

It is a deception to suppose Christian ethics and morality are as universal as they have been in the past –that people in the Flathead Valley correctly understand Christian doctrine and virtues, much less live by them.

Quite the contrary, we are living among people vocal with scorn for the professing church. In a Christian society it can be difficult for us to live with integrity and stand for key values –something made even more difficult in a society like our own.

So now is the time for believers in Christ to stand firm for the kingdom of God, for only in Christ can the deception that binds human souls around us be revealed and defeated. It is God's design that you and I carry the message of freedom in Jesus to our own society.

*This study series is devoted to our **preparation for distinctive living** as people of the kingdom of God.*

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- week one:** What Matters Most to Me?
- week two:** How Much Fruit Do I Bear?
- week three:** How Far Would I Go to be Obedient?
- week four:** Is Today My Day to Begin Anew?
- week five:** Do Others Hear the Sound of The Spirit in Me?
- week six:** What Is the Nature of Spiritual Power?
- week seven:** What Direction Do I Face Before Conflict?
- week eight:** What Comes First in My Daily Living?
- week nine:** What Is My Example?
- week ten:** What Is My Kingdom Practice?

This study guide
is authored by Bob Thornton

Week one overarching question:

What matters most to me?

Before you begin the daily studies, read Matthew 19:23-30. As you read, write down, in the space below, thoughts, words, or phrases that come to mind. Don't over-engineer it – write first impressions. Place yourself in the scene. What sticks out to you?



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As citizens of the kingdom of God, we must look carefully into our priorities, to assure our efforts advance the cause of Christ.

DAILY PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Week One

What Matters Most to Me?

Day One:

The Bible selection this week is as much about values as anything. What do I view as important in my life and (at the heart of the matter) what “measuring stick” do I use to classify them as important?

Check out Matthew 19:25. Write your thoughts as to why the disciples became “very astonished” when Jesus made his famous statement about the rich and the eye of the needle?

Why, in the midst of their astonishment, did they bring in this business about “who then can be saved”?

What measuring stick did they use to help them conclude the rich were going to heaven? Was it reasonable for them to feel this way?

Look closely at your own “measuring stick” of what makes you feel successful or happy; of what matters most to you. Then, take a moment to reflect on 1 Peter 4:12-16 and Luke 19:8 (go ahead, look them up.) Cite the changes in positive values your faith in Jesus has made. Note, too, any promptings by the Holy Spirit about selfish values you continue to hold.

Day Two:

You'll note the selected text captures the aftermath of Christ's encounter with the rich young man. Please review Matthew 19:16-22 to refresh your memory and gain some context.

We can suggest that one purpose of Christ's eye of the needle remark was to address what He saw at the core of the rich young man: the soul-fruit of greed. Look up Luke 12:15. Write the two warning-phrases Jesus uses. Write your impressions about the differences between them.

Note, too, Christ warns, "...against every form of greed". Wikipedia defines greed as the desire to acquire or possess more than one needs. Write your sense of the difference between want and need.

One key lesson for us, then, is to become alert to whatever drives our thinking about what we want and what we need. Take Peter for example. Read his answer to Jesus in Matthew 19:27. Can you sense a note of fear in his plea: "What will there be for us?", "What about tomorrow?", "How will we get through?"

Examine and write below the focus points Jesus offers in His response to Peter (Matthew 19:28-30) as He ministers to this chronic human challenge. Christ is speaking to all of us. How do His words resonate with you?

Day Three:

A common characteristic of worldly possessions is that we can see and touch them (duh). We call special attention because this is a central point of departure from God's revelation of Himself. Read 1 Peter 1:7-9 to see this.

Now read Deuteronomy 9:9-12, and put yourself in the scene, as Moses reviews with Israel what happened when he brought the Ten Commandments down from the mountain. Notice what shape Israel's disobedience took. Now read Revelation 13:14-15 where the devilish activities of the soon-coming False Prophet are recorded. Write down what deceptive outworking is present in both accounts, and why do you think it is successful?

Write some characteristics of an image –what comes to mind?

No matter the form it takes, an image is a substitute; it is not the real thing. As our readings today reveal, it is an ancient deception to be assured only by what we see and feel. Once this falsehood infects our reasoning, how do you think it blurs our faith in the unseen?

Read John 20:29. For believers, the "real thing" is **currently unseen**. What tangible things in your life are competing for your trust in the unseen God?

Read Hebrews 11:1. Pen your reaction to the following statement: One measure of my faith can be found in how much I depend upon worldly possessions.



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Day Four:

Read Matthew 19:28-30 and note Jesus' answer to Peter. Was Jesus' reply past-focused, present-focused, or future-focused?

There are many places in Scripture where we are instructed to look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus (2 Timothy 4:8, for example). Write your thoughts about the value of a "future-focused" perspective when considering the value of worldly possessions:

Read and meditate on 2 Peter 3:10-12. Here we are reminded that "all things are to be destroyed." What lifestyle characteristics does Peter conclude a follower of Christ should reflect, as a result of the certain upcoming cataclysm?

How do your priorities match up against these characteristics? Grade yourself. How are you doing in these areas? Have material interests stifled evidence of them in you?

Read Psalm 24:1 and note what it says about ownership. Be honest. Is there room for you to reassess your view about Who owns your stuff? If you answer "yes", what actions can you take to produce meaningful change? Is there someone you can talk to –someone to confide in about this? Should there be?

Day Five:

Read Matthew 19:23-30 one more time. Write about contrasts you see between what Jesus says and the material security of the world.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:12.

- What instructions does Paul give?
- What two deceptions are highlighted in this verse?
- Paul says, “not all things are profitable.” It is a deception to think we can blend worldly values with Christian living –that we can live with our feet in both worlds. Make note of any areas in which your “lawful” actions (ex: being a good provider) may have blended with worldly values and turned “unprofitable” (ex: thinking that what I have is my own).

Read 2 Peter 2:19. Peter doesn't mince words when he says, "for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved." All sin is bondage. We will eventually become mastered by all urges opposed to God's truth. Stop a moment to ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate your soul. Is there anything coming to mind which might be gaining mastery over you?

An ungodly understanding of the nature of possessions can negatively impact our focus on God. Read the oft-preached text of Matthew 6:24. Fight through its familiarity; hear its Voice of Authority. Make a list below of worldly concerns which eat away at your peace of mind:

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SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Week One

What Matters Most to Me?

This week we studied how worldly possessions may loom as obstacles to our walk with God. Read Matthew 19:23-30.

- Work together to form a working definition of the Biblical view of ownership.
- What deceptions about possessions can your group identify, which act to fog our view of the truth?
- Ask for testimonies regarding the bondage of fear presented by the loss of material things.
- Discuss each person's notion of risk, as a measure of what matters most to them.
- What depths of personal commitment can your group reach, in vesting in each member's victory regarding the spiritual debilitation of ownership?
- Spend time to explore building accountability cells within your group. Who in your group can you connect with to assist your fight against deception?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



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SERMON NOTES



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Week two overarching question:

How Much Fruit Do I Bear?

Before you begin the daily studies, read Mark 4:1-20, 26, 30. How do your personal experiences inform your understanding of these word pictures?



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DAILY PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Week Two

How Much Fruit Do I Bear?

Day One:

The Bible readings this week are parables of seed, to illustrate the believer's journey –the plantings, pruning, and harvestings of fruit for the kingdom.

Read John 12:24.

- Jesus states a grain must “fall into the earth and die” **or else** “it abides alone.” Pause to consider this statement. Shouldn't it read the grain abides alone when it falls into the earth? Reread the text. What do you think Jesus is saying?

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- How does your explanation apply to the experience of believers?

How is a person's life before he knows Christ like being "alone in a seed bag" where there's no reproduction?

When a person professes faith in Christ, how does his life become like a seed that has been buried and is now growing, to one day produce fruit?

Meditate on Romans 12:2 and Hebrews 9:14.

- Name the associations or life patterns holding you in the safety of the worldly "seed bag":
- What transformations do you think you have yet to undergo to become a more productive, growing Christian?

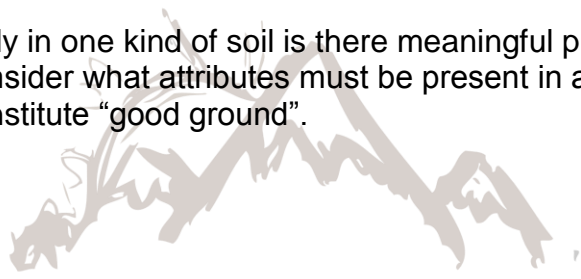
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Roll up your sleeves and read Romans 6:1-11. Make the necessary time to work through it; this is rough sledding. Pen your ideas about how this instruction ties into Jesus' words in John 12:24.

