



TheWay

A Discipleship Pathway

Grow Character

'However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way...' Acts 24:14

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Part 1

Lesson 1: God Expects Us to Grow in Godly Character - Day 1

Renew the Mind

Introduction

Perhaps you've finished the Abide portion of the *Followers of the Way: A Discipleship Pathway*. If yes, congratulations! If not, you may want to start there. Either way you can anticipate much growth in your life through the sixteen lessons on Grow Character. What a journey God has for each of his children!

In Grow Character, you'll find that the language used, questions asked, and overall intensity has increased when compared to the Abide lessons. This is intentional as the Bible calls disciples to move from milk to solid food, and to become those who start to disciple others (see [Hebrews 5:12](#)).

But don't worry! There will be abundant grace and help from Jesus, and the amount of reading and application hasn't increased. Enjoy!

Character & Sanctification

The Bible uses the words "sanctify" and "sanctification" a number of times. To be sanctified is "to be made holy." This involves becoming like Jesus, *which includes developing the same character*. It's part of the expectation that followers of the Way become "set apart" in this world. Put another way, you're to stick out, but in a good way!

There are three parts, or stages, to the sanctification of a believer.

Stage 1: Past sanctification

In Abide, that God calls you his child (you are adopted!) was celebrated. What a good Father! This means that God made us members of his own family. We can rejoice that we become legal sons and daughters of God with many incredible blessings.

This adoption happens when a person believes in Jesus (is saved). There is ALSO something else that occurs, which we're calling "past sanctification." Specifically, our old self with its nature and its tendency to sin, is crucified in Christ. Wow! Read that over again and think about it!

Our old nature was passed down from our original parents – Adam and Eve – through to our human parents, then to us. It's why children are born with the tendency to sin. That is, they don't have to be taught to take a toy from another kid. It's "in their nature!" Education and learning can help them realize this is wrong, but it's only the blood and power of Jesus that can change that inside part. It's no different with an adult.

Paul describes it this way, [Romans 6:6 \(NIV\)](#) *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin ...* Because of past sanctification, we don't HAVE to be slaves to sin. Put another way, the potential to not sin now exists!

Paul emphasizes this truth regularly in his letters to believers. Another example is, [1 Corinthians 6:11 \(NIV\)](#) *And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Stage 2: Present sanctification

It was noted in the previous section that those who believe in Jesus now have the potential to not sin. Praise God! Paul explained it this way, [Romans 6:14 \(NIV2011\)](#) “*For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.*” Why does this potential exist? It’s because God gives believers a new nature!

Notice – Paul said believers are “under grace,” which gives us the desire and ability to have victory over sin! This is what we’re calling “present sanctification.” This is a HUGE part of God’s activity in making us holy NOW.

This present sanctification is VERY connected to growing in character and becoming like Jesus. Christ is now the internal power in our lives, giving us the desire and ability to obey God and carry out his will. Or as Paul describes it, believers are, [2 Corinthians 3:18 \(NIV\)](#) ... *being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

Here’s an important question – who does this work of growing in character, God or you? Is your present sanctification dependent on his grace or your efforts? The answer is both! That’s why there are sixteen lessons in Grow Character! Paul empathizes both parts, but in this verse he refers to our responsibility, [2 Corinthians 7:1 \(NIV\)](#) *Since we have these promises, dear friends, let US purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

Stage 3: Future sanctification

Though we have a clear challenge in the Bible to “make every effort” to grow in holiness (see [2 Peter 1:3-11](#)), we’ll still fall short of perfection. We live in this tension of seeking to grow, while accepting that there’s still more to come.

However, in eternity we’ll be made perfect finally! This is what we refer to as “future sanctification.” The author of Hebrews refers to this, [Hebrews 12:23 \(NIV\)](#) ... *to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect.*

Though present sanctification will not be completed in this lifetime, once you pass from this world and go to be with God you will be holy in every way! That’s when you’ll be set free from the PRESENCE of sin and be made completely perfect. Wow! Or as Paul describes it, [1 Corinthians 15:49 \(NIV\)](#) *And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What are the 3 stages of sanctification? Try to explain them in your own words.

Life Application

1. Spend some time praising God for what he did at the moment you believed in him! He adopted you as his child, you received forgiveness of sins, and he gave you his Spirit so that you can start to grow (be sanctified). Perhaps write out a prayer of praise and read the prayer out every day this week. What a great work that God did!
2. (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) Review [John 15:5-6](#), [Romans 12:2](#), [Matthew 28:18-20](#), [1 Peter 5:8](#), [John 10:27](#), [James 1:22](#), [Psalm 1](#), [Colossians 3:2](#), [Psalm 39:4](#), [Matthew 5:16](#), [Matthew 6:9-13](#).
3. Start memorizing [2 Peter 1:5-7](#).

Bible Reading

1. Through Grow Character, you'll read various books and chapters of the New Testament, which cover many of the truths contained in the Abide and Grow Character lessons. Today, please read [1 Peter 1:1-12](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 1: God Expects Us to Grow in Godly Character - Day 2

Renew the Mind

Why Didn't God Make Us Completely Perfect Instantly?

Are you ready to think? Part of your growth as a disciple and helping others grow (this is a mission that you've been given by God!) is to wrestle with questions of the mind. Working through these questions can flow right from a heart that desires to please God! Put another way, a heart that increases in passion for Jesus can be connected to having good answers!

Today's question is: why didn't God make you completely perfect *instantly*? There are five reasons:

First: It's connected to what it means to be human

To be human is to make choices! Choice is vital to being in a relationship of love! If you were forced or programmed to do the things that love would do, genuine love isn't present. You would become a robot! Just as you'll participate in your own education or physical exercise, God gives you the opportunity to choose growth in character. God did not create robots or expect you to remain as helpless infants! Aren't you glad?

Second: So that we'll learn to hate sin forever

Do you tire of tasting the bitterness of the results of your own sin, like anger, lying, selfishness? Do you get weary of attacks from the devil, temptations from the world and the desire inside of you to make poor choices? I'm sure you can agree with Paul at times, [Romans 7:15 \(NIV\)](#) *I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*

If you ever feel this frustration, that's a good sign – you're being trained by God! And look at the world. Think about the pressure to give women the choice to participate in the murder of the most innocent and defenseless in society, a child growing inside of them. Think of the horrors of even the last century alone: the evil of Lenin and Stalin (Russia); the genocides of Hitler (Europe), Pol Pot (Cambodia), Rwanda, Bosnia; the slaughters of two world wars and other wars, such as Korea and Vietnam; or the bloodshed of Middle East tyrants from Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Libya; or the terrorists of al-Qaeda, ISIS and Hamas.

Think about the evil plague of slavery, promoted by many European countries and the U.S. How about the endless evils committed against women, or minorities – even today? As you experience all of this, you learn to hate sin, to join those already in heaven, crying out: [Revelation 6:10 \(NIV\)](#) *How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?*

Third: So that we'll trust God forever (develop a fear of the Lord)

When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, they did so because they ultimately trusted their own understanding over God's. Right down to this present day, people keep doing this. It's actually foolish (a word that is easy to dislike, but it's important to get God's perspective on one's behaviour).

Do you know what's often lacking? A healthy fear of the Lord! Proverbs highlights the value of this, [Proverbs 14:27; 16:6 \(NIV\)](#) *Fear of the Lord is a life-giving fountain; it offers escape from the snares of death... through the fear of the LORD a man avoids evil.* As you live in a world of unimaginable tragedy, heartache, wickedness and evil, it will begin to dawn on you that this is all a result of trusting yourself rather than God.

Eventually, you'll learn to no longer trust the empty promises of many politicians, the disastrous theories of countless educated elite, and the many dead-end paths of various philosophers. Then, for eternity, you'll know how much you really need God and his wisdom!

Fourth: So that we'll long for heaven

Your personal struggles with sin will create a desire for heaven! Or as Paul emotionally cried out, [**Romans 7:24 \(NIV\)**](#)
What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord ...

Of course, your experience of physical decay will also produce in you a longing for more, as will the brokenness in this world. Paul understood this when he said, [**Philippians 1:21 \(NIV\)**](#) *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

Through our internal struggles and through our experience in this world, God is preparing us for eternity. Together with John in the book of Revelation we cry out "Maranatha!" – which can be translated, "come, oh Lord!"

Fifth: So that we'll praise God for finally making us holy

Now we'll experience a measure of freedom from sin, but in eternity we'll taste it fully! Wow. Further, knowing from EXPERIENCE what really changed in us will also make us FOREVER grateful. And such endless praise is something God deserves!

In [Luke 7:36-50](#) Jesus tells a story of a sinful woman who encounters Jesus. The point of the story is that when a person appreciates and accepts what they've been saved and rescued from, an incredible response of praise and gratitude will result. It will be the same for us in eternity!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Why doesn't God make a person perfect instantly when they become his follower? What are the 5 reasons highlighted today?

Life Application

1. Have you ever been frustrated by your own sin or the evil in the world? Write down what has frustrated you in the past *and* presently.
2. Thank God that one day ALL of this will be done – your struggle, the evil in the world, even the devil!
3. Keep memorizing [2 Peter 1:5-7.](#)

Bible Reading

1. Please read [1 Peter 1:13-25](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 1: God Expects Us to Grow in Godly Character - Day 3

Renew the Mind

What It Means to Grow in Godly Character

As was noted on Day 1, your present sanctification (which includes growing in character) is done in partnership – God works AND you work! Some approach their growth with the attitude of, “Let go and let God,” as if they have no part to play in the beautiful work of becoming more like Jesus.

But this is a serious misunderstanding, for all followers of the Way are commanded to participate in their growth. Paul was clear about this, saying, [**Colossians 3:9-10 \(NIV\)**](#) *Do not lie to each other, since you have put off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

Paul starts by telling believers to “put off” sinful practices. This includes anger, gossip, slander, lying, greed, etc. But Paul doesn’t stop there! You’ll need to replace these practices, or in his words “put on” the new self. Paul believed so much in this that he literally gave his life, for his own growth and the growth of others. Listen to his heart in this verse, [**Galatians 4:19 \(NIV\)**](#) *My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you ...*

Paul is talking about forming the character of Christ in you – Christ’s character traits! Peter, using the term “godliness,” says that you can partake in the divine nature, which is Christ. This is a difficult passage, but followers of the Way need to learn to meditate. Meditation can lead to incredible transformation! Specifically, Peter said, [**2 Peter 1:3-4 \(NIV\)**](#) *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. 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.*

Then, Peter goes on to name what some of these character traits of Christ are, [**2 Peter 1:5-7 \(NIV\)**](#) *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.*

The Bible uses a variety of related terms to refer to these character traits: fruit of the Spirit, righteousness, godliness, holiness and even love. It’s a wonderful thing to experience these traits increasingly! This is God’s heart AND God’s gift for his children. But you’ll have to do your part. And when you do, your automatic behaviors, default actions and reactions will begin to be like those of Jesus. Wow!

And how do you know if you have a specific character trait or not? You’ll know if: i) it’s a pattern ii) it’s displayed under stress iii) you do it when no one is watching.

A Caution: Personality

Our personality is the tendencies we have along various ranges of characteristics such as introversion vs. extroversion, task-orientated vs. relationship-orientated, planned vs. spontaneous, etc. It can be really helpful to be aware of the personality that God has given you. However, there are two cautions.

Caution 1: don't use your personality to excuse bad behavior, selfish desires or poor character in yourself.

Here's a test: if your thoughts, attitudes, desires, actions or behaviors harm yourself or others in any way, then it needs to change – period. It may be related to one's personality, but that means that your personality is partially broken.

Caution 2: don't use your personality to excuse unloving behavior.

Not all behaviours that hurt others are necessarily sinful. However, if they irritate others or if it causes them to distance themselves from you, God, or the church, you are causing such a person to stumble. This violates the law of love, which Christ laid down for you.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. To grow in godly character, do you simply "put off" old sinful practices? Or is there more that you must do? What is the ultimate goal?
3. What 2 cautions are given about personalities?

Life Application

1. Describe what your personality is like and how you use it to help or encourage others. Also write down where your personality can cause hurt or harm. (feel free to ask others close to you for gentle feedback!)

Bible Reading

1. Please read [1 Peter 2:1-12](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 1: God Expects Us to Grow in Godly Character - Day 4

Renew the Mind

Why We Should Desire to Grow in Godly Character

First, we should desire to grow in godly character because God commands it. When we consider all that God has done for us, isn't obedience a reasonable response? Paul said, [Colossians 3:5 \(NIV\)](#) *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature ...* The earthly nature can be connected to things such as sexual sin, greed, selfishness, etc. The command is: put that to death! It's a violent picture, which highlights how important this is to God.

Second, if we don't desire to grow in godly character, we insult the Spirit of grace. This is what the author of Hebrews said, [Hebrews 10:26-29 \(NIV\)](#) *If we deliberately keep on sinning ... [we] insulted the Spirit of grace.* This is a serious matter! Saying, "well, I'm already better than most people" is not a humble heart.

A third reason to desire growth in character is this – these commands come with wonderful PROMISES! Or as Peter declared, [2 Peter 1:4 \(NIV\)](#) *Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises ...* Paul emphasized the same thing, [1 Timothy 4:7-8 \(NIV\)](#) *... train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*

Today and tomorrow we'll look at nine of these incredible promises!

First: Godly character will make us fruitful in this lifetime

Jesus taught that the Father wants you to be fruitful and that this glorifies the Father ([John 15:1-8](#)). This means that it brings praise to him! It also FEELS good to be fruitful for one's Father.

Jesus also said that fruitfulness comes from the Father's "pruning efforts" in your life ([John 15:1-2](#)). Or as Peter says, when describing growth in character, [2 Peter 1:8 \(NIV\)](#) *For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive ...*

Second: Godly character impacts the outcome of our prayers

James explained that some answers to prayer are blocked because of wrong motives, which is poor character. [James 4:2-3 \(NIV\)](#) *When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

Peter offers another illustration of how a lack of character can negatively impact your prayers. He says, [1 Peter 3:7 \(NIV\)](#) *Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives ... so that nothing will hinder your prayers.* Wow!

Third: Godly character keeps us from falling away from the faith

How can godly character keep a person from falling from the faith? First, if your faith doesn't result in changed behavior (which James calls "works"), then this faith is actually DEAD! [James 2:17 \(NIV2011\)](#) *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

Elsewhere the Bible teaches that if you're growing in godly character, you'll make your calling and election sure. Put another way, growth in character proves to ourselves AND tests whether we actually belong to God. That's a clear

contrast to the false confidence some people feel from simply saying a prayer.

Second, character can actually keep a person FROM falling away in the first place! For example, some have fallen away from the faith when trouble came to their lives. Had they grown in godly character, they wouldn't have fallen away. Some debate this – they say it's impossible to fall away from faith. But if this is true, the warnings given by Jesus, Paul, Peter and John would make no sense.

Fourth: Godly character qualifies us for ministry

The divine order for the calling of a man or woman to minister goes something like this:

- a. God chooses someone to ministry long before he or she is even conceived
- b. God eventually calls the one he chose
- c. God then equips that person with the necessary spiritual gifts to fulfill this unique calling
- d. God sends the one he has chosen, called and equipped

But along this journey something else happens – God remakes the character of the one he has chosen!

When God chose Moses, he first had to send him into the wilderness to develop his character – Moses wasn't patient; he was easily angered; he took matters into his own hands, etc. Of course, the remaking of Moses resulted in a very long and successful ministry! It's no different with anyone else - the more one grows in godly character, the more fruitful they will become.

Sadly, many followers of the Way disqualify themselves – they are easily angered, or self-seeking, or unkind or quarrelsome. Some have responded to correction. And others have not and aren't bearing any fruit at all. This is sad BUT it doesn't have to be the case if intentional character growth is committed to.

Fifth: Godly character helps us win the war against the devil

So many followers of the Way and churches pursue the power of God. It's a good thing to have God's power – you will need it to war against the devil. But often what you need is right at your disposal – like character!

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul said that you have spiritual armor to protect you against the attacks of the enemy. And one of the pieces of armor required is the breastplate of righteousness, [Ephesians 6:14 \(NIV\)](#) *Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place ...* What is the breastplate of righteousness that Paul is talking about? It's character, or right living.

When someone lacks in character or holiness, they will ignore others, or lie and gossip about others, and so on. When that happens, the enemy gains a foothold into a person's life, their relationships (e.g. marriage), or a church. And all the power of God will not overcome the lack of character and sinfulness in such believers and in such churches.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 3 reasons for why you should desire to grow in godly character?
3. If you grow in godly character, there are certain promises that you can rely on. What are the 5 discussed today?

Life Application

1. Listen in prayer and write down how you have grown in character in the past 10, 5 and 1 year(s).
2. Spend some time thanking God for what you received in Question 1.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [1 Peter 2:13-25](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 1: God Expects Us to Grow in Godly Character - Day 5

Renew the Mind

On Day 4, five promises given to God's children were highlighted, attached to one's desire to grow in character. Today, four more will be provided. May this only increase your hunger to be godly!

Sixth: Godly character reveals Christ to others

God wants to reveal Jesus to the world because the devil has blinded the minds of unbelievers, which Paul describes, [2 Corinthians 4:4 \(NIV\)](#) *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* This is so sad! But you can do something about it!

There are several ways in which God reveals himself. First, through miracles! For example, in [1 Kings 18](#), the story is told of how Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a public contest to see which "god" could send fire down from heaven in response to prayer. The 450 prophets of Baal accepted the challenge but could not convince their false god, Baal, to do so. However, when Elijah prayed, the true God immediately sent fire in such a convincing manner that the people fell to the ground and cried, "The Lord, he is God! The Lord, he is God!" God still does miracles today to reveal himself to people. We can pray for such miracles!

Second, God reveals himself through displaying godly character through suffering. Paul learned the power of this, saying, [2 Corinthians 4:10 \(NIV\)](#) *We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.* When unbelievers observe a follower of the Way patiently, humbly and joyfully persevering through difficult trials and suffering, it opens their eyes to Jesus Christ. Is it hard to persevere? Of course! But if we remember how impactful this is to others, we add some motivation!

Third, Jesus reveals himself to unbelievers through good deeds shown by believers, which flow from godly character. Peter highlights how vital this is, [1 Peter 2:12 \(NLT\)](#) *Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behaviour...*

Seventh: Godly character is required to experience abundant life

Many cherish, as they should, the following promise from Jesus, [John 10:10 \(NIV\)](#) *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.* However, many do not realize that there are conditions attached to the abundant life! For example, to really experience God's love and joy, you must obey what he tells you to do. Or Jesus also says, [John 15:10-11 \(NIV\)](#) *If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.*

Eighth: Godly character is needed to effectively use spiritual gifts

God has given his children many spiritual gifts, to serve the church and those outside of the church. He is so generous! However, character is needed to use these gifts well! The church at Corinth was using all the gifts – but they had serious character issues! It's not one or the other – gifts or character. We need both!

Therefore, Paul made it clear that without character, their abilities to operate in the spiritual gifts amounted to nothing. [1 Corinthians 13:1-2 \(NIV\)](#) *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*

Ninth: Godly character determines our heavenly reward

After listing off many godly characteristics, carefully consider what Peter notes, [2 Peter 1:11 \(NIV\)](#) *For IF you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior.* This is an incredible promise. We should think about such promises often! They can be very motivating!

Paul made the same kind of promise to Timothy when he said, [1 Timothy 4:7-8 \(NIV\)](#) ... *train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*

Yes, the Bible does declare that you're saved by the gracious work of Jesus on the cross. However, your rewards will be based on what you do. Jesus emphasized this often! For example, he said, [Matthew 16:27 \(NIV\)](#) *For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.*

One thing that a follower of the Way will be rewarded for, if they keep growing in character, is godly motives. Paul said, [1 Corinthians 4:5 \(NIV2011\)](#) *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the MOTIVES of men's hearts.* There it is! God will test your works for what motivated them.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. If you grow in godly character there are certain promises that you can rely on. Which 4 are discussed today?
3. How does godly character reveal Jesus to others?

Life Application

1. Think of the past week or so. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you write down where you displayed godly character and where you struggled.
2. Find 1 or 2 people with whom you can share your answer from Question 1.
3. Review [2 Peter 1:5-7.](#)

Bible Reading

1. Please read [1 Peter 3:1-7.](#)
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 2: Ten Steps to Grow in Godly Character - Day 1

Renew the Mind

Avoiding Confusion About Character

Growing in character results in incredible joy! Do you believe this? Many have discovered that it's a great blessing to *act better*. As a follower of the Way, you can certainly confess your sin, but why not also sin less? Consider Paul's heart on such growth, [2 Thessalonians 1:3 \(NIV\)](#) *We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.*

Here in Day 1, it's important to clear up some confusion that many have about growing in character.

First: Don't confuse intellectual growth with growth in godliness

It's sad that some believers pursue intellectual achievement while ignoring character growth. God calls us to be holy – to be like him in character – rather than to be as smart as him (as if that were possible anyway!). Some mistake intellectual growth for moral growth; or worse, they intentionally ignore moral advancement for intellectual advancement.

Choosing intellectual growth over character development also occurs among many pastors, leaders of denominations (groups of churches with similar beliefs) and biblical scholars. Of course, these leaders should be well-trained, including intellectually, but such preparation without training in godliness is dangerous. It doesn't result in better leaders but more clever sinners! After all, the author of Hebrews defines true maturity as they, [Hebrews 5:14 \(NIV\)](#) *... trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*"

In fact, the Bible warns that we will be judged not only on our works, whether good or evil ([2 Corinthians 5:10](#)), but also on the motivations which birthed those works ([1 Corinthians 3:13-15](#)).

Second: Don't confuse emotionalism with growth in godliness

Did the prophets of Baal display emotion in their worship ([1 Kings 18](#))? For sure! But they were idolaters and evil! Emotion is good, but emotion that is completely disconnected from godliness is deceptive. Even in Christian worship, some who are very emotional may be stirred in their hearts by the music, with no thought about God or their obedience to his Word.

And what about sorrow? This is an emotion that the Bible highlights; that is, you ARE to mourn and have sorrow. But not all sorrow is good! Listen to Paul, [2 Corinthians 7:10 \(NIV\)](#) *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.* From this passage, you see that there is godly sorrow, which leads to life. But there is ALSO a worldly sorrow (where you feel sorry for yourself) that leads to harm.

