" the apostle explains. "On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. . . If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice with it."

Self-Assessment

To evaluate your level of maturity on this mark, transfer the appropriate scores from the questionnaire to the list below.

- ___ 9. I like to worship and pray with others.
- ___ 15. I talk with other people about my faith.
- ___ 26. I help others with their religious questions and struggles.
- ___ 32. I feel God's presence in my relationships with other people.

Add together all your scores for these items: _____

To calculate your average score, divide your total by four: _____

If your average score is higher than five, this mark of faith is well-developed. Nationally, 16% of Christian teens and 43% of Christian adults score five or better.

1. Are you comfortable with your score in this area? Do you think it accurately reflects your nurturing of faith in community? Why or why not?
2. When have you felt the support and nurture of Christian community? How did the experience affect you?
3. Read Acts 2:37-47; Acts 4:32-35; Acts 20:20; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4:11-16 and Hebrews 10:22-25.
 - What similarities and differences do you see with your congregation? Are the differences appropriate?
 - What part of the body do you think best fits you?
4. What is most important to you personally about your involvement in your church? What bothers you the most?
5. What are the main reasons you participate in church activities? Do you think these are good reasons? Why or why not?
6. How does your congregation acknowledge and foster a sense of community? How helpful have those efforts been to you?
7. How do you encourage others to grow in their faith and faith expression?

8. Look at the four elements of this mark of mature faith. Does your church provide opportunities to develop all four? Which ones are the strongest? Weakest? How would you explain the difference or what reason would you give for the difference?
9. What would help you most in developing this facet of your faith?

___ **Acts 2:37-47**

___ **Acts 4:32-35**

___ **Acts 20:20**

___ **1 Corinthians 12:12-31**

___ **Ephesians 4:11-16**

___ **Hebrews 10:24-25**

- a. What is the law in these verses (what God expects and demands)?
- b. What is the gospel in these verses (what God does)?
- c. Put a "C" by the passage that comforts you the most.
- d. Put a Plus "+" by the passage that challenges you the most.

Mark of Faith # 7: Advocating Social Change

Mature Christians enter the political struggle not in quest for selfish power, but as a vehicle for fulfilling part of Christ's earthly mission: "To bring good news to the poor. . . to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). Thus the mature Christian cannot stand away from the political fray when the rights and concerns of the poor are being debated.

Sometimes Christians are told that "religion and politics don't mix," so don't stew up a toxic brew. But mature Christians know that they are "the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13-16).

Self-Assessment

To evaluate your level of maturity on this mark, transfer the appropriate scores from the questionnaire to the list below.

- ___ 4. I care a great deal about reducing poverty in the United States and throughout the world.
- ___ 8. I am concerned that our country is not doing enough to help the poor.
- ___ 16. I think Christians must be about the business of creating international understanding and harmony.
- ___ 38. I want the churches of this nation to get involved in political issues.

Add together all your scores for these items: _____

To calculate your average score, divide your total by four: _____

If your average score is higher than five, this mark of faith is well-developed. Nationally, 23% of Christian teens and 41% of Christian adults score five or better.

1. Are you comfortable with your score in this area? Do you think it accurately reflects your advocacy for social change? Why or why not?
2. According to Search Institute's national research, only 20% of adults say they are interested in peacemaking and social justice activities – the lowest interest level in the list. What does this statistic suggest about Christians? What does it suggest about advocating social change?
3. Read Isaiah 1:13-17; Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 5:13-16; Matthew 25:34-46; James 1:27 and James 4:17. What do these passages suggest about Christian involvement in politics and in social ministry?
4. When has Christian involvement in politics or social issues made a positive difference? When has it done more harm than good?
5. What is most difficult about applying your faith to political and social issues? How do you struggle with that difficulty?
6. Which political or social issues concern you the most right now in light of your faith? Why? Which issues concern you least? Why?
7. Do you see this facet of faith alive in your congregation? If so, where do you see it? If not, why not? How could it be brought to life?
8. How could your church help you get interested and involved in advocating social change?

___ **Isaiah 1:13-17**

___ **Micah 6:6-8**

___ **Matthew 5:13-16**

___ **Matthew 25:34-46**

___ **James 1:27**

___ **James 4:17**

- a. What is the law in these verses (what God expects and demands)?
- b. What is the gospel in these verses (what God does)?

- c. Put a "C" by the passage that comforts you the most.
- d. Put a Plus "+" by the passage that challenges you the most.

Mark of Faith # 8: Acting and Serving

Mature Christians are servants who, like the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 don't find excuses for not helping someone in need. They are the servants who take seriously Jesus' words: "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40).

Self-Assessment

To evaluate your level of maturity on this mark , transfer the appropriate scores from the questionnaire to the list below.

- ___ 6. I do things to help protect the environment.
- ___ 12. I go out of my way to show love to people I meet.
- ___ 20. In my free time, I help people who have problems or needs.
- ___ 22. I am active in efforts to promote social justice.
- ___ 23. As I grow older, my understanding of God changes.
- ___ 24. I am active in efforts to promote world peace.