Day Two:

Read Mark 4:1-20. We find seeds growing in three of the four soils. Write your thoughts about what the role of the soil plays in each word picture:

Only in one kind of soil is there meaningful production. Pause to consider what attributes must be present in a believer's life, to constitute "good ground".



Jesus speaks about the yield of the seed. He says some bear 30, some 60, and some 100 fold. This will take some courage –using that scale write which number reflects your assessment of your production:

What do you suppose is keeping you from writing down a higher number? (Be direct –give examples.)

Day Three:

An important concept about our agricultural focus this week is to consider the dependencies plants have on humans. Because of our climate, Montanans know what to do with a green tomato. Gardeners in this country must work to get the most from each plant and to promote the best possible harvest.

Let's examine Biblical dependency then, especially as it pertains to how we bear fruit for the kingdom.

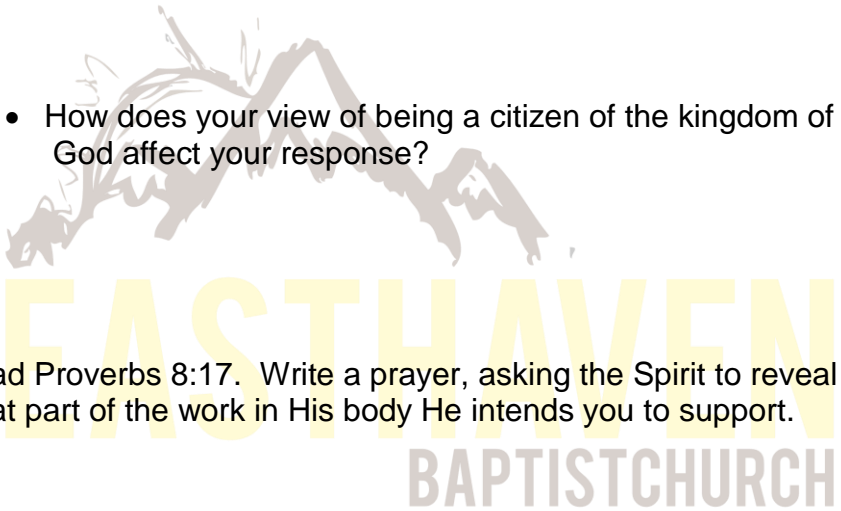
Read Romans 12:4-5.

- How do these verses inform your understanding about the nature of your relationship to others?
- In seeing the evidence of dependencies within this word picture, would you say you have any unfulfilled relationships or responsibilities to others in the fellowship of Christ? If yes, explain your answer.

Now is the ideal opportunity to consider what dependency or role God has prepared for you in the body of Christ. One way to determine God's direction in our roles is through the promptings we receive about another's unmet needs. How do you react when hearing a "volunteer needed" announcement.

- What promptings do you feel in your spirit to respond, if any?
- How do you respond to the call for help?
- How does your view of being a citizen of the kingdom of God affect your response?

Read Proverbs 8:17. Write a prayer, asking the Spirit to reveal what part of the work in His body He intends you to support.



What will you do this week to evidence a change of heart in this area? Be bold to enlist others to help you find a place to serve.

Day Four:

Another interesting aspect to agricultural word pictures is the notion of “pruning” and “trimming” of the plant. How should Christians look at their setbacks –when life hurts? Often well-meaning friends “console” by saying, “It’s all part of God’s plan”, when perhaps you might simply be wondering, “Why is this happening to me?” or “Is this fair?” or (so very often) “Is this my fault?”

Sometimes what happens to us has no connection to our behavior. However, sometimes it does. There are evaluation points we can study with absolutely certainty to help probe how we should view struggles and the question of “fault”.

Read Matthew 3:8-10.

- What criterion governs the work of the axe?
- What makes fruit either good or bad?
- Comment on this: Would a “loving God” use pain as a means to call us back into close fellowship?

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Read Hebrews 12:7-9.

- What reason is given for having to “endure”?
- How does the word picture of a father and child inform your confidence and build hope?
- What do those final words “and live” mean in context to your setbacks?

Read 2 Corinthians 13:5. What prime insight does Paul give for what we should do during difficulties?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

- When in strife, do you “hold fast to every good thing?”
- Do you keep times of regular devotions?
- Do you meet God in prayer as He intended?
- Do you hide His word in your heart to help your battle with sin?
- Do you gather with other believers?

Day Five:

Let's say you've been "walking the walk" and yet, in spite of that, life's trials have conspired to harass and steal your peace (Job 6:2). In the language of the agricultural word picture: damaging weather has come uncontrolled into the garden, threatening seed and harvest.

Job knew something about bad weather. If his experience is any measure, Christians can expect to endure evil circumstances even though they've walked closely with God. Please read Job 1:20-22 and Job 2:9-10 and record his reactions to what came upon him.

One of the most prolific and debilitating deceptions is this idea of fairness. It is instructive to note in these early chapters Job does not try to deal with the fairness of his plight. And although he, indeed, wrestles with it later (for example Job 9:11-12 and 14:13-17), importantly he will later proclaim his trust in the authority of God and not gripe about fairness (Job 19:25, etc.)

Are you bearing a heavy load from some uncontrollable bad weather? Be careful. Looking for "fairness" without a foundation of trust leads only to bitterness—a sure barrier to productive fruit. Read Isaiah 38:17, noting how, in the midst of his turmoil, Isaiah focused on truth.

Write the name of a struggle which seems to plague you. Next to it write the name of someone you trust to share this burden with. Is there no one? That may "feel okay", but remember you are part of a body; you do not have to "go it alone". Perhaps the beginning of healing is to seek others.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Week Two

How Much Fruit Do I Bear?

This week we studied parallels between the Lord's design in seed planting, maturation, and the Christian walk. This week:

- Discuss the corrupt soil in our text. Work together to cite how believers can detect the presence of corrupt soil that spoils spiritual growth.
- Can a Christian's seed fall into unproductive soil?
- Compare each group member's thoughts about what elements must be present in a believer's life to constitute "good soil".
- Ask for testimonies from group members regarding their level of production (30, 60, or 100-fold).
- What can we do to help each other get to 100-fold?
- Ask for life examples where personal hurt brought about an increase in growth—an increase in bearing.
- Be sensitive to each other. Minister to those hurting among you.
- What do members do in the face of trial?
- Are you available to each other for relationship building?
- Does everyone in your group have someone to confide in?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



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SERMON NOTES



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Week three overarching question:

How Far Would I Go to Be Obedient?

Before you begin the daily studies, read Mark 9:42-49. The graphic nature of Christ's teaching here should alert you as to the importance He places upon the lesson. The price of obedience can be costly. Meditate on the overarching question. As a citizen of the kingdom of God, what is your commitment to Christ?



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DAILY PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Week Three

How Far Would I Go To Be Obedient?

Day One:

Read Mark 9:42-49. It seems hardly credible that Jesus would so sharply criticize disobedient living before others with so horrifying a word picture as a millstone hung around one's neck and being dumped into the sea. Stop to think about it: "Kur-plunk", gone.

If we are serious about living kingdom values in our community, it will be profitable to balance (as Christ did) the fierceness of savage drowning against the temporary benefits of our poor behaviors.

Read and take the necessary time to meditate on Revelation 20:11-15. Picture the scene. Look at the faces of friends, relatives, and the guy in line at Smith's: thrown bodily into the place of eternal torment and doom. This is it. There are no "do-overs"; these are people you know. (Revelation 6:16-17) How does close scrutiny of this certain and coming scene justify the intensity of Jesus' remark about the millstone?

We will study aspects of our personal conversion testimony in Week Five, but consider for a moment how you came to an understanding of truth –how the deception of lies and the burden of sin and self-loathing were answered in Jesus. Was there someone who played a role, perhaps as an example, or perhaps who actively shared the Way with you? If so, write below what you would be doing today if that person had not behaved as they did?

Perhaps you are to be that same special someone for another soul. How might poor behavior interfere? Are there areas in which you need to return to the Lord? (Isaiah 31:6)



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Day Two:

Take another prayerful review of Mark 9:42-49. What three body parts does Jesus say are worth crippling in lieu of being “cast into hell”? (In verses 43-48.)

Consider the hand and the function of grasping. The world system seeks vainly for security through possessions and selfishness; grasping at even the most absurd ideas. Isaiah 42:6, however, relates the Lord’s idea for human security. Can you think of a strong thing to hold onto?