Third: Don't confuse the gifts of the Spirit with growth in godliness

As God causes the sun to rise and sends rain to ALL people, whether good or bad ([Matthew 5:45](#)), so too he gives talents to all people. Similarly, God will often give gifts of the Spirit to ALL believers, whether or not they have grown in godliness.

Think about this - we won't be judged by the GIFTS of the SPIRIT we possess, because they are just that – GIFTS! This was a huge issue in the Corinthian church! It's why Paul taught them, [1 Corinthians 13:1-3 \(NIV\)](#) *If I speak in the*

tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

The Corinthians church had the gifts of the Spirit but they didn't have LOVE! What is love? It is a FRUIT of the Spirit! What this all means is this: just because you are a gifted pastor, evangelist, prophetic person and so on, doesn't mean that you are godly and will be rewarded. Sobering, isn't it?

Paul was in prison when he wrote the letter to the church at Philippi. He wrote, [Philippians 1:15 \(NIV\)](#) *It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.* Those who preach have a gift of teaching, isn't it true? But is envy a fruit of the Spirit? NO! It is an act of the sinful nature ([Galatians 5:19-21](#)). Again, it's possible to be very talented and gifted but lack in character.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. When it comes to growing in godly character, what are 3 possible areas of confusion?

Life Application

1. Have you ever been proud about your knowledge, or any talents you have, or spiritual gifts BUT had significant problems with a specific character trait? Write down any examples.
2. Take whatever you received in Question 1 and spend some time writing out a confession to God.
3. Memorize [2 Peter 1:8-9](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [1 Peter 3:8-22](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 2: Ten Steps to Grow in Godly Character - Day 2

Renew the Mind

Participating with God in Growing Godly Character

Paul described one of the main aims of being a follower of the Way. Read this carefully, [2 Corinthians 3:18 \(NIV\)](#) *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.*

There is much that we RECEIVE from God. Here's what God does:

- He gives you the desire for growth ([Philippians 2:13](#))
- He gives you the ability or power to grow
- He guides the process for your growth

But this doesn't mean that we just sit back and let God do it all! In sanctification (being made holy), we're REQUIRED to participate as well. Paul himself said this, [2 Corinthians 7:1 \(NIV\)](#) *... let us purify OURSELVES from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

Character growth is not accidental! Even life teaches that:

- If you don't intentionally tend to your garden, it will soon be overgrown with weeds. Good growth will be choked out!
- If you don't intentionally give time to your marriage, it will soon be broken
- If you don't intentionally commit to raising your children, they will become difficult or unproductive

In the same way, if you don't intentionally give attention to your character, it can get worse or level off – be certain of that! And remember, the goal isn't simply to be *somewhat* good or better than those who do evil, but to be like Jesus. Frequently people will say things such as, "Well, that's just who I am." Well, yes, that may be how you are, but that's not the way you're supposed to be, or even have to be!

Can character growth be hard? Yes, but again, God DOES help! Or as Peter powerfully describes this,

[2 Peter 1:3 \(NIV\)](#) *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.* Did you read what it said? You have EVERYTHING you need for godliness. What a generous God!

Here's a great way to understand how this all works; when it comes to character building, God has to work in you, and you have to work at it! Being a follower of the Way is a life of intentional partnership!

Notice what Paul has to say about this partnership between God and himself, [Colossians 1:29 \(NIV\)](#) *To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.* Who labors? Paul! Who works in him? God!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. In your own words try to explain the partnership that is required for character growth.

Life Application

1. Imagine, reflect on and write out how different your life, your family, your church and country would look if every adult intentionally changed their character.
2. Pray for the churches in your country – for very real character growth for each member and for the pastors of these churches. As you grow as a follower of the Way, being a person of prayer is very important! God will change your heart as you pray!
3. Review [2 Peter 1:8-9](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [1 Peter 4:1-11](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 2: Ten Steps to Grow in Godly Character - Day 3

Renew the Mind

What God Uses to Grow Our Character

First: daily pressures and difficult people

Life can have irritating moments or burdens, each and every day! Thankfully, even small irritations in your daily life can become ways in which God grows your character. For example, when you wait in long lineups or in waiting rooms, do you become irritated? Use these times to grow your character.

What are some possible responses to these challenges? First, you can thank Jesus that he is using these to prepare you for any greater pressures and trials that you will face. Second, you can pray for the person ahead of you in the line. Third, you can ask God if there's something he wants to say to you! Fourth, you could review some of your memory verses, or meditate on what you read in the Bible that day. Finally, you could strike up a conversation with someone next to you. Perhaps God is giving you time to minister to someone?

What about difficult people? Everyone is stretched by others – whether a co-worker, family member, neighbor, employer, employee, etc. They may treat you poorly, or they misunderstand you, or your personalities might clash. In some cases, they may even hate or disrespect you. We just want to get rid of them – get them out of our lives – and God likes them right where they are! It's because he views them as a gift to us, to produce character that will result in more fruit and more rewards and so on!

This is why the trials that difficult people cause us should also lead us to rejoice! ([James 1:2-4](#)) Why? Because it will mature us! And remember, God cares more about the “line of your eternity than the dot of your present.” God is giving all of his children the opportunity to store up rewards in heaven! What a good God!

Second: Specific suffering and trials

What exactly did James say early in his letter? He declared, [James 1:2-4 \(NIV\)](#) *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* Look at the phrase in there – “face trials of MANY kinds!” Isn’t this true?

This can be discouraging, BUT suffering and trials are never without purpose. Followers of the Way can trust that, “the best is yet to come.” Can you trust him for that, if you’re currently facing a trial?

Third: God’s discipline

Does God discipline believers? Of course, he does – he’s a good Father! Not every difficulty that occurs in our lives is connected to God’s discipline, but some are! This is a clear teaching in both the Old and New Testaments. God disciplines those he loves! Please take some time to read the following passage. Let it speak to you!

[Hebrews 12:5-11 \(NIV\)](#) *And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.” Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at*

all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Fourth: We initiate the process

It's important to know that followers of the Way shouldn't ALWAYS wait for God to bring about discipline or circumstances to change their character. In fact, we're encouraged to initiate a training plan to grow our character. Or as Paul says, [1 Timothy 4:7 \(NIV\)](#) ... *train yourself to be godly*. Peter shares a similar idea, [2 Peter 1:5 \(NIV\)](#) ... *make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 4 things will God use to grow you in character?
3. Why does God discipline his children? What is his motive according to [Hebrews 12:5-11](#)?

Life Application

1. Can you think of a time in your life where God disciplined you? What was the issue he was working on? What were the details of his discipline? Write this down.
2. Is there anyone difficult in your life right now who is stressing you out? Spend some time thanking God for them and pray that God would move in them and bless them. This may not be easy – but it will grow your character, for sure!

Bible Reading

1. Please read [1 Peter 4:12-19](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 2: Ten Steps to Grow in Godly Character - Day 4

Renew the Mind

Steps For Growing In Character

Step 1: Choose a godly character trait

There are several ways that you can identify a character trait to work on. A good place to start is to ask God. Why? It's because the ORDER he has for you may be important to the process of your long-term growth.

Next, you can observe your life – what unhelpful, sinful or destructive patterns exist in your life? For example, are you harsh with your family? Do you lie? Are you easily hurt or offended? Do you procrastinate or struggle with self-pity? Or are you independent or selfish?

Second, it may be wise to listen to what your spouse (if married), children or closest friends say. You can ask them specifically, or consider what they even "hint" at, about how you act and react.

Third, you can listen in prayer and invite the Holy Spirit to reveal where you need to grow. Of course, God is gracious! He will not list off everything all at once! God is NOT content to leave you in your brokenness, but is ALSO concerned not to overwhelm you.

Step 2: Pray daily for that trait

You can see how David prayed, [**Psalm 119:133 \(NIV\)**](#) *Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.* God really wants to answer such prayers! Some say, "Don't ever pray for patience, because you'll be sure to get tested." Well of course you will – but this is actually God-honoring!

For example, if you wish to learn to drive a car or fly a plane, you can't do that without repeating the skills over and over until they become natural to you – the same is true of growing godly character! And God is the perfect tester, knowing exactly what you'll need!

Step 3: Renew our mind by meditating on eternal things

In Paul's letters, he often challenged believers to LOOK UP and LOOK AHEAD as a motivator for the right life here on earth. For example, he said, [**Colossians 3:1-2 \(NIV2011\)**](#) *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

Step 4: Identify a time that we failed, and listen in prayer for practical steps

Write out the story (it doesn't need to be long) of when you failed; then stop to think about this incident. Ask yourself: "How does it make me feel when I think about this?" Write it down.

Ask Jesus and listen: "What do you (Jesus) want me to know about this memory?" And: "Where are you (Jesus) in this memory?" Write this all down. Finally, he may show you a simple practical step or two, to help you overcome in the future. Here's an example from Pastor Ray Duerksen:

"I really wanted to grow in self-control. I had just lost self-control again in a particular area, so I stopped to think and pray about it. I felt embarrassment for my failure in that area. I was so done with this. I needed victory – but

how?

When I went to listen in prayer about it, the Holy Spirit reminded me of how Moses had lost self-control toward the end of his life. He reminded me that Moses had been disqualified from further ministry, due to this failure in character. I shuddered as I realized the Lord was warning me, not because he was angry at me, but because he was eager to keep me from losing my reward ([1 Corinthians 9:27](#))!

Then I admitted to him that I just didn't know what to do to gain victory in this. Quickly, he gave me four practical steps to gain victory. I immediately went to work on these steps, and I gained lasting victory. And my wife noticed it too!"

Step 5: Forgive and ask for forgiveness

As you're working on character traits such as not being rude, or not being easily angered or not keeping a record of wrongs, you may need to practice forgiveness. For sure, it can be very easy to accumulate bitterness and offense in your life!

Listen to the words of Jesus, [Matthew 6:14-15 \(NIV2011\)](#) *For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.* This is an incredible promise, but also a serious warning! May you be intentional with forgiveness, even as you grow in your character!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 5 steps for growing in godly character are noted in today's reading?

Life Application

1. What is a character trait that you need to grow in? Go through Step 1 to confirm if this is the one.
2. Next, work through steps 2-5 (or at the least, start the process).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [1 Peter 5](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 2: Ten Steps to Grow in Godly Character - Day 5

Renew the Mind

On Day 4, five steps for growing in character were highlighted. Today, the final five will be shared.

Step 6: Receive inner healing, deliverance and freedom from bondage

Sometimes a character trait cannot be changed because you need inner healing. For example, those who were rejected as a child may struggle with anger. Put another way, a lie such as “I’m worthless” may trigger anger as a way to defend oneself from further pain. Therefore, this is a lie-based or identity-based problem and inner healing is required in such cases.

For others, a demonic stronghold may be preventing spiritual growth in a particular area. Then deliverance could be helpful for finding freedom. At other times destructive family patterns may contribute to character weaknesses. The approach then would be to break generational bondages. These “practices” – inner healing, deliverance and breaking generational bondages – may be unfamiliar to you or your church. What should you do? If your church has such ministries, please seek help! However, if your church cannot help, ask Jesus to lead you by the hand – either by meeting with you directly or by directing you to another resource.

Step 7: Tell someone and ask for their prayers

This isn’t always easy to do, but the Bible declares that confession comes with a promise, James 5:16 (NIV) *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.* It’s so true that you’ll never be as intentional in growing a character trait in secret as you will be if you tell someone else!

Step 8: Be filled with the Spirit

You cannot grow godly character if the Spirit of Christ isn’t powerfully working in you. The apostle Paul commanded, Ephesians 5:18 (NIV) *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.* The Greek present tense is really saying “be being filled.” In other words, keep being filled by the Spirit!

When we are filled with the Spirit again and again, the FRUIT of the filling is frequently experienced, such as God’s love, joy, hope and peace. This is how Jesus lived – filled by the Spirit! For example, we’re told, Luke 10:21 (NIV) *At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit*

But how do we live a life of regular filling? Of course, a special event (like a retreat or conference) in which you experience the filling of the Spirit is wonderful! It’s good when you can intentionally put time aside to come into God’s presence and be refilled. But this isn’t the only way; nor is it the way you’ll do it most of your lifetime!

So how do you get refilled on a daily basis? Ephesians 5:18-21 makes four suggestions:

1. Minister to others – address one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. We must not let church gatherings simply be about the latest sporting event or be places of gossip or just talking about the weather or politics. Then we’re missing opportunities to be filled!
2. Worship the Lord – sing in your heart to the Lord
3. Be grateful – give thanks to God always and in all circumstances
4. Submit to one another – submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ

Step 9: Learn and memorize Bible verses about our trait

You'll need to learn about your character trait. For example, what does it look like to have this trait?

This is a part of renewing your mind, which Paul refers to, [Romans 12:2 \(NIV\)](#) *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind ...*

And when your mind is renewed you'll be increasingly motivated to grow in this way! Memorization of verses that refer to the godly characteristic will also help you. For help with this, please see the tenth lesson of the Abide lessons.

Step 10: Keep in step with the Spirit (stop and choose correctly)

Each year many in the world make New Year's resolutions – even if they know deep down that they'll fail. The difference is that they have no one to assist them, or don't seek supernatural help, and so it becomes an annual exercise in broken commitments.

Paul said, [Galatians 5:25 \(NIV\)](#) *Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.* What does this mean? Well, when God sets up tests, you'll find yourself facing "crossroad moments" where you can succeed or fail in a specific character trait. And IF you choose with God's help to be godly, this is keeping in step with the Spirit!

This is victory! In fact, that one correct choice equals one RIGHTEOUS ACT. You'll feel wonderful! You did the right thing! However, it isn't part of your character at this point. So, another test comes along, and a third one. If you keep choosing rightly, it's becoming a HABIT!

And as life goes on, you may begin to forget that you have been intentionally making every effort to grow in a particular part of your character. Then one day someone says to you: "I've noticed something different about you; you don't _____ anymore!" Or the Holy Spirit reminds you that you were working on a particular character trait, and that you have been making the right choices, as a pattern in your life.

Now the choices are no longer conscious, but happen automatically! At this point you have moved from one righteous act, to habit, to THIS IS WHO YOU ARE! It has now become part of your character! Praise God!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 5 steps for growing in godly character are noted in today's reading?
3. How can you be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Life Application

1. What is the character trait that you need to grow in? (identified in Day 4)
2. Next, work through steps 6-10 (or at the least, start the process).

Bible Reading

1. Please use these memory verses for your Bible reading today. (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) [John 15:5-6](#), [Romans 12:2](#), [Matthew 28:18-20](#), [1 Peter 5:8](#), [John 10:27](#), [James 1:22](#), [Psalm 1](#), [Colossians 3:2](#), [Psalm 39:4](#), [Matthew 5:16](#), [Matthew 6:9-13](#), (*Verses From Grow Character Lessons*) [2 Peter 1:5-9](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Special Note 1: At the end of this manual, you'll find a helpful tool related to growing in your character. This is a resource that you can continue to use and includes the steps that were introduced in this lesson and further principles and practices discussed in future lessons. If you're using our Way app, please see "Steps For Godly Character" under the Tools tab.

Special Note 2: each week contains 5 days of devotions. We strongly encourage you to keep abiding with Jesus all 7 days! You may use the extra days to catch up on anything you didn't get to, or to review your notes/journal or to simply spend time with Jesus with no agenda.

Lesson 3: Forgiveness - Day 1

Renew the Mind

Forgiving Others Is Commanded

For good reason the topic of forgiveness is a MAJOR part of any discussion on growing your character. Why? Well, few things in the Christian life have caused more failure, pain and difficulty than unforgiveness! When the Bible speaks of "prospering" THIS is the kind of success it's pointing to for followers of the Way.

Forgiving others is also a clear command from Jesus. If we don't forgive others, he won't forgive us. It's that simple. And so we remain stuck where we are. He said, [Luke 17:3-4 \(NIV\)](#) *So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."* What was the disciples' reaction to this teaching? They cried out, [Luke 17:5 \(NIV\)](#) ... *increase our faith!*

What's going on here? Why were they asking for more faith? Clearly, the disciples were upset about this difficult requirement to forgive! They were essentially saying: "Well then, you better increase our faith, because such forgiveness is just too hard!"

Jesus is brilliant! How did he respond to their request? First, Jesus said they already had enough faith! He illustrated this using a mustard seed, which was a tiny seed, [Luke 17:6 \(NIV\)](#) *If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.*

Second, using a parable, Jesus illustrated how they SHOULD have responded to him, as their Lord. [Luke 17:7-10 \(NIV\)](#) *Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'*

Notice that the point of the parable is that the servant did what he was "told to do." Jesus was challenging them – "you don't need more faith. You need to CHOOSE to forgive." Jesus was essentially saying, "when I, your Lord and God of the universe, tell you to do something (forgive, in this case), the only correct response is to say (in our language), 'Yes, sir!'"

Of course, forgiveness IS hard. Why? Because when you've been hurt, there's a lot of pain! And yet Jesus pressed them on the issue, leaving NO exit from this doorway to life – they MUST forgive! Why? Earlier in [Luke 17](#) he says, [Luke 17:1-2 \(NIV\)](#) *Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.*

There are many things that could cause "little ones" to sin. But a common reason is unforgiveness! Especially when the unforgiveness of a parent is evident. Some children see their parents take offense at someone in the church (pastor, worship leader, Sunday school teacher, usher, board member, staff person), get angry and bitter, speak about it a lot at home and maybe even leave the church. They REFUSE to forgive and today their children can be deeply impacted by it – to the point that they want nothing to do with God or the church that he loves.

This is why forgiveness is DEMANDED by Jesus – to avoid obedience in this area opens up the possibility for massive damage. He wants us to obey because if we don't, we can harm others, including children.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. The disciples felt that they needed more faith to be able to forgive. What did Jesus say that they needed instead? Explain.
3. Why is Jesus so serious about your need to forgive?

Life Application

1. Can you think of a time when you were offended at a church or someone at church? How did you handle this? In a godly way? Or inappropriately? Write down the steps you took (good or bad).
2. Is there any previous offense that you need to work through with a previous or current church? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you with this ...

Bible Reading

1. Please read [1 John 1 – 1 John 2:14](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 3: Forgiveness - Day 2

Renew the Mind

Forgiving Others Is A Process

Many who follow Jesus think that forgiveness is essentially saying to yourself, "I forgive so and so." Of course, that's where it all begins – a choice to forgive another. And many well-meaning followers of the Way have done just that and yet experienced no relief from the pain of being hurt; they can't get the offender out of their mind; they can't stop thinking about the offense. The reason lies in our misunderstanding of what forgiveness is and how it works.

But stepping back for a moment, remember that love is an ACTION. What does the most famous verse in the Bible say? **John 3:16 (NIV2011)** *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.* God didn't just think in his 'heart,' or say out loud, "I love them." Instead, he demonstrated his love by giving his own Son – for what reason? So that you could be forgiven!

So then, forgiveness is part of love and is an ACTION! Forgiveness happens as you move forward and do good. Three actions will need to be considered: i) doing something good for the person you are forgiving; ii) blessing the person; iii) praying for the person.

Question: What about very difficult cases of forgiveness? What actions are expected in these?

Example 1: A person who is sexually, physically or emotionally abused. Of course, it wouldn't be wise to continue a close connection with the abuser. But forgiveness is still needed! This is why believers need to learn to abide in Jesus, so they can listen to the Spirit for wisdom. E.g. "Jesus, what can I pray for them?"

Example 2: The person you need to forgive is already deceased

Again, ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you about what steps to take. E.g. some will visit a graveside, and speak out words of forgiveness.

Do you have to wait until a person says "sorry" before you forgive? No. Jesus said "love your enemies" and enemies do not ask for forgiveness. Further, when they were crucifying Jesus he said, **Luke 23:34 (NIV)** *Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.* Followers of the Way are called to be like Jesus; he even forgave those who were torturing him! The expectation for forgiveness is obvious, isn't it? And forgiveness happens as we go about life, as Jesus demonstrated.

Of course, forgiveness comes with benefits – and these benefits are also experienced over time.

First, you'll experience healing!

Praise God! Some will even experience physical healing, as research shows that bitterness can impact both physical and mental well-being. As it says in Psalms, **Psalm 38:3 (ESV)** *There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin.*

In fact, all along the Bible cautions us that sin would impact our health. Another verse declares, **Psalm 31:10 (ESV)** *For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away.* "Iniquity" is another word for sin! Therefore, when we have unforgiveness and bitterness in our hearts, we can be consumed with these thoughts and it can exhaust us emotionally and harm us physically!

Second, forgiveness will keep others from experiencing pain.

If a person is carrying unforgiveness, it WILL spill over and harm others: children, a spouse, co-workers, etc.

Third, it can inspire others to do the right thing!

For example, when you offer forgiveness, you may inspire the one who offended you to repent. And this could be the thing that determines their eternity, and those who are influenced by them!

Fourth, God will forgive you.

Jesus said, **Matthew 6:14-15 (NIV)** *For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

Finally, you will receive an eternal reward.

Jesus, the expert on forgiveness, challenges his followers,

Matthew 5:46 (NIV) *If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? Praise God! There ARE rewards in heaven. But these are in part connected to whether a person is willing to forgive.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Is forgiveness a one-time event and choice that you make? Or does it involve more than a choice? Explain.
3. What 5 benefits do you get from forgiving?

Life Application

1. Review (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 6:9-13, (*Verses From Grow Character Lessons*) 2 Peter 1:5-9.

Bible Reading

1. Please read 1 John 2:15-29.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 3: Forgiveness - Day 3

Renew the Mind

Different Kinds Of Offense

When you're searching your heart for unforgiveness (a good habit!), it's vital to know that there are three ways that a person can be offended. First, there are bad things that people have done to you. Of course, the ideal is to "forgive and forget." As Paul said, [**1 Corinthians 13:5 \(NIV\)**](#) *It (love) is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.* However, this "forgetting" doesn't always mean trusting the offender. That's totally different!

Second, offense also includes hurt over the good things people neglected to do for you. Perhaps your parents never made you feel loved and/or special; they didn't listen to you when you were hurting; or they minimized your fears when you were growing up.

Third, you might need to forgive "perceived hurts." Sometimes people do things that hurt, and you know they didn't mean to do it. You might tell yourself, "this shouldn't bother me" - but it does. With this, you'll also need to practice forgiveness.