Add together all your scores for these items: _____

To calculate your average score, divide your total by five: _____

If you average score is higher than five, this mark of faith is well-developed. Nationally, 8% of Christian teens and 11% of Christian adults score five or better.

1. Are you comfortable with your score in this area? Do you think it accurately reflects your acting and serving? Why or why not?
2. Which of the areas of acting and serving is most difficult for you? Why? Which is easiest? Why?
3. Read Matthew 25:34-46; Luke 10:25-37; John 13:12-17; John 13:34-35; Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 10:24; Galatians 6:10; Philippians 2:3-8; 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; James 1:27; James 2:26; James 4:17; 1 John 3:16-18; 1 John 4:20-21. Which of these passages disturbs you the most? Which one comforts you the most? Which one challenges you the most?
4. Of all the aspects of a mature faith, this one is most scarce among U.S. mainline Christians. Why do you think this is true? What would it take to change the situation?
5. What is important about this aspect of faith? What hazards come with it?
6. What personal experience have you had with acting and serving? How did those experiences affect you? How did they affect the people you served?
7. Who do you know personally who models this facet of faith? How might that person encourage you to develop in this area?
8. How could your church help you get more interested and involved in acting and serving?

___ **Matthew 25:34-46**

___ **Luke 10:25-37**

___ **John 13:12-17**

___ **John 13:34-35**

___ **Romans 5:8**

___ **1 Corinthians 10:24**

___ **Galatians 6:10**

___ **Philippians 2:3-8**

___ **1 Thessalonians 4:9-10**

___ **James 1:27**

___ **James 2:26**

___ **James 4:17**

___ **1 John 3:16-18**

___ **1 John 4:19-21**

- a. What is the law in these verses (what God expects and demands)?
- b. What is the gospel in these verses (what God does)?
- c. Put a "C" by the passage that comforts you the most.
- d. Put a Plus "+" by the passage that challenges you the most.

Self-Assessment

Transfer your scores from each of the eight marks of faith in this study to the lines below. Then rank them from highest to lowest.

Mark of Faith	Score	Rank
Trusting and Believing	_____	_____
Seeking Spiritual Growth	_____	_____
Integrating Faith and Life	_____	_____
Holding Life-Affirming Values	_____	_____
Experiencing Fruits of Faith	_____	_____
Nurturing Faith Community	_____	_____
Advocating Social Change	_____	_____
Acting and Serving	_____	_____

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Does the order of marks reflect your view of yourself? If not, what's different? How would you explain the difference?
2. Read Philippians 3:12-16; 1 John 1:8-9; Romans 10:14-17; Colossians 3:16; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 10:22-25 and 1 John 3:1-2. What do these passages suggest about maintaining and improving your spiritual health?
3. Read Romans 6:3-13; Galatians 2:20; Galatians 3:27; Galatians 4:19; Galatians 5:25; Philippians 1:6; Philippians 2:12-13; Philippians 4:13; Hebrews 12:2; 2 Peter 1:3, 4, 8, 9. What connection or tension do you see between working to grow spiritually and accepting God's gift of faith – between working to grow spiritually and realizing Christ's presence in you? How do you resolve the tension?
4. Which mark of faith do you admire the most in others?
5. In which category have you grown the most in the past three years? What factors contributed the most to your growth?
6. In your overall faith what factors have contributed the most to your growth in the past three years?
7. Looking down the road, what aspects of faith would you like to see develop the most? Why?
8. What specific action will you take immediately to help your faith mature? How will you get started? Who or what will hold you accountable?

___ **Philippians 3:12-16**

___ **Colossians 3:16**

___ **1 John 3:1-2**

___ **Galatians 3:27**

___ **Philippians 1:6**

___ **Hebrews 12:2**

___ **1 John 1:8-9**

___ **2 Timothy 3:15-17**

___ **Romans 6:3-13**

___ **Galatians 4:19**

___ **Philippians 2:12-13**

___ **2 Peter 1:3, 4, 8, 9**

___ **Romans 10:14-17**

___ **Hebrews 10:22-25**

___ **Galatians 2:20**

___ **Galatians 5:25**

___ **Philippians 4:13**

- a. What is the law in these verses (what God expects and demands)?
- b. What is the gospel in these verses (what God does)?
- c. Put a "C" by the passage that comforts you the most.
- d. Put a Plus "+" by the passage that challenges you the most.

XX.

Summary

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

*Jesus FOR Me = Jesus' Death = Justification, Atonement, Satisfaction
Jesus IN Me = Jesus' Sanctification – Transformation, New Life
The THROUGH Me - Purpose, Mission, Empowerment*

*God creates everything good.
Humanity Has Messed Up BIG Time.
God has a plan and is working His Plan.
To Experience & Enjoy the Fruit of God's Plan.
All One Needs Is to Believe God & Trust His Plan.*