Consider the foot and the function of traveling a path. Reflect on the roads you have traveled. Experiences tell us there are ways which appeared inviting and productive but when traveled only led to bitterness and despair. Read Psalm 119:105. In contrast to the world system which frets over forecasting into the future, comment why the word of God only lights the place before our feet?

Consider the eye in the sense of understanding a matter, like “I see what you mean.” How do believers gain understanding about the world around them? Proverbs 9:10 informs us of a practice totally out of step with worldly reasoning. What does it mean to “fear the Lord”; to have “knowledge of the Lord”?

Have you disciplined your touch, walk, and vision into submission to the Holy Spirit? How far would you go to forsake the counterfeit influences of “hand, feet and eye”?

Day Three:

Jesus speaks much of hell in our passage. Every citizen of the kingdom should be familiar with Bible teaching on this important subject, if only to motivate our obedience in sharing the gospel. Follow along with the picture on the next page.

Read Luke 16:19-31. We learn that when the rich man died he went to Hades, the place of the wicked dead (also called hell, Sheol, “the nether world”), and the beggar, Lazarus, went to Abraham’s bosom –the place of the righteous dead (also called Paradise –Luke 23:43).

After Christ died, He went to Paradise and took the keys to death and Hades (Revelation 1:18) from Satan (Hebrews 2:14), and then He took those in Paradise and brought them to heaven (Luke 4:18, Colossians 1:18, Revelation 1:5, and Ephesians 4:8-10). Christ is firstborn from the dead. He no longer is in Paradise, but is bodily resurrected and seated at the right hand of God (Romans 8:34, Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 1:3, Hebrews 8:1, and 1 Peter 3:22). The righteous dead no longer go to Paradise when they die. They go to “be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23), “seated with Him in the heavenly places”.

There are three other “hellish” unseen places: The prison of darkness (Jude 6, 2 Peter 2:4), the prison of the four destroyers (Revelation 9:14, 15), and lastly the Abyss –the place of exorcised demons (Luke 8:31). These three and Hades are actual places to be destroyed at the end of time.

The only surviving place present before the new heaven and new earth are revealed and existing after they are revealed as Gehenna, the Lake of Fire (sometimes, too, called hell). This is the place of eternal punishment.

HEAVEN

DEATH, AND THE GRAVE

PARADISE:
THE RIGHTEOUS DEAD

THE GREAT GULF
HELL, SHEOL, ABADDON,
HADES: THE WICKED DEAD

PRISON OF
DARKNESS

HELL, GEHENNA:
THE LAKE OF FIRE AND BRIMSTONE

THE FOUR
DESTROYERS

THE ABYSS

Day Four:

You'd have to go a long way before finding a better example of obedience than displayed by father-Abraham. Let's begin with Hebrews 11:8. Does any particular phrase strike you as being particularly gutsy?

It's simple to suggest taking risks comes easier for some people - that some people are "made that way". Now listen, risk is risk. It's not easy for anyone. But that's precisely the point. Like Abraham we are all called to obedience "not knowing". Pen your reaction to this statement: From a Biblical point of view, the risk associated with obedience to the Lord is a constant zero (Deuteronomy 31:6).

Stepping into the unknown is at the heart of obedience, and obedience is at the heart of walking closer to Jesus. Therefore, the only variable in the risk equation is how we trust the Lord. We are the ones quick to diffidence, quick to justify delay, and quick to cite a myriad of circumstance to prevent stepping into the unknown -to prevent obedience.

Abraham and the story of God's covenant of faith begin in Genesis 11:27 and run through Genesis 25:8. One verse stands out for our study of obedience. Please read Genesis 11:31. How does the phrase "they set out together" inform your understanding?

Abraham had his faults (like telling people his wife was his sister on two occasions), but his shortfalls should encourage us. Ever consider that your weakness is the exact place where God wants to evidence His power? Try on 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Hebrews 11:32-34 and Romans 8:26-27 for size.

You know what you need to do. You can do it. Now do it!



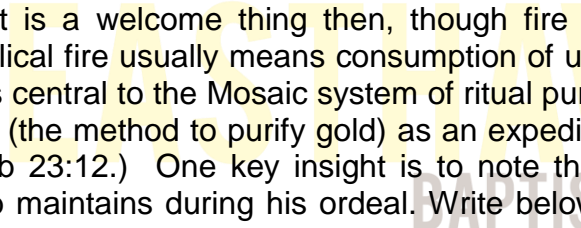
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Day Five:

We close this look into kingdom obedience by considering Christ's summary phrase in Mark 9:49: "For everyone will be salted with fire." As charming a prospect as that presents, we do well to work through it. What is the nature of salt?

In ancient days, salt was sufficiently precious to be used as legal tender. People got paid in salt; we get the term "salary" from that practice. You've likely heard a good worker described as being "worth their salt." Christ describes us as "salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). Within this context then write some ideas of what it means to (verb) "be salted"



Salt is a welcome thing then, though fire maybe not so much. Biblical fire usually means consumption of unfruitful combustibles. It is central to the Mosaic system of ritual purification. Job endured fire (the method to purify gold) as an expedient to sanctified living (Job 23:12.) One key insight is to note the tone of expectation Job maintains during his ordeal. Write below about a time where your personal trials seemed to consume you like fire and yet once you emerged on the other side you were salted.

So important is the lesson of having an honorable personal testimony (Mark 9:42-48) that the Master injects verse 49 to warn of the certainty of salting by our burning desires which, if fulfilled, would dishonor our personal testimony and cause another to stumble (Romans 7:18.) He knows we are susceptible; that in the fire of selfishness we think only of ourselves and fail to consider the consequence of our actions upon others (Deuteronomy 11:16.) “Be warned!” cries the Savior. Endure! Be cleansed!



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SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Week Three

How Far Would I Go To Be Obedient?

This week we sought to identify barriers to complete obedience to Christ, and we examined our willingness to remove their influence. The Small Group Growth Objectives this week are:

- Take a moment to share with each other about the godly behavior of those who played a role at the time of our conversion.
- How is the design of touch and holding corrupted into relying on something else other than God?
- Where have your feet taken you? Have you stopped to assess the road you currently travel –is your way filled with detours?
- The rich man suffering in Hades called Abraham by name (though he couldn't have met him in life). Further, he recognized Lazarus and dialogued about his life on earth, remembering Moses. How does this inform your ideas about human cognition after death?
- Do you feel a sense of purpose about the lost given that knowledge?
- What can your small group do to help others in their striving through risk towards obedience?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



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SERMON NOTES



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Week four overarching question:

Is Today My Day To Begin Anew?

Read Mark 14:22-26. What strikes you as you read this text? You know the world changing events which follow this simple dinner between the Teacher and His disciples. Although they've been instructed about the upcoming "Passion" the disciples do not at this point share your exacting knowledge of what is about to happen. Use that to your advantage –place yourself in the scene. Do you sense any personal connection with the facts or emotions in the text; things that the disciples missed?

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As citizens of the kingdom of God we must act today when made aware of needs in self and others. We may never have a tomorrow.

DAILY PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Week Four

Is Today My Day To Begin Anew?

Day One:

Please re-read Mark 14:22-26. The scene is the Last Supper. The Master's words, always precious, seem somehow more focused and earnest. Read verse 25 and sense the power of Jesus' confidence in His ultimate victory over sin and death. Jot below those factors which perhaps our Lord leaned on to speak with such authority.

Which of those factors you wrote above are also available to you? As Christ knew with certainty what was about to happen, you too know with certainty the words of Mark's gospel and what was to follow this simple dinner between the Teacher and His disciples. How does "knowing" something ahead of time play into one's confidence? (Deuteronomy 7:9)

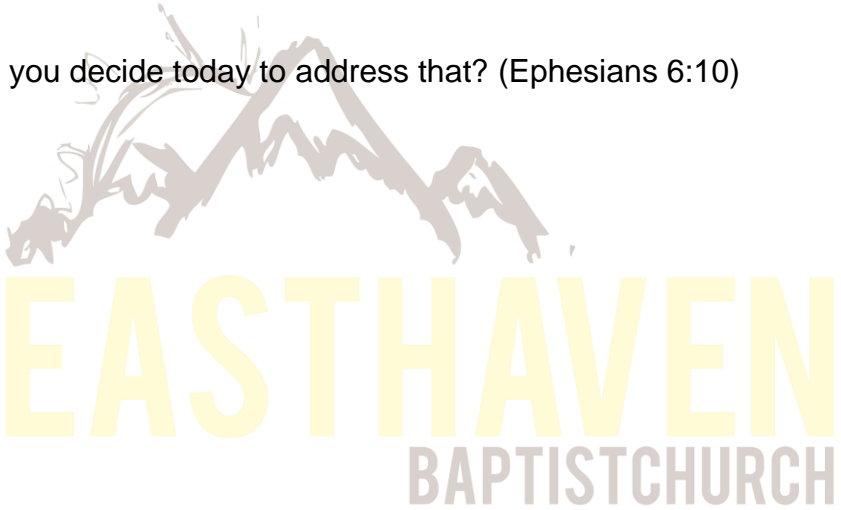
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You know that Jesus is coming again. Does anything keep this truth from bolstering your confidence each day? Maybe today you can drive a nail deep into this fact and secure it.