IMPORTANT NOTE: in most cases of forgiveness, the offender does NOT need to be made aware of you forgiving them – unless they have asked for your forgiveness and are waiting for your response. If you are unsure if you should talk to the offender, talk to a mature believer and pray together with them.

Steps to Forgive – Steps 1 to 5

Step 1: Confess the sin of unforgiveness

Paul said, [**Colossians 3:13 \(NIV\)**](#) *Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* You must not make excuses for unforgiveness or bitterness you've been carrying.

Often pride keeps people from forgiving others. Pride may even cause you to believe that you're always a victim. Now, it's possible that you've been treated unfairly; but being mistreated does not give you permission to hold on to offense. Remember, "two wrongs do not make a right." This reality is why the kingdom of God has been called an "upside-down kingdom."

Step 2: Stop rehearsing the wrong, or seeking to punish the offender

Quit talking about it! Repeating an offense keeps it alive. If you stop talking about it, it loses its strength.

And stop any efforts to hurt the offender, even with manipulation.

Step 3: Listen for what God wants to say to you about the offender

It can be very wise AND healing to stop and listen to what the Spirit of Christ wants to say to you about an offender. This can protect you from having a wound get worse or from carrying the pain your entire life!

Forgiving others is a great way to practice "hearing God." God will speak! Sometimes God will give you his perspective on why the offender was driven to act the way they did. Or God may help you see what they were actually hoping to

accomplish.

Step 4: Ask him if there is anything you did to contribute to this situation

Maybe there isn't anything. But sometimes there is. It may not have been much, and what was done to you may have been way out of proportion to what you did – but still. Is there even something small?

If there is, own up to it and confess it.

Step 5: Listen for how God wants to comfort, heal and love you

God may want to encourage you. Comfort you.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are the 5 steps for forgiving others that are shared today? Try to explain them in your own words.
3. Does an offense or issue have to be big to be forgiven? Or do you have to deal with smaller offenses and hurts as well?

Life Application

1. Can you think of someone that you still need to forgive? Day 4's application will help you work through the steps. But today – listen for the Spirit's whisper – who do you still need to forgive?
2. Another way to determine if there is someone you need to forgive is to listen in prayer with this question – "Holy Spirit, is there someone that I'm struggling to bless?"

Bible Reading

1. Please read [1 John 3](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 3: Forgiveness - Day 4

Renew the Mind

Steps to Forgive - Steps 6 to 9

On Day 3, the first five of nine steps for forgiving others were discussed. Today, you'll look at four more.

Step 6: Listen for how Jesus turned what was intended for evil into something good

Was it evil that people cheered for Jesus to be crucified, and that various others were involved in this horrific act? For sure! Yet consider what the Bible declares about Jesus' attitude, [Hebrews 12:2 \(ESV\)](#) ... *for the joy that was set before him endured the cross ...* Isn't this very different from how we would normally react?

In the same way, there is so much that Jesus wants to accomplish in and through your struggles as well! Paul's desire should be our own! He said, [Philippians 3:10 \(NIV\)](#) *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings ...* We can gain from sharing in the sufferings of Jesus that come from being hurt, also experiencing God's good plans through them (which includes his resurrection power in our lives!).

When we allow God to speak about the pain that others have caused, his words can bring healing and joy and love. He can even bring us to the point of wanting to help the offender, rather than hurt them.

Step 7: Pray for your offender

This was one of the steps that Jesus gave, [Luke 6:27-28 \(NIV\)](#) *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

What should you pray for? Well, you can pray exactly what you would pray for yourself! And pray for them daily – pray for them until Jesus releases you from doing so. And when Jesus does, you'll have truly forgiven the offender.

Step 8: Bless and do good to your offender

Look at what Jesus said again, [Luke 6:27-28 \(NIV\)](#) *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

Of course, if you're a victim of any form of abuse, you must be very cautious about further contact. Sometimes all that you can do in these situations is pray. In many cases, a victim needs strong boundaries for protection.

Step 9: Ask the Lord to heal your heart and fill you with the Father's love for the offender

The Bible reminds us that only God can really heal, [Psalm 147:3 \(NIV\)](#) "... *the broken-hearted and bind up their wounds.*" This healing will also help you move to a place where you create room for God's love to flow in for the offender. You might think – "that love will hurt too much." It may FEEL like that, but it won't – not the Father's love! And this healing and love is different from trust, as we'll discuss next.

Forgiveness, Not Trust Necessarily

Forgiveness must be FREELY given. Holding onto offense and pain is at the root of many people's bondages and struggles. Forgiveness is necessary for inner healing, healing from some addictions, changing one's relational styles, etc. When you don't forgive, you choose to hold on to pain. This creates a prison in your life that will continue to trap you. However, forgiveness does not require you to trust someone immediately, or in some cases, ever again. Trust and forgiveness are separate issues!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 4 steps for forgiving others are shared today? Try to explain them in your own words.
3. Does forgiveness always mean trusting those who you are forgiving?

Life Application

1. Look back to the Life Application section of Day 3. What name(s) did you receive?
2. Take the name(s) you received and start working through the eight steps of forgiveness highlighted yesterday and today. Be diligent! It can transform you and circumstances that you face.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [1 John 4](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 3: Forgiveness - Day 5

Renew the Mind

Asking Forgiveness from Others

You've already seen above that Jesus said that if we wouldn't forgive someone else, he wouldn't forgive us ([Matthew 6:14-15](#)). In another passage, we see that if we mistreat others, God will withhold answers to our prayers. Specifically, husbands are addressed, but this would hold true for others, [1 Peter 3:7 \(NIV\)](#) *Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

While Jesus had much to say about forgiving others, he also addressed the issue of forgiveness from the other side: when you've been the offender. In fact, he said, [Matthew 5:23-24 \(NIV\)](#) *Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*

Why would Jesus tell his followers to go and be reconciled BEFORE offering their gift? It's because Jesus is returning to the idea that anything which causes broken human relationships needs to be addressed. Do you need to forgive? Then forgive. Does someone else need to forgive you? Then apologize and ask for forgiveness. Some followers of the Way like to declare how much their faith is about love. It is! But love is deeply connected to forgiving and asking for forgiveness.

In the book of James, it says, [James 5:16 \(NIV\)](#) *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.* Here is a very serious truth - forgiveness from God, answers to prayer from God, acceptance of your offerings (including your praise and acts of service) from God, and healing from God, are ALL connected to proper relationships with others!

The story of Zacchaeus in the Bible also challenges followers of the Way to consider making things right through restitution. Restitution is anything that you do to help compensate for the pain you caused another person.

One day Jesus was passing through Jericho. Zacchaeus, a wealthy chief tax collector, was there. He wanted to see Jesus and climbed a tree to get a better glimpse of him. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and told Zacchaeus that he was coming to his house. While visiting, Zacchaeus did something pretty astounding, [Luke 19:8 \(NIV\)](#) *But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."*

See how Jesus responded to Zacchaeus! [Luke 19:9 \(NIV\)](#) *Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham."* Evidently, Zacchaeus believed and repented. And the evidence of his repentance was the restitution of all he had stolen from others.

Here's another example, from Pastor Ray Duerksen:

In 1978, six months after the birth of our oldest son, I committed my life to follow Jesus. From that day forward, I followed him wholeheartedly, never turning back. Within a year, the Holy Spirit began to bring back memories of my life as a teenager: I had been stealing from my employer. From that point on, the Spirit wouldn't let the issue go. Every day when I went back to prayer, he would raise the issue. After speaking with Fran, I wrote the employer a letter, confessing my sin and asking forgiveness. But I also included money for goods I had stolen.

After a couple of weeks, I received a letter back from my employer in which he forgave me. But to my surprise, he then confessed that he had held money back from my last pay and asked me to forgive him as well. He also enclosed the pay envelope with the money. Interestingly, the amount he returned to me was almost the exact amount I sent to him! From that day forward, my conscience was clear, and I was able to resume my relationship with the Lord, as before.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Why is it important that you ask forgiveness from others?

Life Application

1. Is there someone that you have offended and you need to ask them to forgive you? Ask the Holy Spirit. Be prepared to obey Jesus by ensuring that you will act quickly on any steps that he gives.
2. Are there any past sins that you have committed that require restitution? Again, ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you.
3. Write out a prayer of commitment to the Lord – that you'll seek to be a person that is intentional about both forgiving others and asking for forgiveness.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [1 John 5](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 4: Emotional Healing and Wholeness 1 - Day 1

Renew the Mind

Introduction

Growth in character is expected for a follower of the Way. This was emphasized in Days 1-3. And such growth has incredible results, as right behaviours begin to occur automatically. What a blessing!

It's also important to remember that being made holy (which is called "sanctification") is related to the past, present and future. Sanctification is:

- A *past* event – freedom from the penalty of sin, because of the blood of Jesus! The old nature is crucified.
- A *present* process – learning to walk away from the power of sin
- A *future* experience – away from the presence of sin, at the return of Jesus

However, we all carry wounds from things we have done, things done to us, things passed on to us, and good things that were withheld from us. Because of these wounds, sometimes our intentional attempts to grow in our character are met with ongoing failure.

Who Participates in Our Sanctification?

So who is responsible for this growth? Who participates in it? Well, the Bible clearly teaches that both are involved! Consider this list:

God participates in our sanctification

- a. He gives us desire – [Philippians 2:13](#).
- b. He gives us the ability (through the power of the Spirit) – again, [Philippians 2:13](#).
- c. He guides the process, allowing irritations, responsibilities, pressures and suffering in our lives, where we can learn proper behavioral patterns – [Hebrews 12:5-11](#).

2. We are to participate in our own sanctification

- a. Prayer and listening prayer
- b. Feeding on God's Word daily, through reading, study, meditation and memorization
- c. Responding to sermons with obedience
- d. Submitting to the Spirit's promptings and corrections
- e. Confessing and repenting of sin
- f. Forgiving others
- g. Receiving God's love and grace in community
- h. Inner healing
- i. Deliverance and breaking bondages, including destructive family patterns

Sanctification of the Whole Person - In the Present

The PRESENT part of sanctification will impact every part of you! God is doing a beautiful work, shaping you like clay into something that will bring enjoyment and result in praise to God. There are four parts of you that he's seeking to sanctify.

First: Sanctification of our mind

Your mind and intellect, given to you by God to think, are to be sanctified. Paul describes it this way, [Romans 12:2 \(NIV\)](#) *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind ...*

Paul also gave advice on what to do with your thoughts, [2 Corinthians 10:5 \(NIV\)](#) *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

Taking "captive your thoughts" goes FAR beyond walking away from lust, or thoughts of revenge, or anything that is usually seen as sinful or poor thinking. Instead, Paul says we are to intentionally root out ANY thought not aligned to Christ's will and way. We are to use our minds to grow in our knowledge about God ([Colossians 1:10](#)).

This all includes reflecting on questions such as: how can I build God's kingdom today? What would other-centeredness look like? How would I act in this situation if I am "obedient to Christ?"

You see, it's more than simply removing bad thoughts, but also choosing to replace them with pure things! Or in the words of Paul, [Philippians 4:8 \(NIV\)](#) *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.*

Second: Sanctification of our emotions

Your emotions, which God gave you for enjoyment and to help with motivation, can also be sanctified. In fact, eliminating negative emotions is commanded, as Paul highlights, [Ephesians 4:31 \(NIV\)](#) *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*

Further, you're to let the Spirit lead you in order to bear good fruit, a life of many positive and godly emotions. Some examples include, [Galatians 5:22-23 \(NIV\)](#) *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

Third: Sanctification of our will and decision making

When you allow one area to be touched by God, it will impact other areas as well! For example, when you sanctify your mind and emotions, your ability to make good decisions will increase! This is important as God wants the wills of believers to be made holy as well. Consider this verse, [Philippians 2:13 \(NIV2011\)](#) *... for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

Fourth: sanctification of our body

Jesus redeemed you with his blood! Therefore, it's reasonable to respond by honoring him with your body! Paul also spoke about this, [1 Corinthians 6:20 \(NIV\)](#) *... you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.* How do you use your body? Is it kept from evil? Do you use it to enthusiastically serve God and others?

The world likes to talk about freedom but God has given you freedom to serve, [Galatians 5:13 \(NIV2011\)](#) ... *do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.* And as the mind, emotions and will are being sanctified, it will make it easier to sanctify the body. This “sanctifying of the body” is very important! It’s because our bodies are the means by which the Holy Spirit works in this life. Therefore, our bodies are not to be recklessly abused or mistreated but are to be made useful and able to respond to God’s will!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. Write down in your own journal something that stood out to you, from the reading you just completed.
2. What 4 parts of your life does God want to sanctify?

Life Application

1. Spend considerable time reflecting about your past: where has God already sanctified your mind, emotions, will and body? Write down as much detail as possible.
2. Spend some time praising God for the work that he has already done in your life. Try to be specific!
3. Review (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) [John 15:5-6](#), [Romans 12:2](#), [Matthew 28:18-20](#), [1 Peter 5:8](#), [John 10:27](#), [James 1:22](#), [Psalm 1](#), [Colossians 3:2](#), [Psalm 39:4](#), [Matthew 5:16](#), [Matthew 6:9-13](#), (*Verses From Grow Character Lessons*) [2 Peter 1:5-9](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Ephesians 1:1-14](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 4: Emotional Healing and Wholeness 1 - Day 2

Renew the Mind

Unfortunately, every believer starts their journey as a follower of the Way with some *inner wounds and brokenness*. These can come from: poor choices you've made; hurt caused by others; patterns passed down by your parents.

However, God has made a way for you to find freedom! For example, he can: *bring emotional healing; deliver from addictions and spiritual oppression; break destructive family patterns!* Praise God! Freedom is possible!

Yet, not everyone takes advantage of this potential for freedom. Why?

Why People Don't Find Freedom

First: Some fear for their reputation

Those who need healing (really, all followers of the Way!) may be anxious about what others think of them. They might be more concerned about "the fear of man" than becoming all that Jesus has for them. Some churches also avoid providing this act of love, with the pastor worried about their reputation.

Second: They haven't been taught OR trained

In [Jeremiah 6:16](#) the Israelites were instructed to ask for the ancient paths and where the good way is. This "good way" can include training on how to find freedom, so that you can reach your potential in Christ. Unfortunately, many churches and believers haven't received such training. In other cases, the doctrine (beliefs) about this subject has been kept, but the practice of them has been lost. It doesn't have to be complicated, but it's part of our inheritance as God's children!

Third: Some cling to false beliefs

There are those who claim that if a person is saved, they are already whole in Christ; and there is nothing left to do. However, in previous lessons, it was noted that while God did EVERYTHING for you to deal with the penalty of sin, he expects you to join with him to grow in your character.

Fourth: Some hold to a naturalistic worldview

The naturalistic worldview has deeply influenced many believers, where the transforming work of God's Spirit is ignored: hearing God, gifts of the Holy Spirit, healings (inner and physical), deliverance, etc.

Others have a supernatural worldview and agree that Jesus and the early church benefited from such spiritual power. However, some of these ignore their own need, even using excuses such as, "well, I have the Bible already!"

Finally, there are those who see the need for such transformation in "uneducated" parts of the world. Foolishly, they buy into the lie that where knowledge is greater, the spiritual health is greater. Evidence shows that this is far from true!

Is there a BALANCE that we need to aim for? Of course! Consider this:

- There are parts that only the minister can do
- There are other parts that the person being ministered to can do

- There are other parts that only God can do (supernatural).

Fifth: They assume that this ministry is for specialists

Each believer DOES have different types and levels of gifting. However, all SAINTS (ordinary Christians) can help others find freedom, even at a basic level. Consider this key passage, [Ephesians 4:11-12 \(ESV\)](#) *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ ...* Notice that the aim of the leaders is to equip saints to do the work of the ministry. That means you!

Sixth: Some fear weird behaviors or division in their churches

How incredibly sad for the people of God, as they're kept from freedom simply because of the fear of something going wrong! Of course, emotional healing, deliverance and freedom from destructive family patterns *should* be handled with WISDOM and LOVE.

However, what's better – stepping out and having to make adjustments OR withholding from yourself and others the full benefits of what Jesus died for? What do you think Jesus prefers?

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Why do people sometimes struggle to find freedom? What 6 reasons are presented in today's lesson?

Life Application

1. Spend some time praying for any churches that you've attended. Ask God to bring them to a place where they can experience ALL of the healing that he desires for them.
2. Spend some time praying for your current pastor. Pray for the pastor to have courage, wisdom and favour in bringing freedom in the church, through teaching and training.
3. Memorize [Galatians 5:13](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Ephesians 1:15-23](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 4: Emotional Healing and Wholeness 1 - Day 3

Renew the Mind

A word that's used in churches is, "atonement." Maybe you've heard it expressed this way; that Jesus, through his death, "made atonement for sin." It's something only he could do! It's one reason why he is worthy of praise!

Today, three blessings linked to the atonement will be emphasized. Hopefully, you'll better understand this incredible truth!

What Is Included in the Atonement

Blessing 1: Jesus' death paid the penalty due for our sins

All sin - including yours - demanded a JUST response from the Father. Sin is incredibly serious, as it's rebellion against God. Therefore, there needs to be a consequence that matches the severity of this seriousness. And the only appropriate response was death, the shedding of blood.

However, as Isaiah clearly prophesied in [Isaiah 53:5](#), someone would be pierced for transgressions (literally means, "those things that miss the mark") and crushed for iniquities (literally, the sinful desires inside of people). This was Jesus! He took the consequence on himself, paying the penalty for YOUR sins. This is atonement!

Blessing 2: Jesus' death redeems us from the curse of sickness and disease

Sickness and disease eventually impact everyone! And they're a part of the curse that followed humanity. Thankfully, Jesus' atonement addresses this as well! Christ not only died for our sins, but also for the suffering that sin caused in us!

Consider what's said about Jesus' ministry, [Matthew 8:16-17 \(NIV\)](#) ... *many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."*

Most Christians agree that the FULL benefits that Christ earned will not come until he returns. It's at that point you'll receive your resurrection body and never again experience any more colds, allergies, cancers, arthritis, heart attacks, dementia, flu, headaches, blindness and sight impairment – NONE!

Of course, though perfect health is not possible YET, from time to time God gives a partial taste of what will be yours for eternity, NOW. This is where the ministry of healing comes in.

Blessing 3: Christ's death broke the power of sin that enslaved us

No one wants to be a slave! Before a person is a follower of the Way, they're a slave to sin! However, the death of Jesus took care of this. As Paul describes it, [Romans 6:6 \(NIV\)](#) *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin ...*

This means that sinning isn't inevitable anymore! Of course, you'll still have weakness, but you're now at an advantage because of what Jesus did. As Peter reports, [1 Peter 2:24 \(NIV\)](#) *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.* Praise God!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. In today's reading, 3 blessings that come from the atonement are noted. What are they?

Life Application

1. Look again at the 3 blessings noted in today's reading. Spend some time reflecting on your own experience of these blessings. Write down any examples that come to your mind.
2. Try to find 1 or 2 people with whom you can share your answer to Question 1.
3. Review [Galatians 5:13](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Ephesians 2:1-10](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 4: Emotional Healing and Wholeness 1 - Day 4

Renew the Mind

On Day 3, you looked at three blessings related to the atonement. Today, a fourth blessing is highlighted.

Blessing 4: Christ's death provides for our "shalom" (peace)

The prophet Isaiah announced what Jesus would do for those who accept his work, [Isaiah 53:5 \(NIV\)](#) *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*

Notice that the punishment inflicted on Jesus would bring peace. The Hebrew word (the Old Testament is originally in Hebrew) for peace is "shalom."

Outside of the Bible, "peace" is usually defined as the absence of conflict and disorder. However, it means so much more in the Bible!

First: We can experience peace with God

Shalom begins with God because he IS peace, just as he IS love. Isaiah powerfully describes Jesus, [Isaiah 9:6 \(NIV\)](#) *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Paul expressed it this way, [Romans 15:33 \(NIV\)](#) *The God of peace be with you all. Amen.* In the Old Testament, when the Israelites were trapped in Egypt, the last plague to hit Egypt was the death of every firstborn. However, an Israelite family would be spared IF the blood of a sacrificial lamb was splashed against the door of their house.

This powerful event pointed ahead to the death of God's Son, which would make peace with God possible. Paul said, [Romans 5:1 \(NIV\)](#) *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* All other kinds of shalom (peace) are dependent on and flow from peace with God, purchased through Jesus' death on the cross.

Second: Peace between nations will come

Israel experienced brief periods of rest (shalom) from its enemies. Can you imagine what relief this was? However, rest from their enemies was not possible whenever they turned from the Lord.

It's why absolute peace between nations awaits the end of time. At that time, the Messiah (Jesus) will come to rule the world! In the words of the prophet again, [Isaiah 2:4 \(NIV\)](#) *He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.*

Third: Peace with nature will come

This will come in the future as well. Take some time to read this longer passage, and praise God:

[Isaiah 11:6-9 \(ESV\)](#) *The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the*

cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Fourth: Peace with others is possible

Of course, when a person is a slave to sin, conflict with others can be almost automatic! But now, with the power of God working in you, there's the possibility of greater unity with others. Especially in the church! This is why Paul commands, **Romans 12:18 (NIV)** *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* The potential to have peace with one another is helped by what Jesus did on the cross. Because of this, we are commanded to live in unity where possible.

Fifth: Peace with ourselves

Not only does the atonement provide for EXTERNAL shalom, but also for INTERNAL shalom – peace inside of you! Wow!

People often love Psalm 23, but rarely experience what it says, **Psalm 23:1-3 (ESV)** *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.* Through Jesus, experiencing this life IS possible!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are the 5 aspects of peace (shalom) that you can receive from the atonement?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Spend time reflecting on your own experiences with the 5 aspects of peace. Write down any examples that come to your mind. Praise God for his work in your life!
2. Pray for people in your circles (neighbors, co-workers, friends, family members) who do not know Christ. Pray that they would be attracted to the peace that can only be found in Christ.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Ephesians 2:11-22.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 4: Emotional Healing and Wholeness 1 - Day 5

Renew the Mind

Applying Inner & Emotional Wholeness

It's very important to APPLY what Jesus did for you. Yes, the penalty for sin is gone! Yet there is still growth needed. All of the blessings that flow from the cross must be ministered individually. It does little good if what Christ won on the cross remains unapplied! Whatever your age or spiritual maturity, why settle for anything less than God's best? He is a generous God if you'll keep seeking him!