Meditate on the following question: Are you stretching your faith sufficiently to necessitate a need for Christian courage and confidence? (Hebrews 12:4)

Please stop to consider. Can you name any relationships where you have perhaps “softened” your testimony from lack of courage or confidence?

Will you decide today to address that? (Ephesians 6:10)



Day Two:

It is interesting to note the phrase Jesus uses in Mark 14:25 that He would “drink it new” or “in a new way.” What could He mean when he says he will drink “in a new way?”

Maybe this passage is especially for you. Former efforts to eradicate recurring sin in no way exhaust God’s capacity to defeat it in a new way. Read I Samuel 17:36, and note how David cites God’s past faithfulness as assurance against his future.

Like David did, proclaim past times when you said “it was a God thing.” Ask anew for release from your bonds based upon His past faithfulness. Memorize Lamentations 3:22-23 to better hold His faithfulness.

Newness of life through Jesus is a central theme of the Christian message. Look over II Corinthians 5:17. What has happened to the old things? What has come in their place?

What about evidence of the “old way” in your living? Can Christians live beset by repetitious sin patterns and still be Christian? (Psalm 19:13) Where (and importantly) when is your deliverance? Do you decide today to more faithfully meditate on the source of your deliverance?

Day Three:

Jesus provides an example of looking forward to some future time with an absolute certainty. The old catch phrase is “nothing is certain but death and taxes.” So that aside, stop to consider those things which you are absolutely certain await you. Pen your list below.

How would you characterize the general feel of your list? As you look are you left feeling hopeful? Did anything make your list that brought feelings of anxiety or dread?

Perhaps your list was pretty lean. Look up II Timothy 4:8. Consider adding Paul’s future promise to your list. What does it mean to do what he said he did? What concrete steps can you take to make this form of worship an active routine –part of your practice?

Have you considered the other crowns which await believers? Read James 1:12, Rev 2:10 and I Peter 5:1-4. Write how these texts affect you. Is today the day you decide to be intentionally mindful (and hastening) the return of the Lord Jesus?

Day Four:

It is helpful to study the nature of Jesus' affirmation in verse 25 of our text. He forms His statement in the character of a vow or promise. Read Psalm 56:12 and write your impressions. Have you considered this concept before?

If God's vows are binding, pause to think about some of them. Can you place yourself in His mercy?

Some folks maintain that it is wrong to make vows, because they are often hard to fulfill (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6). In that light consider Psalm 76:11. Meditate on the breadth of vows Asaph suggests; what limits come to mind? Should there be limits?

What jumps out at you in Asaph's statement? Read Psalm 116:14, 18 for reinforcement.

What spiritual practice do you find in Psalm 61:8 which David ties to the fulfilling of vows? Are you "up" on that practice? Maybe today you will determine to sing praises to God as you never have before.

Day Five:

Start this day's lesson by reading Romans 12:2. Reflect a moment on the hopeful notion of being "transformed." How does Paul say one can be transformed?

Did you write only one thing down? Look again at the text. Note the negative imperative preceding his command to be transformed.

Be honest in this: In what ways would you suggest you've become "conformed to this world?"

How might these attachments hinder your ability to become fully transformed?

What does it mean to "renew your mind?" How is it done? Is this something you practice?

Why does Paul single out "the mind?" Why not the spirit?

Do you decide today to become practiced at renewing your mind?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Week Four

Is Today My Day To Begin Anew?

This week we tried to strengthen our walk by using Christ's frame of reference regarding courage, confidence and new beginnings. The Small Group Growth Objectives this week are:

- Compare notes about what might have been in Christ's mind for Him to show such confidence as He faced the cross.
- Encourage group members to share about relationships where they have "toned down" their Christianity for lack of courage or confidence. Stop to pray for victory with each testimony.
- Share together what Jesus might have meant by tasting the fruit of the vine "in a new way."
- Discuss together if Christians can live beset by repetitious sin patterns and still be Christian.
- Find concrete steps to make looking forward to Christ's return a more frequent part of daily devotions.
- Work together to collect Bible vows God made and how they support believers
- Brainstorm methods of praise to help each member expand his practices in this area.
- Work together to create an understanding of what it means to renew your mind

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

SERMON NOTES

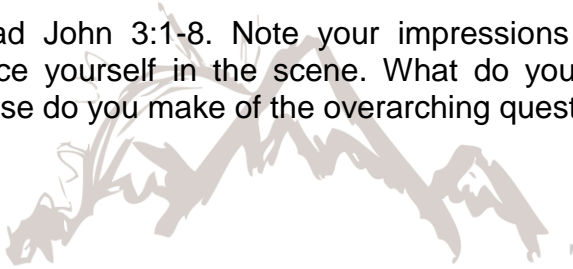


EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

Week five overarching question:

Do Others Hear the Sound of the Spirit in Me?

Read John 3:1-8. Note your impressions in the space below. Place yourself in the scene. What do you see and feel? What sense do you make of the overarching question?



EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

As citizens of the kingdom of God the central measure of our purpose and consequence is the reflection of Christ to the world around us. What is evident about Christ when others see you?

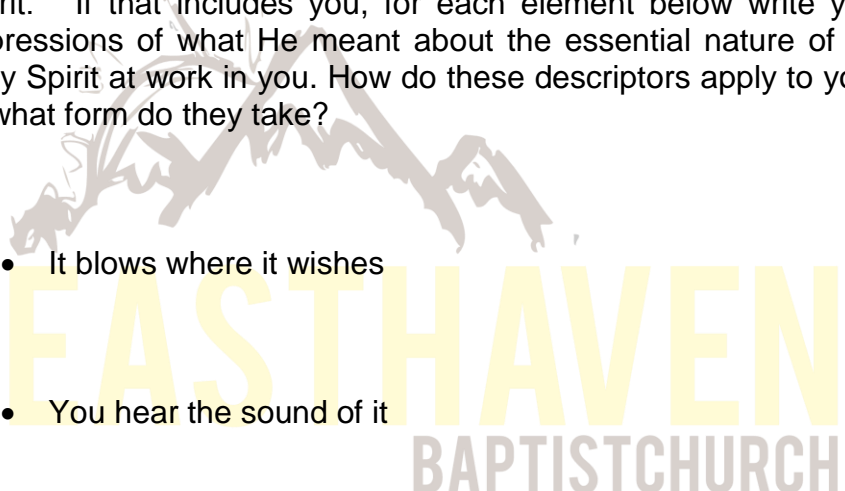
DAILY PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Week Five

Do Others Hear the Sound of the Spirit in Me?

Day One:

Re-read(John 3:1-8). Pause now to focus on Jesus' "wind" word picture in v8. Jesus said "...so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." If that includes you, for each element below write your impressions of what He meant about the essential nature of the Holy Spirit at work in you. How do these descriptors apply to you? In what form do they take?

- 
- It blows where it wishes
 - You hear the sound of it
 - You do not know where it comes from
 - You do not know where it is going

Using this word picture, how would you assess the evidences of the Spirit in your personal walk?

Day Two:

Christ's discourse with Nicodemus continues through John 3:21 (a passage which at v16 contains arguably one of the most recognized verses in the entire Bible.) Throughout the text we see the example of Jesus taking time to explain the rebirth experience.

Pause a moment to reflect on the circumstances behind your own rebirth. Dig deep. Bring to mind how the need for Christ was made clear to you and how it ripened into a confession of faith.

An effective way to simplify and crystallize your personal testimony is to "sequence" your conversion experience into "steps" – to capture on paper the key progression points. This will help you practice your story so it will not be so difficult to share with others. Do this in the space below.



Don't forget, this is your story. No one can take it from you; you practice your story to help give it away.

Does reading this make you wonder what the rebirth experience is all about? If so, take a moment to talk to your group leader or call the church office (406-752-7021) and ask to speak to a pastor about it.

Day Three:

Re-read John 3:1-8: what background-bio can you pick up on Nicodemus?

How does Jesus' reply in verse 3 answer Nicodemus's opening remark in verse 2? Or does it?

It is almost certain that Nicodemus came to Christ at night to avoid the notice of his contemporaries. Compare this nocturnal visit with what is recorded about him in John 7:49-51. (Go ahead, look it up.) Don't you suppose Jesus' John 3 encounter with Nicodemus fostered a new boldness in him? Since you came to know Christ, how would you characterize your speech before others; would you use the word "bold"?

Has Christ's most recent "connections" with you fostered a new boldness in you?

Now read John 19:38-40. Note again the citation of his first nocturnal visit. What does this tell you about Nicodemus? What makes someone openly declare allegiance for another before others? How does your allegiance show itself? How does your "progression" with Jesus compare with Nicodemus?

Day Four:

Nicodemus was a leader of the Jews; he was at the “top of his game.” Re-read John 3:2-4. How long did it take Nicodemus to “get into the swing” of the conversation? Why do you suppose this is?

That Nicodemus called Jesus “Rabbi” (or Teacher) taken with the speed at which he entered into dialogue with Jesus are indicators of a willingness in him (of an availability) to learn more.

Have you ever experienced “sameness” in your walk with the Lord? The mix of self, family, life activities and worship seem to mingle into an oft repeated pattern? Sometimes a friendly routine has a good feeling about it; in other settings, not so much. What are some pros and cons of your routine?

One con might be that our routines (and the resulting “lens” through which we view life) may become so entrenched that they numb our worship (Matthew 15:8.) Nicodemus was an example of someone who was drawn to the truth and set aside his worldly accomplishments (a little at a time) to come to grips with the challenges posed by a carpenter’s son. You may have heard that a rut is no more than a grave with the ends kicked out. How can you objectively know if your routines have become so comfortable that they are preventing growth in Christ and stunting the “sound of the Spirit” in your witness to others?

Day Five:

The main verse this week is one in which the church suffers a key division. John 3:5 says “Jesus answered, ‘I assure you: Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’” Some of the brethren cite this text as basis for water baptism being the agent of conversion; that is, baptism brings the Holy Spirit into the heart of the believer. What would you say to a person who suggests that?

As a Southern Baptist fellowship, Easthaven Baptist Church holds a differing view. According to the promise of grace the Lord established with Abraham (Romans 4:3, 4:13), it is the act of belief in the efficacy of Jesus’ blood to cleanse the repentant from their sin that brings the Spirit. Water baptism is an outward sign of this inward belief; it is a step of obedience and a social testimony of the believer’s intent to walk with Christ.

A key principle in all Bible study is “context.” Continue into verse 6 in your reading. Jesus draws a sharp and parallel distinction between that which is born of the flesh and that which is born of the spirit. How are these statements associated with verse 5? Consider the almost universal phrase from pregnant women: “my water broke.”

While it is essential to remain “on Bible ground” in all aspects of our living, some things are principles and other things are merely preferences. Some may like praise music better than the old hymns, but that is no reason to start a new church. What does Paul’s determination in I Corinthians 2:2 suggest is the ultimate principle we must never shift away from?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Week Five

Do Others Hear The Sound of the Spirit in Me?

This week our focus was on the conversion of the believer and subsequent evidence of growth. The Small Group Growth Objectives this week are:

- Encourage group members to share their insights on how their being “born again” of the Spirit fits into the “wind” word-picture (John 3:8).
- Talk together about the difficulties in “sequencing” a conversion journey on paper. Although this can be challenging to do, the goal is to get sufficient grip on our story so we can relate it. Each member should be asked to share their testimony.
- Explore how group members dealt with the word picture of the wind and the one born of the Spirit.
- Cite the pros and cons of having a sameness of routine for self, family, life activities and worship.
- How can we determine obstacles to growth brought about by our routines?
- How important is being “right” in contentions between believers? At what place must we draw the line and not retreat?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

SERMON NOTES



EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

Week six overarching question:

What Is the Nature of Spiritual Power?

Begin the week by reading Acts 8:9-25. Use your imagination to put yourself in the crowd as eye witness. Stand in awe of what is being done at the hands of the disciples. Work your way close to overhear the dialogue between Peter and Simon. Write what happened. What do you carry away from the text that helps this week's overarching question make sense?

EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

As citizens of the kingdom of God we must develop and apply discernment to properly assess the origins of spiritual powers at work around us.

DAILY PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Week Six

What is the Nature of Spiritual Power?

Day One:

One key to the lesson this week is a challenge to examine the bedrock of our belief; and then (importantly) to use that lens to view and evaluate the world around us. Re-read Acts 8:9-25.

Let's begin our beliefs evaluation by considering Simon's motivation in the story. Pen your thoughts about why he asked Peter what he did (Acts 8:18-19.)

Certainly one word describing Simon's impulse is found in Luke 12:15. Write out the different "forms" of this motivation which come to mind. Are you exempt from all of them you listed?

Each of us stands to benefit from routine self-appraisal of why we do things –to weigh our actions. II Corinthians 13:5 speaks to what is happening "inside." Why does Paul make a distinction between "being in the faith" and "Jesus Christ in you"?

Go deep and meditate on Exodus 20:1-17. Do any of the things listed elicit a conviction? Why do you suppose the last one is listed last? Why too, is this same one used to illuminate the message of Romans 7? (Romans:7-10)

Day Two:

Suppose for a moment that Peter could/did accept Simon's request to sell the power to transmit the Holy Spirit by "laying on of hands." Would Simon's same sense of amazement have persisted once he (wrongfully) possessed that power?

The first recorded phrase from the mouth of Samson (Judges 14:2) exposes an indulgence which persists throughout his life. What did he eventually do with this possession that he "had to have" and that his father counseled against him taking (Judges 14:20)? What effect does the possession of a thing wrongfully wanted have upon the wanting of it?

A thing wrongfully wanted does have attractive power or else you would not want it. This power is a spiritual power. Read Deuteronomy 28:65. When we forsake the Spirit and choose from among the attractions of the "nations" we are responding to the spiritual power of evil. Moses writes the winning of an object wrongfully gained is always the beginning of its loathing and will end in despair. Why does evil spiritual power always lead to despair?

What life experiences have acquainted you with despair? Can you trace a sojourn "among the nations" behind it?

Day Three:

We begin today with Acts 8:13. Look closely. At what does Simon become “amazed”; what did his physical senses perceive?

In the space below list the five human senses (that’s right, sight and four more). Which of the five senses should Simon have consulted to prevent him from becoming amazed at the physical evidences of spiritual power and help him discern his own motivations? In which of the five senses do we find the seat of spiritual power?



Of course the answer above is “none of them.” The body and its sensory inputs are not designed to infallibly protect us from the deceptions of the world around us. What three specific guidelines are found in Proverbs 3:5-6 to assist those seeking discernment?

BAPTISTCHURCH

Sometimes we view spiritual power to produce “signs and wonders” as something of the past –no prophets calling down fire from heaven today. Read Revelation 13:22 and Mark 13:22 what is to soon happen with overt spiritual power?

The urge for humans to rely on touch and feel to persuade us of truth is universal. In Genesis 3:6 we read that one of the hooks against Eve was “... it was a delight to the eyes. . .”

Read Exodus 32:21-24. What does the phrase “who will go before us” say about the expectations the people had of this god they made?

What assurances about your future have you placed in the hands of what you have?



EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

Day Four:

You'll remember from our previous eleven-week study in the Epistle of I John the emphasis on the practice of discernment. Read Hebrews 5:14. What are the hallmarks of the mature?

Read the words of Jehoshaphat in II Chronicles 19:6. Do you read anything to surprise or validate you?

Not only should we be practiced in testing the nature of spiritual power to benefit our own life-victories and peace of mind, we do so to better serve the Lord (Colossians 9:1-12.) What impact does this fact have upon your intentional focus –upon the planning you allot to your personal devotions –about whose you are?

We are not to believe every spirit, because the stock and trade of evil spiritual power is deception (1 John 4:1.) Now think a minute before you read too far here: what is true of those who are deceived? (Did you stop to think about it?) The person who is deceived does not know it. We know the Lord protects our every step; however, we must do our part. Have you spent time on your knees regarding your personal discernment of spiritual power? Have you made a point of asking the Father to help you think and act clearly?

Daily devotions, prayer and reflections on Truth are key to sustaining our spiritual discernment (Colossians 2:8-12).

Day Five:

Read Acts 8:20-24. How does the Apostle Peter address Simon's error? Do you get a sense that Peter's rebukes were a little "over the top" and out of proportion to the misdeed?

How do, Paul's words, in Romans 7:13, affect your answer?

What does Paul mean when he says that sin must "be shown to be sin" and that "sin might become utterly sinful?"