So, how can you experience more inner and emotional wholeness?

First: Jesus initiates, ministering wholeness to the individual believer

Sometimes Jesus will pleasantly surprise you by coming to you when you're struggling with sadness, grief and brokenness. He is THAT good! Or as one verse says, [**Psalms 34:18 \(NIV\)**](#) *The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

On Monday evening after Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples were locked in fear behind closed doors. Suddenly, Jesus stood among them and uttered, "Peace be with you!" ([**John 20:19-20**](#)). Can you imagine what happened inside of them when this happened? Well, you don't have to imagine it, because John notes, [**John 20:20 \(NIV\)**](#) *The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

Similarly, the night following Paul's arrest, Jesus unexpectedly showed up in Paul's prison cell and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" ([**Acts 23:11**](#)). Paul's inner being or soul will have been greatly strengthened!

This is the kind of ministry that Jesus will do for you! Would you say that your heart is soft enough to Jesus, to "let him in?"

Second: We can initiate the ministry, and Jesus responds with wholeness

Though God WILL surprise you, he doesn't want you to be passive, always waiting for him to act. He is not a forceful God!

As you read your Bible, you'll notice the pattern of God waiting for his people to cry out to him. He is so compassionate when we're in need! For example, [**Psalm 107:5-6 \(NIV\)**](#) *They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.*

And consider this invitation and promise from God! [**Psalm 50:15 \(NASB\)**](#) *Call upon me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor me.*

Similarly, Jesus invites people to come to him so that they'll receive shalom, which is called 'rest' in this passage, [**Matthew 11:28 \(NIV\)**](#) *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*

Paul didn't view wholeness as optional for the believer! He viewed it as something critical to survive the ongoing battle against the enemy, the devil. And so he commanded, [**Ephesians 6:14-15 \(NIV\)**](#) *Stand firm then ... with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.*

Paul refers to the “gospel of peace” because peace is a blessing or benefit that comes from the gospel. And remember that peace is an emotion and one of the purposes of emotion is to move or motivate you to do the things God calls you to do. On the other hand, anxiety, worry, and fear will cause you to shrink back or avoid moving ahead.

Therefore, with peace (shalom) firmly in place, the devil can’t tempt you to give up! And notice that walking with “feet fitted” is your choice. Jesus won’t put the shoes on for you!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. Who can initiate the process of experiencing inner wholeness?

Life Application

1. Record a time in your life when God drew close to you and comforted/strengthened you – when you didn’t expect it.
2. Record a time in your life when you chose to pursue God for comfort, as the one who initiated.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Ephesians 3:1-13](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 5: Emotional Healing and Wholeness 2 - Day 1

Renew the Mind

Day 1 and Day 2 covers six things that God will use to bring wholeness and shalom (peace) into your life.

Read this with a humble heart, hungry to see God do even greater things in your life – even if you've been a follower of the Way for many years!

How God Brings Shalom and Wholeness into Our Lives

First: As we live according to God's commands

You'll experience wholeness when you walk in the ancient paths, as the prophet describes, [Jeremiah 6:16 \(NIV\)](#) *This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.'*"

What are these paths? God's ways and way of life, which were walked in by those who have gone before us, "in the faith." This was the way of the covenant; the good way, which brought rest to the soul. The psalmist agreed, saying that the peace we desire in great measure comes from walking in God's ways, [Psalm 19:9-11 \(NIV\)](#) *The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*

Many people use their money to TRY to purchase wholeness through entertainment, sexual sin, drugs or alcohol, excessive spending, and so on. However, just as many people have discovered that the old saying – "Money can't buy you happiness" – is true!

Suppose that a married man or woman with four children has an affair? Will they actually end up with peace? Do they really lie down at night with shalom? They may have thought they were missing something but do they end up "whole?" Or consider God's way of truthfulness. Does the person who lies win out in the end? You see, the commands given by God aren't random; they match how he made people to prosper.

On the other hand, you've surely experienced your conscience giving you grief and pain when you violate God's laws! Is this peace? Paul spoke about the distress the conscience brings when God's law is violated, [Romans 2:15 \(ESV\)](#) *They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.* You see, the laws given by God aren't random; they match how he made us.

Second: As others minister to us, in the name of Christ

If you read the next verses carefully, you'll see that Paul links the experience of Jesus and his peace with ministry in the church. Specifically, he says, [Colossians 3:15-16 \(ESV\)](#) *And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom*

Many followers of the Way have experienced exactly this: the peace of Jesus as they hear a sermon; encouragement when someone else shares their "God story" (a testimony); overflowing hope as someone prays for them.

Third: As we sing and praise

In [Colossians 3](#), Paul continues on and highlights the value of singing and praise! **Colossians 3:16 (ESV)** *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

It's remarkable how quickly peace can flow into your life when singing or singing along with others! Do you remember how David's harp playing brought calm and peace to the troubled King Saul ([1 Samuel 16:23](#))? Have you ever stopped to think that such shalom was purchased for you on the cross?

What a valuable gift! Are you grateful for it?

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 3 things that God will use to bring shalom and wholeness into your life?

Life Application

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you remember how God has used each of the 3 ways discussed today to bring you peace. Write down what you receive. This is an act of praise in itself!
2. Choose a favorite song. Listen to it 2 or 3 times and ask the Holy Spirit to minister to you. Then contact another follower of the Way. Ask them what their favorite Christian song is. Listen to this one as well!
3. Memorize [Psalm 119:133](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Ephesians 3:14-21](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 5: Emotional Healing and Wholeness 2 - Day 2

Renew the Mind

On Day 1, three ways that God brings shalom and wholeness into your life were noted. Today, you'll look at three more.

Fourth: As we meditate on what God speaks to us

When the devil tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread, Jesus responded by quoting the Bible! Whether what God speaks to you is from the Bible or specific words directly from his Spirit, they will bring life and peace. After all, Jesus said, [John 6:63 \(NIV\)](#) *The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are LIFE.*

This is why the Psalmist points out that the one who meditates on the law (God's words) will not wither.

[Psalm 1:3 \(NIV\)](#) *He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.*

From Pastor Ray, Founder of Church Renewal

"One Sunday morning I (Ray) was reading the story of the Shunammite woman whose son of promise had died ([2 Kings 4](#)). Elisha had prayed for and prophesied that she would have a son, though she was barren. But now he lay dead. The woman rushed to Elisha essentially saying, 'What was the point of giving me a son, if I was just going to lose him anyways.' So, Elisha prayed and called the boy back to life!

As I read the story, the Holy Spirit pointed out to me what Fran had been feeling. On the evening that she discovered that she was pregnant with Stefan, the Spirit promised her that God would one day use him to impact many for the kingdom. But now she was discouraged, as in his teens, he was now spiritually dead to God and his family.

Then the Spirit instructed me to tell Fran that like the Shunammite woman's son, Stefan would be spiritually raised back to life. She and I were overcome with tears of joy as God's Spirit ministered to both of us through his promise! This was just over two years before Stefan came back to the Lord!"

Fifth: As we pray

Yes, wholeness and strength can come through the prayers of others! But they can also arise as you pray for yourself. A favorite passage of many explains it well, [Philippians 4:6-7 \(NIV\)](#) *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Sometimes God will deliver this peace to you when you are simply in his presence, as the Psalmist described, [Psalm 16:11 \(NIV\)](#) *You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

When the Lord ministers inner peace, wholeness and healing, he does so gently. Jesus not only spoke peace to the winds and waves ([Mark 4:39-40](#)), but to people! He's that powerful, yet doesn't crush us in his power. Consider this example, [John 20:19-21 \(NIV\)](#) *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"* ²⁰ After he said

this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

At other times he can give you VERY specific words to encourage you, flooding you with peace. For example, God did this for Daniel, who was troubled by the dreams and visions God was giving him, [Daniel 10:18-19 \(ESV\)](#) *Again one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, "O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage." And as he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me."*

Sixth: As we experience the ministry of deliverance

In Mark Chapter 5 you can read the story of a woman who was healed from 12 years of bleeding! Praise God for his power! There's no indication here that this sickness was caused by demonic oppression of some kind. Instead, the woman had endured much at the hands of many physicians and had spent all her money searching for a cure. And sure enough, when she touched Jesus' cloak, the blood dried up and she felt in her body that she was healed. Jesus said to her, [Mark 5:34 \(ESV\)](#) *Daughter, your faith has made you well (sozo); go in peace, and be healed of your disease.*

The Greek word "sozo" (the New Testament was originally in Greek) means salvation. For sure, this includes salvation from your sins! But it's so much more. It also links to being saved from EVERYTHING that you need deliverance from.

You can see other examples of this blessing of "sozo" when Jesus releases a woman who had been in bondage to demons for 18 years (see [Luke 13](#)). What peace she had afterwards!

And praise God, he is still doing this same kind of ministry today!

Brokenness and bondage in us have a variety of causes, including the following:

- a. The things we've done which cause or contribute to our condition
- b. The things which were done TO us, which cause or contribute to our condition
- c. The things which were passed on TO us through our parents or culture, which cause or contribute to our condition
- d. The things which were withheld FROM us, which cause or contribute to our condition

Then there is the matter of how severe each of these is. All of this is enough to help us realize that ministry to each individual will be unique. That is not to say, however, that there aren't general principles and pathways we can follow – there are. Of course, the most important thing that we bring to such ministry is the Holy Spirit.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. How does God bring shalom and wholeness? What 3 ways are discussed today?

Life Application

1. Consider the 3 ways discussed today. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you remember how he has used each one to bring peace to your life. Write down what you receive. This is an act of praise in itself!
2. Can you think of an area of your life where you still need God's peace? Write out a prayer, starting the journey of asking God to take you to a place of shalom in this area.
3. Review [Psalm 119:133](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Ephesians 4:1-16](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 5: Emotional Healing and Wholeness 2 - Day 3

Renew the Mind

It's really important to *practically* understand how God can bring emotional wholeness to you and others. So please take your time reading today's description ...

And remember, this is COMPLETELY linked to growing in character! It's very difficult for any believer to be godly if they're limping around with unhealed wounds.

The Journey of Emotional Healing Described

Whenever you're hurt, Satan can plant LIES in the memories of the event. Think about that ...

And from then on, every time something similar happens in your life, the lie can be triggered and out will come the EMOTIONAL PAIN of the lie! Put another way, the negative emotions you feel in the present can be echoes or smoke trails that lead back to a past fire.

You see, the pain you feel is not necessarily coming from the memory of the event, but rather from the interpretation – or lie planted IN that event. For example, if someone has been sexually abused, it may not be the memory of the event which continues to cause them pain. Otherwise the only way to receive healing would be to lose memory of that event. Instead, it would be lies, or a wrong interpretation, such as "I'm dirty" or "I'm shameful" or "it's all my fault."

You may know that the lies you believe are irrational, yet they FEEL true – don't they? That's why they can trigger emotional pain or outbursts or responses in the present. It's also why people can't be TALKED out of pain or woundedness. The pain isn't in the mind, but in the emotion. And only Jesus can touch that part.

In inner/emotional healing, Jesus is invited to take a person back to where the event took place. The fact that this can be done shouldn't really surprise anyone, as the Holy Spirit offers gifts such as gifts of discernment and knowledge! In fact, these gifts are part of the church's collection of spiritual weapons for warfare (see [Ephesians 6:17](#); [2 Corinthians 10:3-5](#)).

Next, Jesus is asked to remove false interpretations and lies and replace them with truth. And when HE speaks these things into a soul with a specific word through his Spirit or with a Bible verse, it brings inner (emotional) healing. Remember, Jesus doesn't erase the memory, but he removes the pain in the memory.

Here's an analogy from physical injuries. A person may have a scar from past injuries or surgery. They may even have an accurate memory of what happened. **HOWEVER**, they may not have any actual physical pain any longer. This is what can happen with emotional healing as well! The memory stays, but the emotional pain is gone!

Praise God, when the pain is gone, then the trigger is gone! What this means is that anything that remotely reminds you of the original event or pain will no longer cause you to PRESENTLY respond in unhelpful ways.

Truly, these two verses in John describe Jesus' work in emotional healing, [John 8:32 \(NIV\)](#) *Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free* AND [John 8:36 \(NIV\)](#) *So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

A Story

From Pastor Ray and Fran Duerksen:

"One noon hour, while driving with Fran, I looked at her and said, 'You're beautiful.' She retorted, 'No, I'm not!' I said, 'Why do you always respond like that when I tell you that you're beautiful?' I asked if she was up to something that I wanted to try on her, and she nodded she was. We stopped at a park and in prayer I asked the Lord to reveal to Fran a memory where possibly a lie had been planted by the enemy. It didn't take more than maybe 30 seconds, and she had a memory that surprised her.

She shared that when she was only 12 years old, an acquaintance (NOT her mother or father) had looked at her one day and remarked, 'You're fat.' From that day forward she believed she was fat and ugly, though this was completely untrue on both counts – she was (and still is!), in fact, very beautiful! We listened one more time, and this time the Lord gave her a second memory – this time the culprit was me (Ray D). Years earlier I had said something quite uncomplimentary. This reinforced the lie in her. I confessed my sin and she forgave me. Next, we bowed our heads again and I asked Jesus to speak his truth into her heart. I waited perhaps another minute and noticed that her lips were quivering, and her eyes were filling with tears. I asked, 'Is Jesus speaking to you?' She nodded that he was! Jesus told her how beautiful he had made her and how much he loved her. She cried as she received victory over the image issue! After that it no longer plagued her!"

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Why do past events still trigger people today? What is the cause – the memory or a lie that was planted?
3. How can Jesus bring a person healing from a past event? Describe the process mentioned in today's reading.

Life Application

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if there's a past memory that still causes you pain today. Even write down any current things that trigger the pain. Keep your answers to Questions 1 in mind. During Days 4 & 5, you'll be exposed to a tool that will help you find freedom (and lead others to freedom as well).

Bible Reading

1. Please read Ephesians 4:17-32.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 5: Emotional Healing and Wholeness 2 - Day 4

Renew the Mind

Introduction

Followers of the Way need to PRACTICE if they're going to find freedom! You can't just learn things in your head; this doesn't bring freedom. Of course, you can do this alone, but it's even better to walk through this with another person (if available).

The [Peer-to-Peer Ministry Tool](#) which follows, includes three parts:

Part 1: Start the session (discussed today)

Part 2: Identify the struggle (discussed today)

Part 3: Work through the ministry steps (discussed on Day 5)

Part 1: Start the Session

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide the session:

"Holy Spirit, I ask you to guide this time, and to show me (or name of other person) anything you want me to deal with today."

Take authority over demonic spirits:

"In Jesus' name I bind and muzzle any spirit that has influence in my life (or name of other person) and you will go when you are told. You are not to manifest yourself in this session."

NOTE: If you are ministering to someone else, DO NOT counsel them. This is about Jesus ministering to them.

Part 2: Identify the Struggle

1. The struggle you identify with is called the "presenting problem." This is the symptom, not the root cause.
2. The goal is to get to the root cause, to eliminate the source of the struggle.
3. You and any other person you're ministering to may already know the presenting problem. If not, ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom! Or where to start if you have quite a few challenges.

Here is a list of possible presenting problems:

First: Emotional struggles

Six common emotional struggles:

1. Anger - injustice

2. Shame/guilt – done something wrong
3. Fear – danger of unknown
4. Sadness - loss
5. Hopeless despair – personal limitations
6. Disgust – defilement.

Do any of these control you?

Second: Traumas – bad things you've experienced

1. Physical abuse: *including face slapping, hair pulling, shaking, punching, tickling a child into hysteria, violent spanking, leaving marks and bruises, emotional scars, etc.*
2. Sexual abuse: *inappropriate touching, intercourse, etc.*
3. Verbal abuse: *including name calling by parents, siblings, school mates, etc.*
4. Abandonment by a parent: *including adoption, foster care, untimely death in the family, etc.*
5. Torture or satanic ritual abuse
6. Witnessing someone being abused
7. Catastrophic events: *natural disaster, car accident, house fire, etc.*

Third: Absence of necessary good things

1. Not being loved and cherished for simply being you. *E.g. only being told that you are loved when you DO something good for your parent(s)*
2. Not having the experience of being a delight, of being special
3. Not having parents take the time to understand who you are and what's important to you
4. Not receiving enough appropriate physical touch and affection
5. Not experiencing age appropriate structures or boundaries, with gentle discipline
6. Not receiving basic needs. *E.g. food, shelter, clothing, medical attention ...*
7. Not being taught to do hard things. (character growth) *E.g. deal with stress, handle overwhelming emotions, how to handle conflict (school, siblings, etc....), deal with disappointment, etc.*
8. Not being given opportunities to develop personal talents and abilities

Fourth: Addictions and dependencies

Some common addictions:

1. Food
2. Media
3. Video games
4. Alcohol
5. Illegal or prescription drugs
6. Money or certain material items
7. Sex, or pornography
8. Gambling

It is vital that we get rid of all the junk in our homes and run from temptation. Let's pay careful attention to the words of one of God's prophets, **Amos 5:14 (NLT)** *Do what is good and run from evil so that you may live! Then the LORD God of Heaven's Armies will be your helper, just as you have claimed.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.

Life Application

1. Simply begin your journey of finding freedom by walking through the steps mentioned in today's reading.
2. Review (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 6:9-13, (*Verses From Grow Character Lessons*) 2 Peter 1:5-9, Galatians 5:13, Psalm 119:133.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Ephesians 5:1-21.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 5: Emotional Healing and Wholeness 2 - Day 5

Renew the Mind

Part 3: Work Through the Ministry Steps

On Day 4 you began to use the [Peer-to-Peer Ministry Tool](#). Today, if you're using a printed manual, go to the end of the booklet and find the Peer-to-Peer Ministry Tool. If you're using the Way app, go to the Tools tab and find the Peer-to-Peer Ministry Tool. Either way, take the struggle identified in Life Application Question 1 yesterday and walk through all the sections, except the Deliverance section.

This tool is NO substitute for a growing relationship with Jesus. Tools apart from relationship are powerless. And this is not a formula. It's important that you rely on listening to the Holy Spirit for his guidance and direction when receiving ministry or are ministering to others.

Further, the use of spiritual tools should not be a replacement for seeking professional help: medication, doctors, therapists, mental health workers, etc. God created doctors, science and spiritual tools and he uses all of them to help people in distress.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. How would you say you're feeling about facing your struggles and finding healing?

Life Application

1. Continue your journey of finding freedom by walking through the steps noted in today's reading.

Bible Reading

1. Read [Ephesians 5:22-33](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Part 2

Lesson 6: Deliverance 1 - Day 1

Renew the Mind

Introduction

Hopefully, you've made a commitment to grow in character, remembering that the goal is to *be like Jesus*. This means that every single follower of the Way can keep growing! Praise God for having such a wonderful vision for his people!

As we begin the second part of the *Grow Character* manual, we start with a topic that can result in much reaction. Because some have "done deliverance" in unhealthy ways, many want to shrink back from the idea. However, we encourage you to read on and to consider that deliverance is a biblical concept and can be done in a way that honors God and blesses his people.

Unfortunately, there's an enemy, the devil, who will do EVERYTHING possible to resist your desire to become more godly. Paul, speaking about the devil, said, [Ephesians 6:10-11 \(NIV\)](#) *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.*

Notice that it's YOUR responsibility to put on the armor of God. Again, you have a vital role to play! Through these lessons you'll learn to effectively resist and fight the devil's attacks. What an awesome truth that God's people can win!

The reality of evil and the existence of a devil and demons wasn't questioned in historic Christianity until recently. However, such doubt is increasing! Many churches are becoming like the culture, denying anything beyond what they can see with their eyes. YET, this topic is more relevant to the current state of the world than ALL talk about politics, economics, international relationships, etc.

When someone gets a disease what's more useful – only dealing with the symptoms or discerning the source of the disease? Clearly, healing comes when the source is addressed! Of course, since society (and many churches) don't believe in an actual devil or evil, many resources have been spent trying to cure what are only the symptoms of evil. It's actually foolish!

And this is why despite people's best efforts, little has changed in the world. Indeed, we rightly conclude that, "history repeats itself" or, "the one thing we learn from history is that we don't learn from history." It's left many in the world confused.

There are three ways in which society has tried to deal with evil:

First: Through legislation

This is a poor solution, for in the end, not enough laws can be made to limit all sinful and evil behavior. Neither can a police officer be assigned to every person on the planet. While laws can have some value, you've likely discovered that they're helpless to transform inner struggles and negative thoughts, from which all evil springs forth.

Second: Through education

Educators begin with the false belief that people are basically good at birth, and that they learn bad behavior through a lack of education or the wrong education.

While education has its place in helping many, this ultimately fails to consider the reality of evil both inside and outside of people. In fact, some of the most educated societies have participated in some of the greatest evils! And many VERY educated politicians, teachers, lawyers, judges and business leaders have shipwrecked their lives, or been imprisoned for crimes!

Third: Through improved environment

Billions of dollars have been spent trying to improve living conditions in the hopes that it would limit evil. The results of these efforts have been very disappointing; evil continues on. Contrast this with countless Christians throughout history, who have lived in desperate circumstances, yet been models of grace, kindness, patience, and love.

U Thant, former Secretary General of the UN, spoke about the need for peace before 67 distinguished scholars and statesmen from 19 countries of the world and an audience of 2500 people. He asked them:

“What element is lacking so that with all our skill and all our knowledge we still find ourselves in the dark valley of discord – and conflict? What is it that inhibits us from going forward together to enjoy the fruits of human endeavor and to reap the harvest of human experience? Why is it that, for all our professed ideals, our hopes, and our skills, peace on earth is still a distant objective seen only dimly through the storms and turmoils of our present difficulties?”

The apostle Paul has an answer for such questions: people face a REAL devil who is behind much of the trouble in the world today! This is the teaching of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 3 ineffective ways does society try to deal with the problems of the world?

Life Application

1. What are some of the world's problems that have persisted for hundreds of years, no matter what human efforts have been made? Write out a "prayer of mourning" where you express to God your grief over these problems.
2. Review (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 6:9-13, (*Verses From Grow Character Lessons*) 2 Peter 1:5-9, Galatians 5:13, Psalm 119:133.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 1](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 6: Deliverance 1 - Day 2

Renew the Mind

The World, the Flesh and the Devil?