Our tolerance of wrongdoing, of sin, or (more directly still) of evil itself – stands in the way of the spiritual power we can access through living in "the fear of the Lord." Check out Proverbs 8:13.

It's true the Bible word "fear" means "to revere" or "to respect", but it also most certainly means "to fear." (Deuteronomy 6:24) Respond to this statement: if I had a greater measure of dread for the power and authority of the Lord I might be better able to identify, hate, and gain victory over evil influences in my life. If you answered in the affirmative; what can you do about it?

One guard against evil spiritual power is learning to utterly hate evil.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Week Six

What Is the Nature of Spiritual Power?

This week we sought to refresh our responsibility to apply discernment in our living. Not all influences are good. The Small Group Growth Objectives this week are:

- Plumb member ideas about what made Simon tick.
- Solicit and compare member lists of the many “forms” of greed.
- Collect a group definition of covetousness and consider why it is at the core of every instantiation of evil spiritual power.
- Can anyone share about the collapse of feelings once a thing wrongfully wanted is attained?
- What does the phrase “eyes weary with longing” (NIV-1984) mean in Deuteronomy 28:65?
- Ask to share confidences regarding encounters with despair.
- Work up a list together of modern day “signs and wonders” which seek to derail the naive believer.
- Brainstorm what things we might add to our spiritual practice to help make sin become utterly sinful.
- What can we do to add the protective covering of the fear of the Lord to our daily living?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

SERMON NOTES



EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

Week seven overarching question:

What Direction Do I Face Before Conflict?

Spend time reading Acts 14:8-22. See yourself as the lame man, as Paul, as the priest of Zeus, as one of the crowd, and lastly as one of the Jews from Antioch. How does each perspective help you gain insight into the nature of conflict? How does this week's overarching question play into your self-evaluation?



EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

As citizens of the kingdom of God we must walk in the power of the Holy Spirit to directly and successfully engage sources of conflict and spiritual error in the world around us.

DAILY PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Week Seven

What Direction Do I Face Before Conflict?

Day One:

To add descriptors in speech we turn to adjectives: “Pastor Frank’s tie is *interesting*.” However, in Acts 14:9 Dr. Luke uses an uncommon grammatical form placed here to catch our attention. He employs a participle (a verb describing a noun) to portray how Paul looked at the lame man. He “looked intently”, or “fixed his gaze upon”, the man. Think a moment: how carefully do you look to discover the needs of others?

Note, too, how Paul’s active interest in the man’s need became the basis for all that happened afterward. Respond to this statement: God hand-planted me where I am in order to use my giftedness to help meet the needs of others.

Solomon was a practiced observer of mankind; check out Proverbs 24:30-34. What pitfalls can result when believers fail to be intentional about observing the world around?

Stop to consider, are you doing the things you ought to do to further the Kingdom of Christ in the setting He chose for you? II Timothy 4:2 says we are to be ready to meet needs only when we feel prepared, right?

Day Two:

Take a moment to re-read Acts 14:11-13; replay the reaction the worshipers of Zeus gave Paul once they saw the lame man healed. Sometimes spiritual conflict comes with our response to the praise and adoration of others.

Read 1 Samuel 9:1, 1 Samuel 10:1, 10:6 and 1 Samuel 10:17-27 for the story of someone whom the crowd loved and wanted for a leader when God Himself wanted to be Leader. Have the favorable opinions of others ever swayed you to do what you shouldn't have done?

In Acts 14:11-14, the people, faithful to the “inclusive” worldview of Greek pantheism, were driven by their physical senses to worship Paul and Barnabas. What lessons can you take from how quickly the priest adapted to the delirium of the people (v13)?

It is difficult to face conflict directly. Often we seek the comfort of compromise to reduce tensions. Study Revelation 3:14-18. Though a sense of equilibrium (harm avoidance) can be reached by “blending” secular thinking into our personal living, the purity of our witness for Christ is affected. How does Jesus view this?

Do you suppose there is a relationship between compromise and Paul's warning in I Thessalonians 5:19?

Day Three:

One of the greatest deceptions is to suppose one can accept the doctrines of ever-downward spiraling humanistic thought and remain objective to the truth. Today's lenient morality will further be misshaped tomorrow; leaving people content to confuse popular thought with truth. This is the accepted framework in today's arena, where citizens of the kingdom of God must take a stand.

Read John 8:32, 36. Only truth can crush the world's deceptions and set the lost free. Believers are the guardians of truth. Read Luke 12:48 and pen your impressions regarding your personal stewardship of the truth.

Have you considered Matthew 5:14 lately? (Hint, hint, read it.) Reflect honestly –how seriously do you take its message? Are there things in your daily living which thwart your enthusiasm?

Consider Joshua 24:1-18. Note especially what Joshua says in verses 14 and 15. Whoa! Now read Numbers 13:30-33 and then Numbers 14:5-10. You know who you are. If you need to "turn about" to face others consistent with your faith in Jesus, then this is the time to do it. Don't listen to the temptation that "it's too late" or that "people who know me will think I am a hypocrite." Those are vain objections rooted in pride, not truth.

Don't linger with this. II Corinthians 6:2 says "Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation." Can you name below a place, or a person with whom you need to reconsider your stand for Christ?

Day Four:

One thing we learn from our text is that taking a stand for Christ can have its consequences. Check out Acts 14:19. Write your thoughts as to why Christians suffer:

Read Hebrews 5:1-10. This is tough plowing, so take your time. Notice in verse 7 an insight into the humanity of Jesus' struggles – that He lived through “loud crying and tears” (Isaiah 53:3.) What purpose does the writer of the Hebrews give for the Master to have suffered (v8)?

How does 2 John 1:6 define love? Taken with Hebrews 5:8 above, what affect does this definition have on the way you view seasons of suffering?

Read 2 Corinthian 9:13. Paul shows that obedience to Christ is something others can come to rejoice in. Have you ever considered that the things you suffer are placed in your life to give meaning to others?

Respond to the following suggestion: the central benefit accrued to believers in the process of personal suffering is in discovering new directions in obedience to God which will glorify Christ Jesus. Please consider Romans 5:3-6.

Day Five:

A singular happening is recorded in Acts 14:21. Read it for yourself and then refer back to Acts 14:8 for a reminder of where Paul had just been stoned. Be honest, would you have gone back? After what he went through, didn't Paul have the right to choose never to see those people again? Comment.

One conflict which takes courage to face is forgiving those who offend us. One key to understanding forgiveness is a right understanding of the nature of personal rights.

You'll remember that in the days before David became king, Saul ruthlessly pursued him, wanting him way dead. Read 1 Samuel 24:1-7 and then flip to 1 Samuel 26:4-12. What happened in each case? What reason did David cite for restraining his hand?

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 states plainly that we are not our own; that we belong body and soul to Christ (Romans 14:7-8.) Add to that Psalm 51:4 which says plainly, that all sin is ultimately against God.

Visualize the face of a person who has offended you. Would you be willing to view your circumstances with this person as an offense to God, instead of to yourself? What barriers do you encounter? How might you overcome them?

How does this lesson affect you, if you are the offender?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Week Seven

What Direction Do I Face Before Conflict?

This week our focus was digging deep to find the courage to face conflicts head on. The Small Group Growth Objectives this week are:

- How can we get better at actually observing the world around us instead of just seeing it?
- Ask group members about their experiences of finding needs when they were “on the lookout.”
- How important is it for leaders to take a stand for Christian truth? Do you see yourself as a leader, or is that someone else’s job?
- What does it mean to “quench the Spirit?” What affect does this quenching have on the believer?
- Solicit and help members identify areas and people where they need to make a stand for Jesus
- How can we learn to see suffering as love –as God’s method to bring us into obedience?
- How persistent are we in forgiving those who offend? Do we pursue them again and again?
- There are barriers to forgiveness that some members have not overcome, but others in similar situations have. Work to root out and unite them.

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

SERMON NOTES



EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

Week eight overarching question:

What Comes First in My Daily Living?

First things: Stop and carefully work through Romans 14:13-18. Hear the words as if Paul is speaking directly to you and to you alone. What jumps out at you? Jot a note or two below about the things which resonate. Are you able to take those items and place them in context with this week's overarching question?

EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

As citizens of the kingdom of God we must act courageously to face Truth and accept responsibility to foster righteousness, peace and joy in our daily living.

DAILY PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Week Eight

What Comes First in My Daily Living?

Day One:

We begin our lesson this week by thinking about those around us. Paul cautions believers against behaviors which become an obstacle or stumbling block to others. The question quickly becomes one of self-assessment.

Read Isaiah 8:14-15 and then turn over to Luke 20:17-18. If Christ is a stumbling block, how is it that believers are warned of becoming one?

Read 1 Peter 2:4-10. What does the phrase “living stones” convey to you?

Luke 17:2 illustrates how seriously the Master takes issue with becoming an obstacle to others. Take a moment now to evaluate your friendships, your view of ownership, your view of spiritual feeding and accountability. Are there areas where your feet seem planted in two worlds –where others can hear the claim Christian but are likely to see something else?

Turn back to 1 Peter 2:9. God wants to use you to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light.” Note below things which need to be addressed – which inhibit the purity of your calling, which, in fact, pose a stumbling block to others.



EASTHAVEN

BAPTISTCHURCH

Day Two:

“Putting others first” is a hackneyed phrase –familiar, but lacking traction in practice. In the words of Cain, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Where is the line in my responsibility toward others?

When considering our relationship with others, it’s good habit to begin with ourselves. Lookup Luke 24:47 and then Acts 1:8. Jesus teaches that the message of salvation must first start at home and then branch out in ever widening circles.

Now read John 4:24 and then John 16:13. When was the last time you asked the Holy Spirit to illuminate truth onto what’s going on in your walk with others? Perhaps now would be a good time.

Lookup Matthew 7:1-5. Write below key words to capture battleground areas where the Holy Spirit indicates the enemy has gained a toehold.

What words would you use to describe someone who has little interest in spiritual self-assessment –who thinks he is fine the way he is and who does not believe such activities are necessary or even useful?

Read the caution Hebrew 3:12 cites for such a person. What does the passage reveal about his destiny? What personal pronoun does the writer of Hebrews use? Could you be the person he is writing about?

Day Three:

The key verse this week is Romans 14:17. Take a moment to read it. What are the three words Paul uses to describe the kingdom of God?

Let's examine righteousness together. What significance does Psalm 97:2 place on righteousness?

Read Romans 1:16-17. How is righteousness manifested?

Righteousness is always revealed, imputed, or declared by God, it is not something we can work to achieve. Pen your impressions of how 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Isaiah 64:6 speak to this truth.

Romans 1:16-17 says righteousness is appropriated through faith. Lookup Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:5 and Romans 10:10. How recently have you considered your faith as the engine to participate in God's righteousness?

There is another important consideration. Read Malachi 4:2 and Psalm 71:19-20. Righteousness is an active attribute. Describe the actions of righteousness identified in these passages. How does this help you view your personal walk?

Day Four:

The second word used by Paul as being foundational to the kingdom of God is peace. Read John 14:27. Christ says how He gives peace differs from the way the world gives peace. In what ways would you say this true?

Many today would define peace as an absence of difficulty. Read John 16:33. What life-condition hovers within a sentence of Jesus' words on peace?

Read Romans 5:1, Finish this sentence: "The peace of God comes through. . ."

One familiar definition of justification is: "just as if it never happened." What does the verse say are the results of the believer's justification?

Read Mark 5:24 and then Luke 7:50. If we are to live kingdom priorities in our daily walk, we must remain mindful of the spiritual links between faith and peace. What spiritual practices help you to keep the power of your faith in the crosshairs? How do they factor in "what comes first" for you?

Day Five:

The third word used by Paul as being foundational to the kingdom of God is joy. If we seek kingdom priorities we do well to understand more about it. Put some thought into this: what is the difference between joy and happiness?

Read 1 Chronicles 16:27 and then read Psalm 16:11. Where is the abode of joy?

Given that answer, does joy reside with the believer, or does it come and go with circumstance? How does your answer affect your expectations of being joyful?

James 1: 2-4 sets a tough standard for when to have joy. Please take a moment to read that passage. Pen your reply to this next statement: I can choose joy at my discretion.

How does your answer fit with James' imperative?

Since joy is a fruit of the Spirit, does that mean I can constantly bear it?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Week Eight

What Comes First in My Daily Living?

This week we sought to better understand our personal capacities for making kingdom priorities our own. We worked on what it means to be an obstacle, assessing ourselves to determine how well we put others first and we bore down into three key elements of the kingdom: faithfulness, peace and joy.

- Work together and share struggles with “living in the world.” What strategies can be applied to help?
- Ask the group about barriers to authentic self-assessment; seeing our self without filters and treating sinful behaviors for what they are.
- Does anyone in your group need spiritual or bodily healing, or revival from some difficulty? How might righteousness be applied as an engine for change?
- Work together to identify examples of the “false peace” of the world.
- Solicit ideas of practices believers can exercise to bring their faith (and hence peace) into their cognitive mind?
- Is joy a frame of mind (point of view) or a possession (life-condition) for the believer?
- How can we become better accountable for making Godly things first in our daily living?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

SERMON NOTES



EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

Week nine overarching question:

What Is My Example?

First things: Stop and meditatively approach 1 Corinthians 4:14-21. Ask your Heavenly Father to guide you. Paul offers firm and loving advice –so keep tabs on your promptings. Does any of the passage make you uncomfortable? Make a note about it in the space below. Make a point to reassess it later after you've completed this week's study. Prepare yourself to face the overarching question.



EASTHAVEN
BAPTISTCHURCH

As citizens of the kingdom of God we must be bold to proclaim our allegiance to Christ and to annihilate elements of our living which distract others from Him.

DAILY PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Week Nine

What Is My Example?

Day One:

Re-read 1 Corinthians 4:14-21. Paul draws a clear line about his intentions (v14): he states he's trying not to do one thing, and he states he's is trying to do another. What two words does he put into opposition?

David's tender heart amplifies a familiar context for human shame in Psalm 69:19. Give it a read. We experience shame most pointedly when we are culpable –when we get caught with our hand in the cookie jar. Why is shame seldom at work before an unrighteous act?

What is your take on personal honor?

Check out Job 19:9-10 to affirm a further connection, the one between honor and hope. Have you felt “the lash” before? Maybe you've been fired from a job, got “chewed out” by someone in authority, or were otherwise punished? What happened to your sense of hope at that time? (Read Lamentations 3:1-18, and notice Jeremiah's summary at v18.)

Return to 1 Corinthians 4:4. Punishment differs from admonition. The former yields sanction; the latter warns away from punishment. Read Colossians 3:15-17. List the words Paul uses to frame the activity of Christian admonition.

When would it be your responsibility to admonish someone?



Day Two:

Re-read 1 Corinthians 4:15, what human roles does Paul bring into opposition?

Stop and consider the inputs life gives you on a daily basis. How do the ideas for your behavior come into your head? From where do you receive instruction about how to spend time, money, personal effort? Make a list of your tutors.

Write the name of the person you'd call your "father through the gospel". If you have no name to write, does that stir something in you? Who might you prayerfully consider?

The world of business finance is not noted for its altruism, yet most Fortune 500 companies have well-established mentoring programs. What does Titus 2:1-6 suggest to you about your personal mentoring in the body? Are you currently on one side or the other of a mentoring relationship?

Please write your impression of this statement: It is necessary for Christians to have a mentoring relationship with someone in the body.

Day Three:

Read what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:16 (no really, stop to look it up.) Use your imagination and picture yourself among your family. You speak Paul's words from v16 to each of them. Now see yourself doing the same among all your relatives, now among all those in your daily routine, and now among all those at church.

Pen your response to this statement: I should be able to speak the words of 1 Corinthians 4:16 to anyone.

What if the statement began: "I am able to. . . "

Read 2 Corinthians 3:2-3. This passage makes clear no matter what you wrote in the space above that you are, in truth, God's "correspondence" and that you are "known" by "all men". What do men "know" from reading your life-letter? Are there conflicting messages?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:20. What formal title does Paul give the believer? The title is one thing, but it's a bigger deal to live the responsibilities which comes with it. An Ambassador is never to convey his own message but is only to deliver the message of the One who sent him. How are you at keeping Christ's message at the forefront?

Now read for context: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. Why does Paul cite the ambassador role within context of the regenerated soul and a call to reconciliation with God?

Day Four:

Re-read 1 Corinthians 4:14-21. Paul “outs” some of the Corinthian crowd, calling them “arrogant”. How does that tie up with Christ’s enjoiner in Matthew 7:1? (Yeah, you should look it up.)

What aspect of the arrogant does Paul seek to measure in 1 Corinthians 4:19? What other aspect does he say he will not measure? Why this distinction?

Read Ephesians 6:12, what are the four classifications Paul alerts believers about?

What imperative does the Holy Spirit give on either side of Ephesians 6:12 (i.e., how do both v11 and v13 begin?) What insight do you gain from this? Is there any surprise when the humanistic individualism of our age says to “go it alone” and “look inside yourself for answers”?