People often say, “the fight is against the world, the flesh and the devil.” Well yes, there’s a lot of truth to that! However, Paul says there is really only one enemy, the devil. Here’s why: Satan USES the world and the flesh (one’s natural desires, patterns, etc.) as ways to attack you.

Here’s how Paul explained it, **Ephesians 2:1-3 (ESV)** *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work IN the sons of disobedience - among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

How does the devil use the flesh and the world?

First channel: The flesh

People may say, “I’m not aware of any control of the devil.” And this is entirely possible when a person simply follows the natural desires of the body and mind. When the Bible says “flesh” it’s used as a metaphor; it’s not talking about one’s body.

Instead, it’s referring to: the urge to self-centeredness within; a desire to be one’s own god; pride of taking credit for everything; willful push or rebellion against authority. These are the destructive behaviors we automatically or subconsciously begin to follow.

Everyone was born with this; no one had to teach anyone to lie, to be proud, to be bitter and rebellious, etc. Now consider what James says about this kind of life, **James 3:15 (ESV)** *This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.* Notice the word there – “demonic!”

Clearly, one of the ways the devil will attack you is through the flesh (human nature), twisting it and seeking to change it from what God intended. Though in our inner beings we desire to be obedient to God (**Romans 7:22**), our flesh automatically turns to conditioned patterns of action and response in our subconscious.

Therefore, we are to crucify the flesh (**Galatians 5:24**) by forming new and righteous patterns of thoughts, actions and reactions. But until we do that, the devil will continue to take advantage of us, tempting us where we’re most vulnerable and likely to fail.

Second channel: The world

The world, on the other hand, is simply a combination of many “flesh-centered” individuals – you, your neighbor, etc. Since the flesh is in every person – acting selfishly, pridefully, with pain – the total collection results in a broken world.

Isn’t it true that there’s tremendous pressure of the majority upon the minority to conform, adjust, keep in step, and not to be different? This is why the Bible says, **Romans 12:2 (ESV)** *Do not be conformed to this world, ...* That is, “do not let the world squeeze you into its mold.”

The devil may use or deceive human power structures to influence individuals to sin. Haven’t you seen this happen? In fact, while the world is totally unaware, it can be under the control of the devil’s manipulation and control.

Examples

How do you explain that one of the most “civilized”, sophisticated, and educated societies in history (Germany) could initiate and allow some of the worst horrors the world has ever seen, systematically torturing and murdering over 6 million Jews?

And how do you explain that World War 1, which left 17 million people dead, and was often referred to as “the war to end all wars,” was followed up by these Nazi atrocities AND World War 2 only 21 years later? Historians have said that it was because Germany was so angered by the humiliation of the Allies after its defeat in World War 1.

This may explain the surface symptom. But how foolish to suggest that this gets to the root of the problem! In no way can this explain the intense hatred of a so-called “civilized” people who would commit some of the most horrific and dreadful acts against humans ever recorded!

How do you explain why a father of four would go out during the day and engage in the torture of a fellow human, and return at night for supper with his lovely wife and children, all the while listening to beautiful German classical music? How does one explain how educated and talented Nazi doctors could carry out live “experiments” on Jewish children, and feel no guilt?

In [Daniel 10](#) a fascinating glimpse into the VERY REAL spirit world is given. In that chapter, it's made clear that strong demonic spirits exist who rule over specific places on earth. These demonic powers manipulate and control entire regions of the world and are responsible for orchestrating spiritual brainwashing.

In the West, a new group ‘mindset’ is forming - a forced belief in behaviors counter to the Bible. Not only are there no ‘warning labels’ for sin, followers of the Way are being forced to believe that it is good! Clearly, powerful demonic spirits are behind the shaping of this group ‘mindset’.

Therefore, the Bible alone helps believers understand what would otherwise be completely irrational; such evil. And it teaches followers of the Way what to do about it.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 2 things the devil uses to harm you and others?

Life Application

1. Can you think of a time in your life when you realized that the devil was attacking you through your flesh or through the world? Write this down.
2. Spend some time in confession for not being alert to how the devil works. Ask God to forgive you for ignorance or willful rebellion. Write out a prayer of commitment – that you will seek to grow in resisting the devil.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 2](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 6: Deliverance 1 - Day 3

Renew the Mind

Why God Doesn't Remove Evil Now

Have you ever noticed that if you eliminate one cause of evil, that another one often springs up to take its place? For example, when Iraq's Saddam Hussein was captured, eventually the Islamic terrorist group ISIS took a measure of control, which was just as destructive.

And that's the problem with immediately attempting to wipe out evil. In fact, if God were to eliminate all evil right now, he'd have to remove yours as well! Of course, many would say, "my sin isn't THAT bad." But consider this ...

Did you know that some of history's worst people came from homes in which they experienced abandonment, neglect or an absent father? How many people have had a father (or mother) that was like this? Well, you'd have to remove that evil (the parents' action or inaction), as it contributed to a greater evil (the child's actions). And maybe these parents were like this because of their own parents' sin – so you'd have to remove ANOTHER generation too!

What about sexual sin? Have YOU ever looked at pornography, lusted after someone else, fantasized, etc.? This has hurt others, as no sin is without impact on others (including one's relationship with God). Therefore, you'd have to be removed!

What about anger, an addiction to work, lying, overspending, selfishness, ignoring widows, stealing? This all contributes to evil! All who have committed these things would have to be gone as well! Clearly, immediately removing evil isn't the answer. In fact, every generation would have to be removed!

Consider another question, one that bothers many people - *why did God allow evil to occur in the first place?* Of course, here's the problem: to prevent evil, you'd have to remove choice. This is why God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Eden – not to tempt humans, but to give them a real choice.

And if you don't have choice, you can't have love. If God had programmed people without choice, they wouldn't be humans made in the image of God, with the ability to choose to love God and others. Instead, they'd just be robots! God didn't want robots!

This is one of the things that will make heaven such a wonderful place. Heaven will ONLY be filled with those who have chosen to love and continue to love. Those who don't want Jesus won't have him.

But until that time, God allows evil to give people the opportunity to choose.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Why doesn't God remove evil right now? Write out your answer.

Life Application

1. Try to imagine a life without any choices. Wouldn't that be a horrible life? Spend some time praising God for giving you choices!
2. Pray for those you know that are not choosing God's ways right now. Pray that they would turn to him. Pray with compassion, as we all make poor choices.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 3](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 6: Deliverance 1 - Day 4

Renew the Mind

Evil is obvious in the world. And God doesn't immediately remove it. But does he do anything? Today, you'll look at three ways he addresses evil, and two more on Day 5.

Ways That God Deals With Evil

First: God outmaneuvered evil, ultimately on the cross

Early in Genesis, Satan tempted Adam and Eve to sin. This brought GREAT evil into the world! But God's plans weren't hindered.

Shortly after, God speaks directly to the devil, declaring, [Genesis 3:15 \(NIV\)](#) *And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*

Satan will be crushed! By who? The offspring of the woman. And ultimately, this is referring to Jesus and his work on the cross. Or as Paul said, [Colossians 2:15 \(NIV\)](#) *And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.* The power and authorities referred to here are evil powers – spiritual and otherwise!

God DID give people choice, which gave them room to be tempted, to sin, etc. HOWEVER, he is a good God because there's a solution! No other belief system has a solution to "the problem of evil."

Second: God slows the progress of evil

Human pride reached a new height (literally!) with the building of the tower of Babel, as people attempted to make a name for themselves and to create security, apart from God (see [Genesis 11](#)). This was evil! However, God examined their tower and confused the common human language to *slow the progress of evil*.

Further, Jesus said that one of the purposes of the church was to be like salt ([Matthew 5:13](#)), a picture used to describe slowing the decay of the world.

There is much evidence that this has happened: the abolition of slavery in England and U.S.A.; the outrage against infanticide; improvement of the status of women; introduction of child labor laws, hospitals, education for girls and for all classes; etc.

Third: God sets limits on evil

FAR from being the author of evil, God actually limits it! For example, he uses judgments such as natural disasters to hinder the spread of evil. He did this in Genesis, and still does to this day. Or as the Bible says, [Genesis 6:6 \(NIV\)](#) *The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.*

Is this a God that loves? Yes, as he will do anything to limit evil, while still maintaining people's freedom to choose! He is brilliant!

God also limits what Satan can do; something you can read about in Job's story. And he prevents nations from going too far, an example being found in this passage, [Genesis 15:16 \(NIV\)](#) *In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.*

Further, God limits the TIME for suffering and evil. Peter notes that suffering doesn't last forever, [**1 Peter 1:6 \(NIV\)**](#) *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.*

Paul said the same, [**2 Corinthians 4:17 \(NIV\)**](#) *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.* God is SO good that he even takes the suffering that he allows and forms wonderful purposes out of it! Praise God!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. How does God address evil? What 3 ways are discussed today?

Life Application

1. Spend some time re-reading the verses from today's teaching. Followers of the Way need to fill their minds and hearts with truth!
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you a time when he limited the impact of evil in your life. Write this down. In response, praise him for his protection and care.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 4](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 6: Deliverance 1 - Day 5

Renew the Mind

Fourth: God will judge the devil and eradicate all evil in hell

On one hand people are upset that God DOESN'T get rid of evil, even though doing so would remove everyone. On the other hand, people are offended that God will finally stop evil by sending to hell those who refuse any rescue.

People can't have it both ways! This also proves the insecurity of many in seeking truth. Their own mouth convicts them of their rebellion towards God. It's not God's ways that bother them as much as God himself! They don't want his rule in their lives or his amazing solution to evil.

One day, all will give an account for their choices. God will then cast the devil and those under his rule into the lake of fire. Or as the final book of the Bible declares, [**Revelation 20:10, 21:8 \(NIV\)**](#) *And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur... But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.*

Fifth: God provides us with armor to defend ourselves and weapons to fight the devil

As you wait for final deliverance from evil, God hasn't left you defenseless! But YOU must fight. James said, [**James 4:7 \(NIV2011\)**](#) *Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* Who is resisting?

Paul challenges the church, [**2 Corinthians 10:3-4 \(NIV\)**](#) *For though we live in the world, WE do not wage war as the world does. The weapons WE fight with are not the weapons of the world.* Who has to use the weapons?

Did Paul just hand the battle over to God? No. He said, [**2 Timothy 4:7 \(NIV\)**](#) *I have fought the good fight... And elsewhere he says, [**Ephesians 6:11 \(NIV2011\)**](#) *Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.* Who is initiating the, "putting on?"*

Some believe that it's God's fault that they sin; that he hasn't come through for them! But here you can see that there is a battle, and that sin is overcome through a personal choice to fight. But praise God – he will help you with weapons!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. How does God address evil? What 2 ways are discussed today?

Life Application

1. Praise God for the final destiny of the devil. Praise him for what's still to come and for the strength to do battle until that amazing day.
2. Take the 5 ways that God deals with evil and share them with someone else. Be courageous! This can be how you can impact others. You may feel silly at the time, or receive little response, but seeds will be planted that can bear fruit even YEARS later.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 5](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 7: Deliverance 2 - Day 1

Renew the Mind

The Victory of Jesus

Did you know that Jesus' death was a great victory over the devil? Praise Jesus! Many fail to understand all that Jesus accomplished on the cross! John is very clear, [1 John 3:8 \(NIV\)](#) *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.*

What a victory Jesus won! And it's a victory that impacts the past, present and future.

First: In the past

Through Jesus' sacrifice AND resurrection - his past work – the power of Satan is broken! Jesus can set free ALL who follow him. That is, the power of Jesus is much greater than the evil one! As a follower of the Way, do you acknowledge that you needed this rescue? Do you give praise to Jesus for this?

Paul declared this about the work of Jesus, [Colossians 2:15 \(NIV\)](#) *And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.* The power and authorities that Paul is referring to is Satan and his demonic army; they are real!

Second: In the future

Jesus' resurrection defeated death! This is why followers of the Way have no need to fear death; it's a defeated enemy. Jesus' work impacted the future as well!

The devil, on the other hand, will be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur forever – where he will be tormented day and night (see [Revelation 20:10](#)). This is the same place that those who live apart from Jesus will be sent (see [Revelation 21:8](#)).

Third: In the present

In the present, the devil still attacks believers with doubt, discouragement, lies, temptation, and physical problems. Of course, not ALL physical problems are caused by the devil – not at all! But some can be, as was Paul's thorn in the flesh – sent from Satan to torment him ([2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#)).

Notice what Paul said about the devil's attacks, [Ephesians 6:16 \(NIV\)](#) *In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

But thank God, you're not defenseless! As Paul also notes, [Ephesians 6:10-11 \(ESV\)](#) *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.* You can be mighty with God! You can win, with God's help!

What is the armor that Paul mentions? There are five “pieces” that will be mentioned over the next few days. As you read, ask yourself – is this something I've been “putting on?” Could some of your struggles be connected to failing to use what Jesus has given you to battle? Even if you're winning the battle, have you been training others to win?

First: Belt of truth

Paul said, **Ephesians 6:14 (NIV)** *Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist ...* Roman soldiers in biblical times buckled on a belt that: secured their breastplate, hung their swords, and even protected their mid-section or waist. This was a much needed belt!

Followers of the way also need a belt, a belt of TRUTH! The devil doesn't want you to know truth, as he is a liar and deceiver. This is what Revelation says about him, **Revelation 12:9 (ESV)** *And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world ...*

The devil also knows that truth sets people free (see **John 8:32**), the ultimate truth being Jesus himself. Of course, one way that the devil deceives many is by convincing them that being a Christian is about blind faith!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Jesus' victory over the devil impacted the past, present and future. Explain this in your own words.
3. What piece of armor was discussed today? Why will you need it?

Life Application

1. Examine your life. Have you prepared yourself intellectually with the "belt of truth?" Not everyone has to be brilliant to do so! This includes paying attention to sermons and re-visiting previous ones. Confess to God any laziness or distractions you have let hinder you.
2. Review (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) [John 15:5-6](#), [Romans 12:2](#), [Matthew 28:18-20](#), [1 Peter 5:8](#), [John 10:27](#), [James 1:22](#), [Psalm 1](#), [Colossians 3:2](#), [Psalm 39:4](#), [Matthew 5:16](#), [Matthew 6:9-13](#), (*Verses From Grow Character Lessons*) [2 Peter 1:5-9](#), [Galatians 5:13](#), [Psalm 119:133](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 6](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 7: Deliverance 2 - Day 2

Renew the Mind

On Day 1, the belt of truth was introduced as one piece of the armor that God has given you, to resist the devil's attacks. Today, three more will be explained. As you read, try to do so with an attitude of praise. This was done for YOU!

Think of all that Jesus went through for YOUR victory. And he did this while you were still his enemy. That's what the New Testament teaches (see [Romans 5:10](#), [Colossian 1:21](#))! It's very wise to meditate on such truths!

Second: Feet fitted with the gospel of peace

Paul said, [Ephesians 6:14-15 \(NIV\)](#) *Stand firm then with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.* The reason Paul refers to it as the gospel of peace, is that peace is a blessing or benefit that comes from the gospel.

In another letter Paul even speaks of this peace as protecting! [Philippians 4:6-7 \(NIV\)](#) *And the peace OF God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* What might a person be anxious about? Money, political instability, sickness, death, their children, not pleasing others, possible persecution for one's faith – the list could be very long!

And the devil will try to make your anxieties and worries seem even bigger. He piles on, as he has NO mercy. He will try to get you to:

- Quit – some give up when the enemy stirs up their anxieties. Or they simply try to self-preserve. In a parable, Jesus said, [Matthew 13:22 \(NIV\)](#) *The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful*
- Control everything – rather than trust God with your fears or anxieties, the devil will try to get you to take matters into your own hands. This usually creates more problems and even conflict, which the devil loves!
- Be distracted with other things – Jesus warned, [Luke 21:34 \(NIV\)](#) *Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with the ... anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap*

Third: Shield of faith

This is another piece that Paul spoke about, [Ephesians 6:16 \(NIV\)](#) *In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

Essentially, the shield of faith is: 1) learning AND believing what God has said in the Bible 2) hearing AND believing what God is saying to you through the Spirit.

Did you notice that both require believing? It's important to remember – God won't believe FOR you. You must choose to believe what he said. This is a piece of armor that many followers of the Way do not pick up. This is so sad!

This shield also protects against false doctrines, which are false teachings. False doctrines will increase as the end times approach, [1 Timothy 4:1 \(NASB\)](#) *But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons ...*

Some common false doctrines are: the belief that everyone will go to heaven (universalism), the prosperity gospel (everyone will be healed now, and if you have enough faith, you will do well financially), denying that Jesus is God.

Fourth: Helmet of salvation

Paul also tells followers of the Way to, [**Ephesians 6:17 \(NIV\)**](#) *Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* What is the helmet of salvation? Another verse explains, [**1 Thessalonians 5:8 \(NIV\)**](#) ... *let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.*

The helmet of salvation is HOPE! And it's connected to the PROMISE of what is coming that you can't see yet. Hope is really important, isn't it? No one will keep battling without hope. Hope can make you bold, help you resist sin, attract those who don't believe and helps you keep doing good!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 3 pieces of the armor of God are discussed today? How can they help you? Explain in your own words.

Life Application

1. Look at the 3 pieces of armor that were discussed today. Can you see how they've helped you in your own life?
2. Can you think of a time when hope helped you persevere? Write this down. Then choose 2 people to share this with over the next day or two. Perhaps ask them to share their own examples.
3. Memorize [John 8:32](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 7](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 7: Deliverance 2 - Day 3

Renew the Mind

On Days 1 and 2 four pieces of the armor of God were discussed. Today, one more will be highlighted.

Fifth: Breastplate of righteousness

It's CRITICAL that you use this piece of armor. Many are defeated because of a weak understanding of righteousness. Or because it's a big word, they skip over it! Yet the New Testament talks about it a lot. The Holy Spirit must want to teach believers something very important.

What does Paul mean when he writes about the breastplate of righteousness? There are two types of righteousness to consider.

Jesus' Righteousness Given to Us When We Believe - Imputed Righteousness

God expects you to be righteous, or to act rightly. In fact, no one can be in a relationship with a holy God without righteousness. However, no one has been perfect. Or in the words of Paul, [Romans 3:10 \(NIV\)](#) *As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one."*

What was God to do with this reality – that you (or anyone) didn't meet his standards? Instead of forgetting you Jesus came as a perfect substitute! Praise God! This is the best gift ever! And as a part of this gift, those who place their faith in Jesus are also given his righteousness. Put another way, they are declared righteous! Here's how Paul describes it, [2 Corinthians 5:21 \(NIV\)](#) *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

In God's eyes, you're now seen as righteous! Your sins aren't simply forgiven, but you're seen in a positive light! This is FAR beyond moving into neutral. Some have called this, "imputed righteousness." If something is imputed, it is assigned to something. Followers of the Way have been assigned the righteousness of Jesus. Wow!

How will this help you resist the devil? Well, the devil will accuse you of being unworthy to be in a relationship with God. And in one sense, you are! However, you can resist the devil by reminding him – "but someone who IS worthy died for me. And HE SAYS I am righteous! Jesus took care of it. So get lost devil, with your lies!"

Righteousness Given to Us as We Grow

In the last section, "imputed righteousness" was noted as something that can help you resist the devil. Praise God! Hebrews describes it this way, [Hebrews 10:10 \(NIV\)](#) *And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* Amen! But there's another type of righteousness that also helps! It's called, "imparted righteousness."

The devil is ALWAYS rebelling against God! Therefore, followers of the Way resist him WHEN they grow in right living. When something is imparted to a person, it's given to them. But God doesn't force godly character on you! He doesn't force this kind of righteousness into your life. Oh yes, his Spirit will urge you in this direction, and will fill you with God's power, but this is a kind of righteousness that you'll need to partner with God to experience.

Put another way, he will impart it as you walk with him. Consider Hebrews again, [Hebrews 10:14 \(NIV\)](#) ... *because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.* You see, you're being made holy. In one

sense, in God's eyes, you are holy! (imputed righteousness) In another sense you're being made holy (imparted righteousness).

And again, both kinds of righteousness will help you win battles against the devil. The devil has a very specific passion, or passions, related to fighting God and his people. But when you choose to avoid sin, you counter his efforts. Or as Paul says, [Romans 6:12 \(ESV\)](#) *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is the difference between imputed and imparted righteousness? How are both important in resisting the devil?

Life Application

1. Perhaps the greatest response to a lesson such as today's is to write out a prayer of praise to God! He has been so good to you!
2. Review [John 8:32](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 8](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 7: Deliverance 2 - Day 4

Renew the Mind

How the Enemy Can Gain Entrance Into Your Life

Entrance 1: Through disobedience to God's written commands

There are at least five areas in your life which the devil will attack you in: your thought life, your emotions and attitudes, your speech, your behaviours and your motivations. And he will use temptations from OUTSIDE of you to do this. Of course, NO temptation fired our way from the enemy is strong enough to overcome our will in itself. In the end, if we sin, we have chosen to yield to the temptation to sin.

A point of clarification though - temptations themselves are not sinful and you shouldn't feel guilty about them. The devil also tempted Jesus, as Hebrews declares, [Hebrews 4:15 \(NIV\)](#) *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.* As it says, Jesus didn't yield to any of the temptations hurled his way!

This is the same choice we need to make, or at some point we can sear (harm) our conscience ([1 Timothy 4:2](#)). This means we give entrance to and yield control of that area in our lives to the enemy, whether we are immediately aware of it or not.

So you'll have a choice. To participate with the work of the enemy by sinning when tempted OR to resist such temptation. In fact, it's a lie to say that you HAVE to sin. Paul said, [1 Corinthians 10:13 \(NIV\)](#) *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

James says that temptation ONLY works when it connects to something sinful a person already desires.

[James 1:14-15 \(NIV\)](#) ... *but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

Sadly, if you continue to give in to temptation, you'll begin to harden your heart and dull your conscience, so that future temptations will quickly lead you to sin. This is giving the devil a foothold into your life (see [Ephesians 4:27](#)).

Entrance 2: Through disobeying a specific instruction from God

By his Spirit, God may give you specific instructions. These are gifts from him! However, they need to be obeyed.

The life of King Saul provides a powerful example of what happens when a person flirts with disobedience, even partial obedience. God had asked him to totally destroy the Amalekites and all that belonged to them – including their livestock. However, Saul left some of the best animals alive. And God's response is, [1 Samuel 15:11 \(NLT\)](#) *I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has not been loyal to me and has again refused to obey me.* Wow!

God saw partial obedience as disobedience, calling it rebellion. The prophet Samuel went to the heart of the matter when he said, [1 Samuel 15:22-23 \(NIV\)](#) *Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination ...*

It's vital to know that obedience is the highest form of worship and the greatest evidence of love. Disobedience, on the other hand, is rebellion – but it's more! It's also like the sin of divination, which is an occultic practice! Put another way,

rebellion can open one up to the demonic realm.

Entrance 3: Through a return to past demonic practices

Paul said, **Galatians 4:8 (ESV)** *Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.* Before coming to Christ, Gentiles (non-Jews) offered worship “to those who by nature are not gods,” who they thought were divine beings. They were worshipping idols, behind which are demons, **1 Corinthians 10:20 (NIV)** ... *but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.*

With this in mind, many things are to be removed from one's life – links to false religions, fortune telling, witchcraft, tarot cards, yoga, occult games, Ouija boards, satanic music, horoscopes, and so on.

Of course, there are many other things that can give demonic entrance to a life such as mind-altering drugs, alcoholism, pornography, abortion, etc.

Entrance 4: Through generational sins

More on this in the next lesson, Destructive Family Patterns.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 4 ways that the enemy can gain entrance into your life?
3. What is the highest form of worship?

Life Application

1. Spend some time confessing any sin that you have committed, which you haven't already dealt with ...
2. The Bible talks about being alert, watchful, and sober-minded. Are these characteristics a part of your faith? Write down any examples or why you avoid these.
3. Review [John 8:32](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 9](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 7: Deliverance 2 - Day 5

Renew the Mind

Weapons for Deliverance

Though you'll be attacked by the enemy, God gives weapons for deliverance! Or as Paul said, [2 Corinthians 10:4 \(NIV\)](#) *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.* There are many spiritual weapons we require in our fight to free ourselves and other people from the devil's hold. For the sake of today, you'll be introduced to six such weapons.

Weapon 1: Utilize the gifts of the Spirit

[Ephesians 6:17 \(NIV\)](#) *Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* Paul is likely referring here to specific spoken words given by the Spirit as believers follow his leading into the battle against the enemy. Some people call these specific words "rhema" words, using the Greek word that is translated here as "word."

These spoken words can come about by what Paul calls spiritual gifts and include: words of wisdom, words of knowledge, and discernment. Though such gifts can be used for encouragement purposes, they most certainly are to be used in fighting against the evil one!

For example, through the gift of discernment, one is able to tell if a demonic spirit is present, or perhaps identify which spirit it is (demons will hide so people don't realize they're creating the problem). Or the Spirit may show you the root cause of an enemy attack. This is called a word of knowledge. Sometimes what a victim has endured is so painful that they block out the memory of it in order to survive. In such an instance, the Spirit can help us "know" the issue, by revealing it to the one ministering deliverance.

Weapon 2: Repent

As you saw yesterday, a disregard for God's commands can give the enemy an entrance into a life. As some have explained it, when there's garbage in a life (sin), the rats (demons) will be attracted. Therefore, the best way to get rid of the rats is to remove the garbage. In a biblical sense, this is called, "repentance." Repentance means to, "turn away from sin."

For deliverance, it's often wise to start by confession and repenting of sins. This can really loosen the grip of the enemy's influence in a life! Of course, if the struggle is related to past involvement in the occult, resistance may be greater. In such serious cases, one should seek help from those with much experience! The one ministering should patiently work through the process of confession, binding the enemy at each of his attempts to stop the deliverance process.

It's not an overstatement at all to say that no one ends up free without repentance.

Weapon 3: Forgive

If the sin you've been holding on to is resentment or bitterness against another, you must forgive. This means you not only "say" you forgive, but you pray for those who have sinned against you in the opposite spirit. Therefore, we sincerely ask God to bless them the way we want to be blessed, including knowing his forgiveness and freedom. This step also is essential in weakening the enemy's grip in our lives.

Weapon 4: Renounce any sinful thinking, behavior, or vows

Renouncing includes “coming against” past sinful thought patterns or vows. For example, what if you made a vow in response to someone insulting you, “no one will ever treat me like that again?” This is a vow to be broken. Why? Listen to what Jesus said about this ... [John 15:20 \(NIV\)](#) *Remember the words I spoke to you: “No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”*

Sinful vows or thought patterns will keep you in bondage in some way. That's why you need to renounce them. Or if you were involved in occult activities, you'll need to renounce such connections. To renounce something is to go FAR beyond repenting of it. To repent is to turn from something. To renounce is to declare it wrong in every way.

Weapon 5: Break soul ties

Jesus said that when people come together in a marital sexual union, they become one! [Matthew 19:6 \(ESV\)](#) *So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.* Admittedly, there is some mystery here, as no further explanation is given.

However, this does mean that you'll need to break any ties made through sexual sin. Any sexual sin can create an improper tie: pornography, sex with animals (bestiality), sex before marriage, sex outside of your marriage (adultery), etc.

Therefore, after you've confessed a sexual sin, you'll need to break the soul tie that was established.

Weapon 6: Take authority and cast away the demon

The power that raised Jesus from the dead is available for this! If you've been walking with God, this power is not only available to you; it is already in you! In dealing with demons, you don't need to scream, use a loud voice or a special ‘casting away a demon’ tone! Why? Because the authority comes from Jesus, not one's technique. As Jesus said, [Luke 10:19 \(ESV\)](#) *Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.*

If a policeman stops you and asks for your licence, they don't have to yell – they can do it calmly because they've been given authority. In the same way, you can simply tell an evil spirit, “be gone, in Jesus' name.” Of course, if you're not walking close to Jesus, you'll not have authority in the demonic realm, as the seven sons of Sceva proved (see [Acts 19](#)). Put another way, it isn't just positional authority but relational authority that you need.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 6 weapons of deliverance are mentioned in today's lesson?

Life Application

1. We're going to use the Peer-to-Peer Ministry Tool again! Again, if you're using a printed manual, please go to the final part of this manual, called Renewal Tools and find the Peer-to-Peer Ministry Tool. If you're using the Way app, go to the Tools tab and find the Peer-to-Peer Ministry Tool. Go through Parts 1 and 2 again, then in Part 3, try the Deliverance section.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Genesis 10.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 8: Destructive Family Patterns - Day 1

Renew the Mind

Introduction

The Bible clearly teaches us that we are to intentionally participate in growing our character, also called sanctification. However, as we discovered in previous lessons, wounds in our soul and demonic strongholds in our lives can hinder our intentional attempts to change ourselves.

Thankfully, because of what Jesus did on the cross, you CAN experience shalom (peace, healing, wholeness) and deliverance here on earth! Aren't you grateful?

Of course, this shalom can be threatened, including by something called generational sins, or destructive family patterns. But praise the Lord! You can be set free from these as well!

Starting on Day 4, the process of finding freedom will be explained. But first, Days 1-3 will highlight evidence that generational sins (and blessings) even exist.

Biblical Evidence for Generational Blessings

First, the good news! Blessings can be passed down to you from your family! Perhaps you're even thinking of some right now, which is awesome! And it's important to understand that this "passing on" can go beyond godly modeling, to something that's actually planted in your soul.

The book of Exodus speaks about both blessings and curses flowing to future generations, as God said, [Exodus 20:5-6 \(NLT\)](#) *You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.*

Some might be troubled by the reality that a parent's sin can result in consequences for the next three to four generations. However, before you focus on that, consider what's truly amazing - God pours out his abundant love to a thousand succeeding generations of those who obey him!

No doubt, God is using hyperbole here. But don't miss God's heart; his blessings are passed down as long as there are generations to receive them!

Example 1

Abraham is a great example. Here's a promise that God made to him, [Genesis 12:2-3 \(NIV\)](#) *I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*

Abraham is receiving a promise of a blessing, one that would impact MANY generations. In fact, the incredible blessings of salvation which you enjoy in the present can be traced THROUGH Abraham, as Jesus would eventually come from his line. Don't skip over how incredible this truth is!

God LOVES to bless! This is how Paul explains it, [**Galatians 3:14 \(NIV\)**](#) *He (Jesus) redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*

Example 2

David was also given an amazing promise, that one of his descendants would always sit on the throne as king. But then Solomon succeeded him. And his life ended up a mess! (see [**1 Kings 11:1-8**](#)).

Solomon had started out well, but he began to pursue many women from the surrounding countries, even though God had commanded his people to not mix with the nations. Why such a command? God had warned them that marrying foreign women would turn their hearts after other gods. It wasn't about their race, but the gods that they were worshipping.

And this is exactly what happened! Solomon compromised and ended up allowing high places to other gods – in Israel!

Solomon did not follow the Lord wholeheartedly, as his father David had. In response, God declared that the kingdom would be torn away from his line and given to his servant. However, note what God said next, [**1 Kings 11:12-13 \(ESV\)**](#) *Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen.*

The promise given to David years before was a generational blessing, one that couldn't be reversed by Solomon's disobedience. Put another way, even in judgment the blessing given to David had an impact on many generations to come!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 2 examples for generational blessing are given today? Can you think of more from the Bible?

Life Application

1. Not everyone can observe blessings that have been passed down from generation to generation in their families. However, even in some of the most difficult families, there can be evidence of God's mercy and blessing. Listen in prayer and ask – “Father, are there certain blessings in my life, that have been passed down to me?” Write down anything that he reveals.
2. Review (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) [**John 15:5-6**](#), [**Romans 12:2**](#), [**Matthew 28:18-20**](#), [**1 Peter 5:8**](#), [**John 10:27**](#), [**James 1:22**](#), [**Psalm 1**](#), [**Colossians 3:2**](#), [**Psalm 39:4**](#), [**Matthew 5:16**](#), [**Matthew 6:9-13**](#), (*Verses From Grow Character Lessons*) [**2 Peter 1:5-9**](#), [**Galatians 5:13**](#), [**Psalm 119:133**](#), [**John 8:32**](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 11](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 8: Destructive Family Patterns - Day 2

Renew the Mind

Biblical Evidence for Generational Sins

First: Consequences of generational sins are passed on

There are many verses in the Bible that support the idea that the sins of a person do impact future generations. Consider what God says, [Exodus 20:5 \(NIV\)](#) *You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.* (see also [Exodus 34:7](#); [Numbers 14:18](#); [Deuteronomy 5:9](#); [Lamentations 5:7](#); [Jeremiah 32:18](#))

You can see this truth illustrated during Israel's wanderings in the wilderness. Twelve men had been sent into the land of Canaan (which God had promised to them) to spy it out, to bring back a report to Moses. When they returned, ten of them influenced the entire nation to refuse to enter the land, saying that the people living there were too strong to overcome.

God was angry and told Moses to tell the people that he would punish them for their rebellion. And notice the impact on their children, [Numbers 14:33 \(NIV\)](#) *Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert.* In Joshua 7, the sin of one man, Achan, also had devastating consequences on the entire nation. In fact, they were defeated at Ai by a very small enemy.

Here's an important point though – what's being passed on to children are consequences, NOT guilt. The prophet Ezekiel makes it clear that guilt is ONLY related to what an individual does – not their parents. He says, [Ezekiel 18:20 \(NIV\)](#) *The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son.*

Israel's laws were consistent with this principle of guilt: they said that the children were not to be put to death for the sins of their parents ([Deuteronomy 24:16](#); [2 Kings 14:6](#)). However, consequences can be passed on. And one of the reasons is to cause people to take sin VERY seriously!

Now some DO argue that since Jesus died, the consequences of a parent's sin can no longer be passed on to their children. But here's a question - will you still physically die? YES! And this is true even though you're a believer.

And what is death? It is connected to a consequence of the sin of one's oldest ancestors – Adam and Eve! This means that generational sins can STILL impact future generations. Or as Paul said, [Romans 5:12 \(NIV\)](#) *Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.*

Second: A sinful nature is passed on

Paul also said that the sinful NATURE was passed down from Adam, not just consequences. The sinful nature is your, "spiritual wiring." Paul put it this way, [Romans 5:19 \(ESV\)](#) *For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.* (also [Romans 5:15-17](#); [1 Corinthians 15:21-22](#); [Psalm 51:5](#))

It IS true that all humans are sinners because they sin. But it is equally true that all humans sin because they are sinners. Does environment or poor modeling of a bad home or culture influence sinfulness? Of course it does. Even the negative aspects of church culture can hurt people. However, the Bible is clear that those alone do not determine sinful behaviors; because at the heart each and every one of us is a sinner.

Third: Tendencies to certain sins are also passed on

You've probably believed this without really thinking about it! It can be seen with parents and children (maybe your own!) David and Abraham are also examples ...

Example 1

David committed adultery (sexual sin). Then his son Amnon horribly raped his half-sister Tamar (more sexual sin). After that, David's son Absalom had sexual relationships with David's concubines in the sight of all Israel! And what about Solomon – he had over 1000 partners!

David also murdered Uriah, Bathsheba's husband. And his son Absalom murdered his brother Amnon for raping Absalom's sister, Tamar. Later, Absalom not only led a coup against his father, David; he even tried to murder him.

Some might dismiss this as an example of modeling. But it isn't the only explanation, as will be seen in the next example.

Example 2

Abraham deceived Pharaoh concerning Sarah, his wife ([Genesis 12:10-19](#)). And it's important to note this – Isaac, his son, wasn't even born yet when this happened. YET, Isaac committed the same sin in EXACT detail, deceiving Abimelech concerning his wife.

This is important, for Isaac couldn't have learned this sinful behavior through parental modeling! Abraham's sin was now mirrored in the 2nd generation. But it didn't end there. You can trace the sin of deception as it passed to the 3rd generation. In an elaborate scheme first conceived by his mother, Jacob deliberately deceived his father Isaac, pretending to be Esau in order to rob him of the first-born's blessing ([Genesis 27:1-36](#)).

Finally, the sin of deception is still alive in the 4th generation. Jacob's sons deceived him after they sold Joseph into slavery.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 3 categories of biblical evidence are given today, to show that generational sins are passed down?
3. Is guilt passed down from a parent to their child? If not, what can be passed down?

Life Application

1. Thank the Lord for his mercy! Even where there are certain generational sins, the fact that you can experience any goodness in this life is because of his mercy. Write this prayer out!
2. Memorize [Numbers 6:24-26](#).

Bible Reading

1. Read [Genesis 12](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 8: Destructive Family Patterns - Day 3

Renew the Mind

Other Evidence that Points to Generational Sin

Evidence From Life Experience

Everyone experiences the reality of *physical* genetics. For example, people inherit physical characteristics from their parents (e.g. baldness, lacking a sense of smell, high blood pressure, great reflexes, etc.)

When you go to the doctor, the first thing they start with is your family history. No one questions that this is important. All kinds of things can be passed down, good or bad.

When it comes to behaviour, again, modeling does play a huge role. However, many in the field of behavioural sciences are beginning to accept, from evidence, that behaviour can be inherited as well! Anytime we say things such as: "Like father, like son;" "a chip off the old block;" OR "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree;" we are acknowledging that behavioral traits are also passed on.

Here's a story that supports this (**Warning** very graphic):

*April 4, 2011 two men were sentenced, who as 16- & 17-year olds, lured a teenage girl; raped her, killed her and mutilated her dead body. One of the teens' (Kruse Welwood) own father had at one time picked up a 16-year-old when Welwood was only 7 years old; had sex with her and then killed her. Forensic psychologist, Steven Hart of Simon Fraser University, said that Welwood's father's crime would have had an impact on Welwood: "What's clear from some of the research that's been done is there is a **behavioral genetic contribution** to crime or violent crime," Hart told CTV News. "We can see there is a family history of violence, even when people are adopted away and raised by different parents."*

Even the field of psychology rarely questions whether patterns of thinking and behavior are passed from one generation to another. In the mind of most psychologists they can be! And counselors, not all who believe in Jesus, will sometimes use genograms. Genograms are advanced family trees that seek to trace patterns, INCLUDING patterns that have been inherited.

Evidence From Natural Sciences

Even the natural sciences point in the same direction. If you need further proof of this, take the time to read the article below online:

Article: <https://www.discovermagazine.com/health/grandmas-experiences-leave-a-mark-on-your-genes>

Tina's Story

Tina's son and daughter-in-law were preparing for the mission field. Their 5-year old son came to them with a notepad filled with pictures of the demonic realm. He had no exposure of such things at school, TV, video games or parental behavior. So, the daughter-in-law questioned Tina if there might be something in the family line. Tina had received years of counseling with minimal impact. So, she made an appointment with a pastor who guided her through prayers about destructive family patterns.

She began to experience deliverance and much healing in these sessions from a childhood of sexual, physical and emotional abuse from her father and a cousin. Sometime later Tina was reminded about her grandson's drawings and asked her daughter-in-law about him. Her daughter-in-law replied that he had stopped drawing demonic pictures! When they traced the timeline, they discovered it had stopped at the same time that Tina had been working through the generational sins! Not only that – he was also healed of his allergies at the same time!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What evidence exists, other than from the Bible, that generational patterns of behaviour can be passed down?

Life Application

1. Can you think of a destructive or behavioural pattern that exists in your family history, but that you do not struggle with? If yes, spend time praising God for sparing you from the impact, and from blessing you with the gift of freedom!
2. Review [Numbers 6:24-26](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 13](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 8: Destructive Family Patterns - Day 4

Renew the Mind

What You Can Do About Destructive Family Patterns

Is there anything that you can do about destructive family patterns? Praise God – yes! Provision for this was also made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus at the cross! Today, you'll learn about the process. On Day 5, you'll practice.

Discovering The Generational Sins:

1. **First:** Go carefully through the Generational Healing Inventory card (on Day 5), noting any sinful patterns.
2. **Second:** Transfer the sinful patterns to the appropriate places on the Family Tree.
3. **Third:** Listen in prayer throughout, asking the Spirit to reveal anything that you need to know.

What To Do When We Discover Generational Sins:

1. **First:** You must forgive those from your family history, whose sins have impacted you.
2. **Second:** You must confess the sins of your ancestors.
 - You can acknowledge the past sins of others. Jeremiah did this, ***Jeremiah 14:20 (ESV)*** *We acknowledge our wickedness, O LORD, and the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against you.*
 - David also confessed the sins of his fathers, aware that consequences for those sins could be experienced in his life, ***Psalm 79:8 (NIV)*** *Do not hold against us the sins of the fathers; may your mercy come quickly to meet us, for we are in desperate need.*
3. **Third:** Repent of (turn from) any sin that you have committed.
 - ***Leviticus 26:40, 42, 45 (ESV)*** *But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me...then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land... I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD.*
4. **Fourth:** Break the generational curse.
5. **Fifth:** Take authority over any spirit that may have gained a foothold (if applicable).

Using a Family Tree to Discover Generational Bondages and Curses

A family tree can be used to diagram family history. Some problems can be seen vertically, as from grandfather to father. Some might move horizontally, from aunt to aunt, or cousin to cousin. And some may even skip generations.

Some of the problems will be obvious, others will only be known to God. Therefore, as you intentionally listen, the Holy Spirit will reveal what you need to know, and what he reveals he will touch with healing.

Great traumas may even be healed through generational healing prayer without you knowing their exact cause. Praise God! However, if you find that your family's problems are not completely resolved after one healing prayer session (very normal!), you are encouraged to repeat the process. As in chopping down a tree, it often takes more than one hit at the tree.

To construct your family tree, go back as many generations as you can, even if you do not know all the names. If possible (being sensitive to family history and secrets), check with parents, grandparents and other relatives to get more details or clearer information. Do not worry about in-laws, as you're only working with blood lines.

Write down the names you know; if you don't know names, don't worry about it. God knows who your family is. Keep in mind that this is not about judging family members who may have participated or committed any of the sins on the card. This is about HEALING the family tree so that you and your descendants will not follow in the same patterns.

Pray over the session, asking the Holy Spirit to lead and to jog your memory for information you may have long forgotten. And this is important – you're looking for patterns of sin, not individual sins.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. You won't know everything about your family's history. How can you be alerted to things you may not know?

Life Application

1. On Day 5, you'll apply these tools. Today, you'll have extra Bible reading.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 14-15](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 8: Destructive Family Patterns - Day 5

Renew the Mind

Skip to the Life Application section for today.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

Skip to the Life Application section for today.

Life Application

If you're using a printed manual, please go to the final part of this manual, called Renewal Tools and find the section on Dealing With Destructive Family Patterns. Go through the entire section. If you're using the Way app, go to the Tools tab and find the section on Dealing With Destructive Family Patterns.

Bible Reading

No Bible reading today!

Lesson 9: Live Generously - Day 1

Renew the Mind

Introduction

Generosity is a vital characteristic to grow in and one that God desires for each follower of the Way. In fact, generosity is a measure of our lives being renewed. As someone once said, "You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving." Similarly, you can be generous without being renewed; but you cannot be renewed and without being generous. Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

Generosity is also a means TO renewal. As we are generous, something begins to change in us. Or as God's Word highlights, [Proverbs 11:25 \(NIV2011\)](#) *A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.*

However, generous living is not so easy. Why is that? Because we were born as self-centered and selfish people. One of the first words a child learns is "Mine!" and they have to be taught to share with others. But it isn't just children who need training in this; so do adults. It seems that this is a life-long lesson we need to grow in.

During Days 1-4 of this lesson, five motivations for generosity will be explained.

May you approach this with a heart that is ready for growth! May you walk out this instruction from Paul, even as you read, [Colossians 3:17 \(NIV\)](#) *And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.*

Motivations for Generous Giving

First: Experiencing God's love and generosity

The first motivation to live generously will flow from your own understanding AND experience of God's love. This is captured in the story of a woman with a broken past (see [Luke 7:36-50](#)). She had not followed God's ways, YET she generously poured expensive perfume on Jesus and served him!

Contrast this with Simon, a man in the same story, who did not greet Jesus with a kiss, or anoint him with oil (both cultural expectations for a host). The good news of God's love overwhelmed this broken woman and triggered a desire to show love in return. She was generous, as a RESPONSE.

So she washed Jesus' feet with her own tears and wiped them with her hair; a shocking act, as no woman would let down her hair except for her husband. She also kissed his feet, a sign of humility and devotion.