BAPTISTCHURCH

How might daily, intentional donning of the full armor of God bring God’s kingdom power to you and to your life example before others? Are there components of His armor that you have neglected and allowed to languish in disrepair? Do you make a cognitive decision to “put on” your armor each day? Pause now to weigh the consequences of failing to do so.

Day Five:

Some find the tenor of Paul's summary remarks in 1 Corinthians 4:21 threatening and unfriendly; that he is offering a choice which is really no choice at all. Read this selection to decide for yourself making note of your impressions.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:5-6. Notice the aggressive terms used to describe the Believers' mandate regarding influences of evil. The Holy Spirit and (by Divine proxy) Believers – are not passive participants in some stage play. This is a life and death struggle (eternal life, eternal death). We are soldiers, combatants, belligerents, warriors for the cause of Christ. How practiced are you at thinking in those aggressive terms?

Given that foundation, read 2 Peter 3:17-18. What actions might you take to help you “be on your guard” and to “grow in grace?”

Luke 8:18 reveals God's expectations of those who have been given much. Once the believer turns to Christ, more is expected and, in fact, more will be extracted, even if it means the “rod.” Read (in this order please) Hebrews 12:7 and then Proverbs 15:5 and then back to Hebrews 12:11. Respond to this statement: It may be a good example to others to accept the “rod of discipline”, but I don't do well under pressure and I'm not likely to change now.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Week Nine

What Is My Example?

This week our focus was to take a hard look at what others see when they look at us. The Small Group Growth Objectives this week are:

- Discuss ideas of how to harness the power of shame before an unrighteous act.
- Ask those who were/are service members to share their insights on the subject of honor.
- Why is it important to frame Christian admonition the way Paul does in Colossians 3:15-17?
- Is there anything wrong with just having the Bible as my “father through the gospel” or do I need one in the flesh?
- How does one go about finding a Christian mentor?
- Should Christians be able to say “be imitators of me?” Why or Why Not?
- Share personal conflicts faced in showing a consistent picture of Christ to others.
- What can we do to redeem Christ’s message to others for whom we’ve corrupted it?
- Come up with group guidelines for when it is appropriate to judge others.
- Is there any difference between words and the power behind them?
- How can we accept the “rod” with grace?

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



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Week ten overarching question:

What Is My Kingdom Practice?

First things: Stop and work through this week's overarching question. View your practice the same way an M.D. views hers. Prepare for reading this week's selected text by a stern self-assessment about what habits you keep which advance the kingdom. How about those which have the opposite effect? Now read Galatians 5:16-26. In the space below write the influences you sense from the Holy Spirit.

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As citizens of the kingdom of God we must be intentional in the application of Christian method to more effectively perform our mission for Christ.

DAILY PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Week Ten

What Is My Kingdom Practice?

Day One:

Consider the statement: “We become what we do.” Write your response.

Perhaps the greatest advocate of “doing to become” was James, the Lord’s brother. Drink in James 3:13-18. Does he convince you about practicing good behavior and about what evidences it yields?

What four things does he list in opposition to the “gentleness of wisdom” (v14)? What crowd does he identify as behind those elements of opposition (v15)? Does that awaken anything in you?

Would you say the evidence James cites in v17 are present in your living? What can you do to better demonstrate them? Do any of these stand out; are you sensing a prompt from the Holy Spirit?

Follow up this meditation with James 2:19-25. What is going through your mind as you self-assess in this area?

End with a few moments of meditation on James 4:17.



Day Two:

Write your impressions of the following statement: “motion is progress.”

“Motion is progress” seems an absurd life philosophy, yet one seen frequently in the world system. At the core of this deception is a misunderstanding of the nature of change. Thus, it presents treacherous footing for our Christian practice.

How many times have you been in the grocery and read a product label “New look, same great taste”? New labels, old recipes. What does Matthew 23:25-26 say is necessary to realize meaningful change?

Read Revelation 3:1-3 write your take on the internal condition of the believers in the church at Sardis.

What did the Lord say about their deeds, their practice?

What prescription did He offer and what consequence awaits if they should they fail to abide by it? Does this text apply to the body of believers at our church? Does it apply to you?

Sometimes Christians practice worldly solutions that offer the illusion of change: getting more stuff, change of scenery, New Years’ resolutions, etc. Read Ezekiel 36:25-27. Where does the power for real and meaningful change reside?

Day Three:

Read Galatians 5:17; work through Paul's comment "so that you do not do what you want" (NIV). It is also certain you often go about doing what you want. Explain this difference.

Work through Romans 8:4, 2 Corinthians 5:7, Ephesians 4:11, Ephesians 4:17 and 1 John 2:6. Now in your own words, pen what it means to walk by the Spirit. Does it take a specific kind of concentration (or practice) to do it?

If we fail to make a focused, cognitive effort to daily walk by the Spirit, then with whom are we walking in the mean time? How does that idea sit with you?

Read Acts 20:24. Respond to this suggestion: the Christian's ability to walk by the Spirit is closely related to how tightly he grasps the world.

What elements of your daily living contend most for your attention? Of those, which would you categorize as "relaxing" or "entertainment?" Would you consider "tithing" some of those instances into a ministry outworking at church? (Ephesians 5:15-16.) Talk to your group leader or a pastor about it.

Day Four:

The key verse this week is Galatians 5:21; take a moment to catch it in context (Galatians 5:19-21.) Review the items on the “works of the flesh” list. Okay shoot straight, do you see entries there which pepper your own life? If you’ve a pulse and you’re honest, the answer (for most) is “yes.” Given that then, it begs the question: how does the part about not inheriting the kingdom of God fit in? Does that mean our salvation is in jeopardy due to our misdeeds? Write what you think.

Take a slow moment and read John 10:27-29. Note the use of the words “snatch” and “no one”. This also means you, yourself. You cannot snatch you out of the hands of the Father. Write what you think about this statement: Believers are saved forever even if they are living a messed up life.

Sometimes we observe the works of people and wonder whether they’re actually committed to the cause, maybe even questioning whether they’re saved or not. At such times the best Christian practice is always the same: get your own house in order. Get the beam out of your eye and get busy loving on this person whom the Spirit has especially pointed out to you. Perhaps all this person lacks is you. What can you do to help? Get busy, roll up your sleeves and reach out. Leave the judging to the Judge.

Day Five:

Throughout this ten-week series, we have highlighted the Lord's intent for believers to live life distinctively as citizens of the Kingdom of God. Not as benign citizens, but as Ambassadors of the Lord Jesus, charged to take the message of freedom to those within our circle of influence who live bound up and blinded by the deceptions of this age.

However, we are reminded that such a solemn responsibility will come off hypocritical if we are not authentic. Therefore we must be intentional and even ruthless in routine, objective self-assessment. We must practice Biblical-discernment, and that starts with us.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What are the things which matter most to me?
- How do the goals and aspirations of the world system contend with my priorities for Christ; or with His priorities for me?
- Do I stop to evaluate the nature and consistency of the "fruit" I bear; to appraise the character I evidence?
- Am I willing to weigh my love for the Lord in balance against my love for things He disapproves of?
- Do I nurture sinful practices?

- Am I deliberate in living as a Christian example?
- Do I act like I may be the last chance for someone in my circle of influence to discover the cleansing forgiveness of the Blood?

The Lord has not sent us out without the tools we need. The Father desires our proficiency in the spiritual life skills which contribute directly to successful kingdom practice and so has given His Holy Spirit to influence and guide. However we must do our part. Are you becoming expert with the tools He has provided: prayer, Bible reading, Bible memorization, the gathering together with other Believers and worship through giving of time and possessions?

Our closing meditation is found in Colossians 3:5-17.

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SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Week Ten

What Is My Kingdom Practice?

This week our focus was to be intentional in our spiritual routines in order to establish productive life patterns. The Small Group Growth Objectives this week are:

- Discuss the idea of: What we do is who we become.
- Work together to amass a list of Bible passages which instruct on the definition and nature of those evidences of constructive living listed in James 3:17.
- Motion is certainly not progress if it is moving in the wrong direction. What insights can you share with the group about seasons in your life when you “kicked up a lot of dust” but made little spiritual progress?
- What does the group think about this idea of tithing some entertainment time back to the church? Brainstorm where you see the church could use some help.
- Is a Christian saved forever, or can they do enough bad stuff to end up in the hot place even after their profession of faith in Jesus?
- Work together to review the ten weeks of lesson materials. Ask each member to consider which thoughts or ideas spoke most clearly to them.
- Seek ways for them to explore these impact areas more closely, to gain kingdom traction from the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS



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