Simon, unmoved by all this responded that if Jesus REALLY was a prophet, he would have known what kind of a woman was touching him. Simon had likely invited Jesus over to determine whether he was a prophet (among other things), and he had decided, "no."

But Simon had misjudged the situation – Jesus DID know who this woman was. She was ready to respond to love, and a sign of such readiness was her own response of generosity. In fact, Jesus praised the woman for her love and generosity! In a male dominated society, the shock of praising a "sinful" woman was bad enough. But he also criticized the host of the gathering, for his lack of generosity.

Put another way, the proof of whether one has truly understood and accepted the love of Jesus is their own generosity in return. Isn't this challenging? Jesus makes a powerful point when he says, [Luke 7:47-48 \(NASB\)](#) *"For this reason I*

say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." Then he said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven."

In this example, there are actually TWO great sinners – not one! First, the woman, who saw how much she had sinned and had been forgiven. Out of gratefulness, she shows extravagant love! Second, Simon, whose sins were just as great (e.g. pride, judging others, a lack of compassion), but who showed no love because he was blind to his own need.

Have you ever considered and pondered what would have happened to you if God had not forgiven you? Are you grateful? If yes, it will show through a response of great generosity!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What motivation for generosity is shared today?
3. In your own words explain the difference between the woman Jesus spoke about and Simon.

Life Application

1. Spend some time in prayer and reflection – would you say that your personal generosity reflects God's generosity? Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you and journal what you sense.
2. Spend some time reflecting on where you would be if God wasn't in your life. This increase in appreciation can automatically spark more generosity in your life.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 16](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 9: Live Generously - Day 2

Renew the Mind

Yesterday, one motivation for being generous was explained: experiencing God's love and generosity. Today, two more will be highlighted.

Second: Understanding that we're a steward, not an owner

God owns everything! This has huge consequences. He said, [Job 41:11 \(NIV2011\)](#) *Everything under heaven belongs to me.* And he gets even more specific in another passage, [Haggai 2:8 \(NIV2011\)](#) *'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty.*

Even when God gave Abraham and his seed the land of Canaan to possess, he did NOT transfer ownership of it to them. [Leviticus 25:23 \(NIV2011\)](#) *The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers.*

This is why God can use land in any way that he sees fit to fulfill his purposes. Not only Israel, but other nations as well (e.g. [Deuteronomy 2:4-6, 9-12, 18-19](#); [Job 12:23](#); [Amos 9:7](#); [Acts 17:26](#)). And this is key: he demands that the nations follow his commands and obey him OR give up possession of the land.

For example, when the Amorites didn't obey God, they lost possession of the land to Israel (see [Genesis 15:16](#)). And when King Saul used the kingdom for his own interests, God took it from him, and gave it to David.

God not only owns everything in the world and universe, he also owns you! Do you embrace this truth? Paul said, [1 Corinthians 6:19-20 \(NIV2011\)](#) *You are not your own; you were bought at a price!* This means that you're his servant. Yes, you're loved by him, but the New Testament refers to servanthood just as much!

Jesus told a story and said, [Luke 12:42 \(NIV2011\)](#) *Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?* He is pointing to your call to be a good steward of what he has given you.

This motivation is also strongly emphasized in the parable of the talents (see [Matthew 25:14-30](#)). It is clear that every single person will be held accountable for how they used what they were given. Or in Jesus' own words, [Matthew 25:19 \(NIV2011\)](#) *After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.*

The mindset of the world, "but this is MINE," is unbiblical. The apostle Paul said, [1 Corinthians 4:7 \(ESV\)](#) *What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?*

Here are some tests of whether you understand stewardship, before God:

- Do you ask God to show you what to do with the money and possessions he has lent you?
- Do you ask him to reveal his will about the bigger purchases you make?
- Do you ask God how much money he wants you to make? How much he wants you to keep? How much he wants you to give?

If you seek your own will rather than God's, in what you do with money and possessions, then you view yourself as the owner. Your body, sexual behavior, money, possessions, career, time, talents – everything – it all belongs to God and he has a RIGHT to do with it whatever he wants.

This is very different than what many think, BUT to be a follower of the Way is to think differently. Listen to the attitude that Jesus celebrates, [Luke 17:10 \(NIV2011\)](#) *So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'*

Third: The shortness of life and judgment

The Bible says there are two things you can be sure of: death and judgment. [Hebrews 9:27 \(NIV2011\)](#) *Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.* You may not know WHEN you'll die or HOW you'll die; but you know that you will die.

Yet it is astonishing the vast amounts of time, money and energy humans spend planning for the few years BEFORE they die, rather than the endless years they will spend AFTER they die. Consider what James says, [James 4:14 \(NIV2011\)](#) *Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*

You're living "in the dot" (this short life that you have) and need to prepare for the "line" (all of eternity)! The Bible describes two judgments which will happen at the end of this age. One will determine where you go (heaven or hell). This is the great white throne judgment and is determined by whether or not you have said "yes" to Jesus.

The second judgment decides what you will get in heaven. This is connected to your stewardship. This is something that should motivate us to incredible generosity! Or as Paul declares, [2 Corinthians 5:10 \(NIV\)](#) *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 2 motivations for generosity are shared today?

Life Application

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if there is anywhere in your life where you're acting like an owner, rather than as a steward (money, possessions, children, job, gifts, time)?
2. Review (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) [John 15:5-6](#), [Romans 12:2](#), [Matthew 28:18-20](#), [1 Peter 5:8](#), [John 10:27](#), [James 1:22](#), [Psalm 1](#), [Colossians 3:2](#), [Psalm 39:4](#), [Matthew 5:16](#), [Matthew 6:9-13](#), (*Verses From Grow Character Lessons*) [2 Peter 1:5-9](#), [Galatians 5:13](#), [Psalm 119:133](#), [John 8:32](#), [Numbers 6:24-26](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 17](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 9: Live Generously - Day 3

Renew the Mind

The past two days, you looked at three motivations for being generous. Today, you'll cover another one.

Fourth: Our eternal dwelling, possessions, and activities

In Day 2, you saw that there's a judgment to come for believers. God notices what we do and says he will not forget it. Here's an encouraging verse regarding this truth ... [Hebrews 6:10 \(NIV2011\)](#) *God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.* That should be very motivating! Unfortunately, many churches and believers ignore this eternal motivation. This is very sad.

Related, the New Testament also speaks of the following things as motivations for generosity: eternal pleasure, eternal possessions, future authority (ability to rule), and praise. Someone might object, "just being in heaven will be good enough for me." Apparently not. First, the Bible says other motivations do matter to people. For example, Paul says, [1 John 2:28 \(NIV\)](#) *And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.*

Second, you can tell that God has planted certain desires in your heart by what is important to you NOW. We desire pleasure, possessions and power, not because we're sinful, but because we're human! God CREATED us with a desire for possessions, honor, pleasure and praise. And because you're made with those desires, when you go to heaven you'll have these exact same desires!

Finally, just as close human relationships consist of a combination of simply being together, plus activities together AND blessing one another, an eternal relationship has the same qualities. Put another way, while the CORE motivation is to be with Jesus and honor him, other factors are presented as valid motivators by Jesus himself. Of course, if the core motivator is rotten, everything else will end up out of place – something to never forget. That's why the focus should be on the core, while not ignoring other motivators.

What are some other motivators? God appeals to six primary desires, promising to reward you in these areas. What are they?

1. God promises POSSESSIONS in heaven

The Bible makes it clear that a potential reward is possessions in heaven. Jesus said, [Matthew 6:19-20 \(NIV2011\)](#) ... *store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.* He also promised, [John 14:2 \(NASB\)](#) *In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.* The size and quality of our eternal dwellings and rewards are likely determined by our works today.

2. God promises PLEASURE in heaven

Consider this reward! [Psalms 16:11 \(NIV\)](#) ... *You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.* You may have seen incredible things on this earth that brought you great joy! (oceans, mountains, exotic animals, etc.)

But the Bible teaches that these are nothing compared to what's coming! In Paul's words, [1 Corinthians 2:9 \(ESV\)](#) ... *no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.*

3. God promises POWER and honor

Did you know that followers of the Way will reign with Jesus over the new earth and universe? Jesus hinted at this in the parable of the talents, [Matthew 25:21 \(NIV\)](#) *His master replied, '... You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.'*

John also points to this in the last book of the Bible, [Revelation 20:6 \(NASB\)](#) *Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him*

4. God promises PRAISE

You likely love words of affirmation! Everyone does! Perhaps the greatest satisfaction of hard work is when someone acknowledges it. In fact, the desire to have something acknowledged is FROM God. This is one of the rewards you're to aim for in eternity, by being generous and faithful now.

5. God promises PEOPLE in heaven

There are at least two ways this is true. First, anyone who has to sacrifice family relationships to follow Christ now (e.g. because people resent your commitment to Jesus) will gain a larger family, especially in eternity. Jesus promised, [Matthew 19:29 \(NIV2011\)](#) *And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.*

Second, anyone who invests their time, talents, treasure, and prayer for the sake of others will gain eternal friends. Jesus referred to this, [Luke 16:9 \(NIV2011\)](#) *I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.* For example, we can make choices and invest wisely so that any children and grandchildren we have are more likely to be with us in heaven.

6. God promises his PRESENCE in heaven

What an incredible promise! This is THE supreme thing or person we are promised in heaven! This is worth giving up everything for! Jesus said, [John 14:3 \(NIV\)](#) *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.* We won't need faith and hope any longer, for what our souls hoped for and what we held to by faith, will be fully and finally realized! We'll be forever – HOME!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What motivation for generosity is shared today?
3. What 6 things are important to people NOW, that God promises as rewards in the future if one is faithful?

Life Application

1. Look over the 6 things that are often desired in the present. Write down an example for each one, from your own life. You can use either examples of when you received these things or longed for them, but did not receive them.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 18](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 9: Live Generously - Day 4

Renew the Mind

The past three days, four motivations for generosity have been noted. Today, one more will be mentioned. Also, WHAT you're a steward of is explained. Again, may you be hungry to follow the Way taught by Jesus!

Fifth: We will ALREADY reap what we sow

A fifth thing which can motivate you to live generously in the present is, "the law of sowing and reaping." Paul points to this when he challenges, [Galatians 6:7 \(ESV\)](#) *Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.*

Here are three things that you will reap in your life now:

1. You reap WHAT you sow

The law of sowing and reaping is a universal law and Paul warned the Galatians not to be deceived, for as sure as the sun rises, we reap WHAT we sow. It is not only true that we will reap in eternity (as we saw earlier), but it is also true that we will reap here. Someone once said, "You cannot sow crabgrass and reap pineapples."

Proverbs says, [Proverbs 22:8 \(NIV\)](#) *Whoever sows injustice reaps calamity ...* This is just one example of many verses in the Bible that teach that you'll receive back what you give out – good or bad. We see in the Bible that the Egyptian midwives sowed much into the families of the Hebrew slaves at risk to their own lives (that's righteousness!) and they reaped from God their own families!

For us, if we sow hatred, we can expect hatred back. If we sow selfishness, others will be selfish towards us. On the positive side, the prophet said, [Hosea 10:12 \(NIV2011\)](#) *Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of unfailing love ...* And again, Proverbs has much wisdom, [Proverbs 18:24 \(NKJV\)](#) *A man who has friends must himself be friendly ...*

2. You reap MORE than what you sow

First, when you sow, you'll reap MORE harvest for your Master, Jesus. Second, when you sow, you'll reap MORE rewards for yourself. As Jesus stated, [Mark 10:29-30 \(NIV2011\)](#) *"Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life."*

Do you ever feel that what you are doing is insignificant and won't really make much difference?

God's eternal Word says otherwise – it says that we'll reap much more than what we sowed.

3. You reap according to how MUCH you sow

Paul explained this well, [2 Corinthians 9:6 \(NIV2011\)](#) *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.*

What We Are a Steward Of – Our Time

Your time on earth is significantly shorter than you think. And God placed thoughts about eternity in your heart so that it would motivate you to use your time here well (see [Ecclesiastes 3:11](#)). In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis said, “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.” This is so true!

You’ve probably heard the phrase: “He’s so heavenly minded that he’s of no earthly good.” But this is rarely true. Most who are “heavenly minded” are generous, investing time for others precisely because they think about the line of eternity.

In the New Testament, you can see how Paul wrestled with this issue. Writing from a prison cell he said, [Philippians 1:22 \(ESV\)](#) *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* This apostle was willing to invest more time in the church for the sake of Christ, THOUGH it meant he would suffer even more than he had already endured. Is this your reason for wanting to still be on earth? To steward your time for Jesus?

There are three things you can do. First, analyze your lifestyle. You might say, “I don’t have enough time.” But is this because you get distracted by unnecessary pursuits – excessive sleep, parties, social media, endless hobbies, many movies?

Second, commit to using your present life FOR GOD. Jesus said, [John 9:4 \(ESV\)](#) *We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.* Is this what you’re focused on?

Third, determine which priorities are most important and related to “storing up treasures in heaven.” You have just enough time to do what GOD wants you to be doing. You were created for him, with the time he has given you. Paul announced, [Ephesians 2:10 \(NIV2011\)](#) *For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

One of our priorities with our time should be the family of believers. As Paul commanded, [Galatians 6:10 \(NIV2011\)](#) *Therefore, as we have opportunity (time), let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.* The Greek word for “opportunity” here is kairos, which means “time” or “opportunity of time.” Therefore, we’re called to use some of our time to do good to the family of believers. Is this a focus of ours?

May this prayer of the psalmist be your own prayer, [Psalm 90:12 \(NIV2011\)](#) *Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What motivation for generosity is shared today?
3. What are you a steward of according to today's reading?

Life Application

1. Spend some time in prayer and reflection. Are you using your time to honor God and build his kingdom? For example, when you plan for your spare time, what are your priorities?

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 19](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 9: Live Generously - Day 5

Renew the Mind

On Day 4 it was emphasized that you'll need to steward your time as a follower of the Way. Today, two more responsibilities of stewardship will be presented.

What We Are a Steward Of – Our Talents and Gifts

Talents are the natural abilities you're born with, that give you unique skills and abilities. Generally, they're not a learned behavior, although they can be developed.

Spiritual gifts, on the other hand, are specific abilities you're given by the Holy Spirit when you give your life to Jesus, or later on. Of course, neither your talents nor spiritual gifts are earned or deserved; they are just given to you from God.

Therefore, both need to be stewarded for God! Or as Paul put it, ***Colossians 3:23-24 (ESV)*** *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*

How can you steward your talents and gifts well? First, you can use them for serving others, rather than for self-promotion or self-gratification. Talents and gifts were not given to help us pursue our own dreams or to benefit from them personally. What is your motivation in using your talents and gifts? This is a very important question! As Paul noted, ***1 Corinthians 12:7 (NIV2011)*** *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*

Imagine that you were given a gift of music – do you use it for yourself, or to assist others in worshipping God as well? Or maybe God gave you the gift of intellect – do you use it just to satisfy your own curiosity about life, or to help others sort out worldly philosophies from true ones? Perhaps God gave you the gift of making money. Do you use it to help those in need and to finance Christian organizations who are doing a great work for God?

But can you enjoy your talents and gifts as you invest them for eternity? Yes, of course! However, followers of the Way need to be careful that this doesn't become the primary motivation.

Consider how Paul balanced these in his instructions to Timothy, ***1 Timothy 6:17-19 (ESV)*** *As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.* What great advice!

Second, talents and gifts can be stewarded well by developing them, with humility and hard work! Finally, stewardship also includes growing your character. Think of the examples of Moses, David, and Joseph. God put them each in their own "wilderness," to develop their character. Without character, even the most gifted and talented people can cause damage to themselves and others.

For example, you may be asked to do things which you feel are 'beneath' your abilities and giftings. Will you be faithful in these? Will you be faithful behind the scenes? Will you be faithful in the little things? It's a requirement for more advanced assignments which lead to more fruitfulness.

Just because you don't presently have opportunity to do what you are best suited for is no reason not to serve God. Don't waste valuable time grumbling about the gifts you were given or resenting others for theirs. Embrace your

calling and stay within its boundaries. God knows that while a future teacher or leader in his kingdom can do much good, they also carry with them the potential to do much damage.

Therefore, part of God's training regimen for them will include growth in matters of: faithfulness, humility, obedience, submission and perseverance. That is, God will set up a series of tests that the individual will have to pass in order to be given more responsibility.

What We Are a Steward Of – Our Prayers

The necessity, importance, and power of prayer is highlighted throughout all of these lessons! The Bible calls followers of the way to, "pray continually." This too is something you must steward! How much you pray, how you pray, what you pray for, etc.

It's often been said that perhaps the greatest tragedy is unoffered prayer, not unanswered prayer. Hearts need to be searched on this – how much do you express concern or outrage about many topics, whether to friends or online – but do not pray? Thankfully, Jesus led the way in this area of stewardship as well, as it says, [Luke 5:16 \(NIV\)](#) *But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 2 things are to be stewarded, according to today's reading?
3. How can you steward your gifts and talents well, according to what was shared today?

Life Application

1. Write down a list of gifts *and* talents that you feel God has given you. This isn't prideful! How else would you know what to steward? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you with this exercise.
2. Look at the list you made in Question 1. Assess how you are using your gifts and talents for others.
3. Ask the Lord to show you if you're using your gifts and talents *with wrong motives*. If he reveals something, do not hesitate to confess this to someone.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 20](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 10: Give Generously - Day 1

Renew the Mind

Introduction

As you seek to be a faithful follower of the Way, which includes generosity, it's necessary to consider the topic of tithing (literally meaning "a tenth"). Thankfully, there's complete agreement among believers that giving a tenth of ALL of one's income was a requirement in the Old Testament (see [Leviticus 27:30-34](#), [Deuteronomy 12:5-6](#)).

But what about in the New Testament, and by extension, today? Did anything change with the new covenant, which was initiated by the death and resurrection of Jesus, also confirmed by the pouring out of his Spirit?

This is an ongoing debate among many – that is, a lot changed from the Old Testament to the New Testament, but HOW MUCH? Should those who love God still tithe? The starting point for this discussion will be the different types of laws in the Old Testament.

The Laws of The Old Testament

First: Moral law

The moral law is a part of the foundation upon which the entire Old Testament is built! This law is made up of any command that flows from the character and nature of God (e.g. his kindness, his justice).

Therefore, to break any of these commands/laws is to sin. These laws stand forever and apply everywhere, all the time. That's why they're also called "universal" or "absolute" laws. Some believers argue that you shouldn't ever talk about any laws or commands, but the moral law is still relevant. After all, aren't you glad that God still "outlaws" murder, lying, adultery, etc.?

This is why the New Testament continues to challenge believers to obey the commandments of God. For example, Paul said, [1 Corinthians 7:19 \(ESV\)](#) *For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.* (see also: [1 John 2:3-4; 3:22-24; 5:2-3](#))

Second: Ceremonial laws

The purpose of ceremonial laws was to point people to the coming Messiah (meaning "anointed one") and the work he would do to save those who would trust in him. Therefore, after Jesus' death and resurrection, they were no longer needed.

That's why these laws were called 'copies,' 'shadows,' 'symbols,' and 'pictures' in various passages of the Bible. For example, [Hebrews 8:3-5 \(ESV\)](#) *For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices [the ceremonial laws] ... They serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.*

The book of Hebrews also says, [Hebrews 10:1 \(ESV\)](#) *For since the law was but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near ...*

Finally, notice the distinction in the following passage. This is really important to understand! [Hebrews 10:16-18 \(NIV\)](#) *"This is the covenant that I will make with them after that time," says the Lord. "I will put my laws in their hearts [the*

moral laws], and write them on their minds.” Then he adds, “Their sins and their lawless acts I will remember no more. And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin [ceremonial laws].”

Third: Jewish separation laws

These laws aren't rooted in the character and nature of God, so they're not required for non-Jewish (Gentile) believers. These laws include circumcision, food regulations, no marriage with foreigners, as well as certain feast days and holidays.

Why did God even introduce such laws? One of the purposes was to protect the Jewish nation from falling into idol worship. As they were warned, [Exodus 34:16 \(NIV\)](#) *And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same.*

Israel was raised up by God to be a LIGHT to the nations, which also meant being a moral example. Ultimately, this was to point people to the true God, Yahweh (the name that God gave himself in Exodus. It is written “LORD” in most Bibles).

Of course, the need for the separation laws ended with the work of Jesus on the cross. Or as Paul noted about the previous differences between Jews and Gentiles, [Ephesians 2:14 \(NIV2011\)](#) *For he [Jesus] himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility ...*

Fourth: Civil laws

There are many commandments in the Old Testament guiding the everyday life and institutions of the nation of Israel (property laws, building code, criminal code, etc.). This is what is known as the civil law.

There are different types of civil law; some can be ignored and no longer apply, while others are based on moral laws and are adapted to fit culture today. For example, the “heart” behind laws such as building a fence around your roof for safety reasons ([Deuteronomy 22:8](#)), or criminal penalties for stealing sheep ([Exodus 22:1-4](#)) are applied to present-day laws.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are the 4 types of law noted in today's reading?
3. What is distinct about the moral law as compared to the other 3?

Life Application

1. It's amazing to appreciate what Jesus did, as he lived a perfect life morally, and was sacrificed for many – including you! Thank him for taking your place. Thank him for his brilliant plan, for the “shadows” of the Old Testament and the reality found in Jesus. Invite the Holy Spirit to help you pray.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 21](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 10: Give Generously - Day 2

Renew the Mind

Tithing

On Day 1, four types of Old Testament laws were noted. But what about tithing, which is commonly seen as giving a tenth of one's income?

First: Tithing isn't a moral law

Consider what Jesus said to a group of Jewish religious leaders, [Matthew 23:23 \(ESV\)](#) *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.*

You see that Jesus pointed them to "weightier matters of the law" - this is the moral law, that which is connected to the character and nature of God. For example, all followers of the Way need to be just and merciful.

Some might object – but Jesus still told them to keep tithing, alongside the moral law. Yes he did! But it's important to note that Jesus was speaking to Jewish religious leaders who were still bound by the Old Covenant. Remember, this is BEFORE Jesus died. Ceremonial laws, such as tithing, were canceled after his death and resurrection.

Second: Tithing wasn't mentioned among the instructions given to non-Jewish (Gentile) churches

Paul and Barnabas (later Silas) took the gospel to the Gentiles in the far reaches of the Roman Empire ([Acts 13-14](#)). However, some Jewish believers followed and began to teach the Gentile believers that they needed to follow all the customs of Moses ([Acts 15:1](#)).

It was finally decided that Paul and Barnabas would take the issue to the apostles in Jerusalem for a final ruling ([Acts 15:2-23](#)). After much prayer and discussion, they decided, [Acts 15:28-29 \(NIV2011\)](#) *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.* Notice that there is no mention of tithing.

Of course, if someone were to disagree with what's presented here – that's ok! The "law of love" requires believers to, "agree to disagree." However, here's a challenge for ALL who follow Jesus. Whether you believe one has to tithe or not, the New Testament points to a lifestyle of generosity that goes FAR beyond any law. In fact, Jesus himself spoke on money in 11 of his 40 parables!

What are some principles of New Testament giving?

Principles for New Testament Giving

First: We're to excel in giving

Paul challenged a specific church to be excellent in their giving, an encouragement to every believer, [2 Corinthians 8:7 \(NIV2011\)](#) *But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.*

In fact, Paul went on to say that though he was not commanding them, sacrificial giving would prove their love! He said, [2 Corinthians 8:8 \(NIV2011\)](#) *I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.*

To strengthen his appeal, Paul turned their attention to the supreme example of generosity, the sacrifice of Jesus, [2 Corinthians 8:9 \(NIV2011\)](#) *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

Here's a good thought to remember: if you love what Jesus did for you, you'll love giving!

Second: Generous giving follows from putting God first

The generosity of many early believers followed naturally when they gave themselves first to God. Or as Paul said about the Macedonians, [2 Corinthians 8:5 \(NIV2011\)](#) *And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.*

In ancient times, those who honored God were required to give the firstborn of their flocks ([Exodus 13:12-13](#)) and the firstfruits of their crops ([Exodus 22:19](#)) to God. In fact, they were to honor God by bringing the best of their firstfruits ([Exodus 23:19](#)).

Of course, if this was true for them, how could those who put God first now NOT be known for their incredible generosity? In the context of speaking about money, Jesus said, [Matthew 6:33 \(NIV2011\)](#) *But seek FIRST his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 2 things are noted about tithing in today's reading?
3. What 2 principles for New Testament giving are mentioned today?

Life Application

1. Review (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 6:9-13, (*Verses From Grow Character Lessons*) 2 Peter 1:5-9, Galatians 5:13, Psalm 119:133, John 8:32, Numbers 6:24-26.
2. Memorize Matthew 6:33.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Genesis 22.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 10: Give Generously - Day 3

Renew the Mind

On Day 2, two principles for New Testament giving were highlighted. Today, one more will be explained, along with who will benefit from generosity.

Third: Generous giving is empowered by God's grace

The apostle Paul said, [2 Corinthians 8:1 \(NIV2011\)](#) *And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.* In fact, the word "grace" (it's the Greek word "charis") appears ten times in chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians.

The grace Paul is speaking of here is not for your salvation, but for the POWER to do something difficult. Put another way, God's expectations for generosity are so great that you'll need his help to be faithful! Of course, you can be ACTIVE in the process of welcoming God's grace. This includes thinking about the right things.

For example, you can intentionally set your heart and mind on eternal matters – such as the shortness of life, Jesus' return, your future resurrection, judgment of your stewardship, eternal rewards, etc.

Generosity Benefits Three Groups

First: It blesses the GIVER

The idea of, "give AND it will be given to you," is a CONSISTENT promise in the New Testament. Or as Paul declared, [2 Corinthians 9:6 \(NIV2011\)](#) *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.*

In a previous lesson, you learned that God promises to reward his followers in many ways! (e.g. with his presence, his pleasure, his power) This can include both material AND spiritual blessings. As Proverbs says, [Proverbs 22:9 \(NIV2011\)](#) *The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor.*

Sadly, some turn the promise of blessing into the expectation that God will make them rich. However, Jesus speaks of storing up treasures in HEAVEN, [Matthew 6:19-20 \(NIV2011\)](#) *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.*

Of course, this doesn't mean that there are no blessings in the present for those who are generous. Paul himself noted, [2 Corinthians 9:8 \(NIV2011\)](#) *And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

The key is watching for the RIGHT kinds of blessings! Here are some of the blessings you'll at times receive:

- Some material blessing SO THAT you can do good works – this can be through direct giving to a need or by funding someone else who is doing God's work
- Some material blessing so that your needs are met (key: needs, not wants). He is able to do this, as Paul declared, [Philippians 4:19 \(NIV2011\)](#) *And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus*

- Spiritual blessings that flow back to YOU, from those you have blessed. E.g. they may pray for you, give to you when you're in need, honor you before others, etc.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What principle for New Testament giving is mentioned today?
3. How does generosity bless the giver? Explain in your own words.

Life Application

1. Can you think of a few times when YOU were blessed by being generous? Write this down. And thank God for any godly examples in your life, who have encouraged you to give.
2. Review [Matthew 6:33](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 23](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 10: Give Generously - Day 4

Renew the Mind

On Day 3, it was emphasized that YOU would be blessed as you give. This is not to be your primary motivation for giving, but it's another sign of Jesus' generosity towards his children! Today, you'll also see that your generosity impacts the church and glorifies God.

Second: Our generosity will bless the CHURCH with an expression of love, unity, and an example

The wider church as a whole benefited from the generous giving of the Macedonians and Corinthians. Take a moment to think about these few verses, **2 Corinthians 9:12-14 (NIV2011)** *This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.*

There was a MASSIVE impact from their generosity! Not only did it supply the needs of others, it also resulted in God being praised and an incredible feeling of oneness among the different churches. Paul also led by example, living a sacrificial and generous life, noting, **2 Thessalonians 3:7 (NIV)** *For you yourselves know you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you ...*

Third: The world takes note and GOD receives glory

Many accuse those who follow Jesus as not caring about anything but themselves. Of course, as followers of the Way are generous, they provide a HUGE counterpoint to this accusation.

Jesus said, **Matthew 5:16 (NIV2011)** *In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.* Notice WHO will be glorified (praised) because of good deeds – God!

The early church, as well as the church throughout history, has used an effective strategy - they ministered to the body (the “material”) in order to get to the soul (“immortal”). In fact, when Emperor Julian wanted to revive pagan religion in the mid-300s, he gave a most helpful insight into how the church spread. This opponent of Christians said, “it has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers and through their care of the burial of the dead.”

What is the Giving for?

First: To support those who minister

Galatians 6:6 (ESV) *Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.* (also **1 Timothy 5:17-18**). There's a clear expectation in the Bible that those who devote substantial time to ministry should be provided for. In another passage Paul said, **1 Corinthians 9:14 (ESV)** *In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.*

Second: To expand Christian missions and outreach

One day as the church in Antioch was worshipping, fasting, and praying, the Spirit instructed them to set aside Paul and Barnabas for the work to which he was calling them ([Acts 13:1-4](#)). Later, after some of his missions work, Paul wrote the church at Philippi and included something about their giving, [Philippians 4:16 \(NIV\)](#) ... *for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.*

This gives a glimpse into what Paul was referring to when he said this to the church at Philippi, [Philippians 1:4-5 \(NIV2011\)](#) *In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.*

This giving should also include helping those churches that lack funds, training, etc. Missions is VERY important, but in giving to missions one must not forget to help existing churches be renewed. Put another way, as existing churches are strengthened, even more people can be reached for Jesus! God cares for both the "lost" and the "already found."

Third: To take care of the poor

Dozens of times the Bible calls those who follow God to help the poor! For example, the book of Proverbs makes an incredible statement, [Proverbs 19:17 \(NIV2011\)](#) *Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done.*

The New Testament is just as clear. James even said, [James 1:27 \(NIV2011\)](#) *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is your giving for? What 3 things are noted?

Life Application

1. Make a list of things that you have given to in the past, that have furthered the kingdom of Jesus. Spend some time praying for each of these things. Prayer is powerful, combined with generosity!
2. Look through the list of 3 things to give to, in a spirit of prayer. Does God want you to give any more to these needs? Are there specific sacrifices you can make to help increase your giving?
3. Review [Matthew 6:33](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 24](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 10: Give Generously - Day 5

Renew the Mind

Guidelines for Giving in the New Testament

First: Everyone is to give something

Paul instructed the Corinthian church, [**1 Corinthians 16:2 \(NIV2011\)**](#) *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*

Some might say, “I just can’t afford it,” to which the Bible responds that every follower of the Way should give. Of course, God is gracious! In the Old Testament, guidelines were given to reduce expectations on the poor. It’s no different in the New Testament!

However, Paul is thrilled that some gave out of extreme poverty, [**2 Corinthians 8:2-3 \(NIV2011\)**](#) *In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.*

And Jesus commended the giving of a very poor widow (see [**Mark 12:41-44**](#)). In fact, though she gave VERY little in actual money, in Jesus’ eyes, [**Mark 12:43 \(NIV\)**](#) *... this poor widow has given more than all the others ...*

Second: Give to God first

Giving is part of worship and in worship you’re honoring God by putting him in his rightful place. Through the prophet Malachi God stated his criticism of Israel. He said that they didn’t honor or respect him. God’s point was that in worshipping him they were dishonoring him by giving him their blind, lame, or diseased animals for sacrifice. Then he says, [**Malachi 1:8 \(NIV2011\)**](#) *Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?*

Third: Give generously and in proportion to what we make

Do you want to reap generously now and in the life to come? Then you’ve got to sow generously! And to reap generously means that you also sow in proportion to how much you have been blessed with money, possessions, etc. That’s why in discussing the church’s offering, he used the words “in keeping with your income ...” (see [**1 Corinthians 16:2**](#)).

Fourth: Give primarily through the local church

In the New Testament, you’ll notice the pattern of giving directed NOT to individuals or to the church at large, but primarily to and through local churches. For example, early Christians would bring money from the sale of land to the church leaders to use as they were led by Jesus (e.g. [**Acts 4:33-35**](#)).

Giving to one’s local church is wise for a couple reasons. First, it prevents givers from being arrogant or improperly motivated, as giving to a local church isn’t usually attached to a lot of recognition or special privileges.

Second, it ensures that those who are providing you and your family with much spiritual “feeding” are adequately provided for. Of course, if a person is giving significantly to their local church, they can also give privately to the poor, as well as to other worthy causes.

Fifth: Grow in giving

The apostle Peter makes it clear that followers of the Way are to keep growing in every way. He said, [**2 Peter 1:10 \(NIV\)**](#) *Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall ...* Of course, this would include generosity!

Do people fall away from the faith? Absolutely! And do you know the kinds of people who DON'T fall away from the faith? People who intentionally grow in the faith! Further, continued growth impacts your reward in heaven. Again, Peter says to those who remain faithful, [**2 Peter 1:11 \(NIV\)**](#) *... and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

If you make very little money, or are presently in the midst of financial struggles, and haven't given before, PRAY about giving 1 or 2% and then give by faith. If you're already giving, plan, pray, and adjust to give 5-10%. If you're giving 10% go to 11 or 12% and then 15%. Why not see how God will bless your generosity? Some may be able to give even more, out of their relative riches.

Of course, God DOES desire cheerful givers ([**2 Corinthians 9:7**](#)); but he first wants you to be an obedient giver! If the cheerfulness doesn't accompany the giving, it will often follow later ([**Matthew 6:21**](#)).

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 5 guidelines are given today for giving?

Life Application

1. Ask 2-3 mature believers about their journey of giving. Take notes! Talking about giving, if done in humility, can be very inspiring!

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 25](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Part 3

Lesson 11: Grow Godly Character through Suffering & Trials - Day 1

Renew the Mind

Saints Should Expect to Suffer

Something that causes many followers of the Way to get discouraged is their own suffering and the suffering of others. That's why it's crucial to learn what the Bible ACTUALLY teaches about suffering and trials. You'll be encouraged to learn and be reminded that God doesn't waste the painful things we experience. What does it teach?

First: There's a curse that hasn't been FULLY reversed ... YET!

There was a curse placed on all of humanity when Adam and Eve sinned. This curse includes the reality that everyone still dies physically, wrestling with weeds in your garden, pain in childbirth, etc. It is only after the second coming of Jesus that, [Revelation 22:3 \(NIV\)](#) *No longer will there be any curse.*

It IS true that on the cross Jesus cried out: "It is finished!" What this means is that the purchase of salvation from sin was completed NOW. However, the results of salvation aren't fully implemented YET. This is why some call the work of Jesus, NOW-NOT YET.

Some churches emphasize the NOT YET part, and often experience little of the power of the Holy Spirit or miracles. Others focus on the NOW part, but unfortunately many get disillusioned as they falsely expect little suffering on earth.

The key isn't to concentrate on either the NOW or NOT YET but to bring both together. You'll need a both/and approach! This is humble and biblical! So yes, much is possible because Jesus accomplished much! But there is still work to be done in combating the curse. We wait for the second return of Christ with the armies of heaven ([Revelation 19:11-21](#)).

This idea of NOW and NOT YET is well illustrated by the later stages of World War 2. As the Allies tightened the noose around Hitler and his armies, many of his supporters began to urge him to stop the war, as it was already 'lost!' The Allies could 'NOW' see victory in sight ... but it was NOT YET as they waited for the final completion.

Similarly, we fight on against Satan ([Ephesians 6:11-13](#)), knowing that the outcome is now secured!

Second: Disease and trouble are common ... NOW – though healings and deliverance can happen

Were there healings in the Old Testament? Yes! For example, Naaman, commander of the army of Aram was healed after he listened to Elisha's instruction to dip himself in the Jordan River seven times ([2 Kings 5](#)). King Hezekiah was also healed of a disease that would have otherwise killed him ([Isaiah 38](#)).

And there were healings in the New Testament as well, such as Peter and John healing a man at the temple ([Acts 3](#)). A woman Dorcas was also healed, in fact, she was raised from the dead! ([Acts 9:36-40](#)) Of course, such things can happen presently, that is, NOW.

YET ... many of God's followers then and now DID NOT and DO NOT experience God's healings! Even some of the great apostles and saints of the early church experienced sickness and death. For example: Timothy had stomach problems ([1 Timothy 5:23](#)); Epaphroditus was ill and almost died ([Philippians 2:25-27](#)); Trophimus was left sick in Miletus ([2 Timothy 4:20](#)); and Paul, after praying three times, was left with a 'thorn in his flesh.'

There is a verse in the Bible that some use to argue that everyone will be healed now. It's found in Matthew, where it notes, [Matthew 4:23 \(NIV\)](#) *Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.* However, this doesn't mean that every person was healed with a disease, but that every TYPE of disease was healed by Jesus. How do you know that this interpretation is correct? Again, you'll notice that even Jesus didn't heal every sick person he met. For example, at the Pool of Bethesda Jesus only healed one paralytic ([John 5:1-15](#)), even though there were sick people lying all around the pool!

Paul put it well. Even your body needs redeeming still! [Romans 8:23 \(NIV\)](#) *...[we] groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* Think about this - how many colds, flus, headaches, broken bones and cuts has God healed you of already? Praise God! Well, there's more coming!

One value of present healings is to remind us that this will be our inherited state in heaven! That is, all healings and miracles are simply a 'taste' of what's coming at the great Marriage Supper of the Lamb ([Revelation 19:9](#))! God is not breaking his promises to give us complete and final healing – not at all!

And what about other troubles? Can they all be "prayed away?" On the one hand it appears that the Bible says, "yes." Psalms says, [Psalms 34:17 \(NIV\)](#) *The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.* YET Jesus said, [John 16:33 \(NIV\)](#) *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*

It is clear that God will hear the prayers of his children and that you're to call out to God, "your kingdom come, your will be done." However, until Jesus returns, there will be some suffering and trials. Probably you realized this a long time ago!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. You will continue to suffer as a believer. What 2 key points are noted today about this suffering? Try to explain it in your own words.

Life Application

1. What are some examples of suffering that you have faced since you gave your life to Jesus? Write them down.
2. Can you think of a time in your life where God healed you or delivered you – or someone close to you? This is a taste of what's still to come! Spend some time praising God for this healing or deliverance!

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 26](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 11: Grow Godly Character through Suffering & Trials - Day 2

Renew the Mind

On Day 1, you looked at two key points about what you might expect regarding suffering as a follower of the Way. Today, you'll consider one more.

Third: Suffering is God's plan and will for believers

If you read the book of Job, you'll read about a man who suffered greatly! However, some say that what happened to Job was ALL Satan's doing. And of course, the enemy was very involved! He initiated and carried out the plan of inflicting pain.

But there's more to the story. In fact, the book of Job emphasizes that Satan couldn't do anything to Job without God's permission. Look at what God says to Satan, [Job 1:12 \(NIV\)](#) *The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.*

Who did Job's wife blame? God – not Satan! [Job 2:9 \(NIV\)](#) *His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!"* And who did Job himself point to when he considered his troubles? God! [Job 1:20-22 \(NIV\)](#) *At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."* *In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*

Now surely Job must have done something wicked for such trials to be allowed! That's what his so-called friends argued. But God said this about Job, [Job 1:8 \(NIV\)](#) *Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.*

This is fascinating! Not only is this suffering one a 'blameless and upright man,' he is suffering precisely because he IS blameless and upright! And though in the end God corrected the thinking of Job and his friends, he never corrected their claim that God allowed the suffering!

The writer of Hebrews goes one step further in explaining God's dealings with his children. He affirms, [Hebrews 12:6, 11 \(NIV\)](#) *... the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son ... No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful ...* Who is initiating the discipline and punishment, that even results in pain? God.

This fits with what God said through Isaiah, [Isaiah 45:7 \(NIV\)](#) *I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.* At times, your faith will result in healing, comfort, and deliverance. Praise God!

But at other times, your faith will be strengthened as God initiates and USES suffering. In fact, in the famous "chapter of faith" in [Hebrews 11](#), faith brings about both positive (e.g. Sarah received the ability to conceive) and "negative" (e.g. some were flogged) results.

Sadly, there's a deep misunderstanding among many about what faith is. Many think that biblical faith is something that arises from believing something YOU WANT. It doesn't! Biblical faith is trusting and believing something that GOD WANTS!

And whatever God wants is ALWAYS for your ultimate good, though in the present things may be difficult. As a famous verse declares, [Romans 8:28 \(NIV\)](#) *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who*

have been called according to his purpose. Brothers and sisters, we must never lose sight of God's ongoing redemptive purposes in all that he initiates or allows in the lives of his children.

It's impossible to read the Bible and escape the truth that God will lovingly, yes LOVINGLY, use suffering and trials in the lives of his followers. You can only consider trials something to rejoice in if you know that God is working it all for good in the end; which in fact he is! And when one considers that this is only for a short time on earth, such troubles will be much easier to bear.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Is suffering ever God's plan and will for believers? Explain your answer.

Life Application

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you 3 examples from your life where suffering resulted in something good. Write these down.
2. Spend some time praising God for what he did through your suffering.
3. Memorize [John 16:33](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 27](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 11: Grow Godly Character through Suffering & Trials - Day 3

Renew the Mind

How to Handle Suffering and Trials

Some people don't spiritually survive seasons of difficulty. Jesus referred to such people in his parable about soils, calling them rocky soil without deep roots ([Matthew 13:5-6](#)). As soon as trouble or persecution come, they quickly fall away ([Matthew 13:20-21](#)).

It takes a mature trust in God to withstand trials and not fall away. So then, how can YOU handle suffering and trials?

First: Understand God's love in using suffering

Many followers of the Way are very familiar with the teaching that Jesus went to prepare a place for them (see [John 14:1-3](#); [1 Corinthians 2:9](#)). This is something to praise God for! However, did you know that he is also PREPARING YOU for that place?

Many get upset at God when they suffer, but instead should agree with Job's statement, [Job 42:3 \(NIV\)](#) *Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.* Over time, if you'll humble yourself, you'll realize that God allows suffering to come into your life to mature you. And isn't this a LOVING goal? Isn't greater maturity also for YOUR enjoyment?

When we understand God's wisdom in allowing suffering in our lives, it will anchor our souls. Again, Job couldn't see any rational or good purposes for his suffering. But now we see that God's thoughts and ways were better. Can we trust God for this in our own lives as well?

Jesus said that the Father PRUNES believers to make them more fruitful, [John 15:2 \(NIV\)](#) *...every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.* This is why Peter could speak of rejoicing, yes REJOICING, in the midst of trials. Specifically, in mentioning trials, he said, [1 Peter 1:7 \(NIV\)](#) *These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

As you read the Bible and walk with Jesus, you'll find that God has many wonderful purposes for suffering – for now and eternity! Paul agreed, [2 Corinthians 4:16-17 \(NIV\)](#) *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

God loves you SO MUCH that he's setting up your life and allowing things so that you can be as mature as possible, and receive rewards in the future. However, like most – things such as pride, mixed motives, selfishness – likely get in the way. Again, a loving God will utilize redemptive suffering as an effective tool in rooting these out. The question is – will you submit to his ways?

Those who haven't learned God's truths about suffering are soon overwhelmed when confronted by it. They are unnerved and even crushed, concluding that either God isn't strong enough to do anything about it or he simply doesn't care. Or worse still, that he doesn't even exist! At this point, many fall away and never recover. In such cases, Satan's "false doctrine" arrow has hit its mark and destroyed a soul! Tragic!

There is a day when your life will be judged by God. As Paul described it, [**1 Corinthians 3:12-13 \(NIV\)**](#) *Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.*

God, in love, wants you to easily pass this test! Suffering, for most, will at least cause people to make a choice. Your trials will make you bitter or better (the difference is one letter!)

Your heart will become hard towards God or softer. When you go through difficult times, what happens TO you isn't nearly as important as what happens IN you.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What key point is shared in today's reading, that will help you handle suffering and trials?
3. Explain what God's love can accomplish through your suffering?

Life Application

1. Have you given your life to Jesus? Are you serving him? Would you say that your motives are being purified? It's awesome to ask these questions, prior to standing before your King and Judge.
2. If there are things revealed about your life or motives, find someone to confess to. Don't be ashamed to bring this to a brother or sister. God will work through your confessions!
3. Review (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) [John 15:5-6](#), [Romans 12:2](#), [Matthew 28:18-20](#), [1 Peter 5:8](#), [John 10:27](#), [James 1:22](#), [Psalm 1](#), [Colossians 3:2](#), [Psalm 39:4](#), [Matthew 5:16](#), [Matthew 6:9-13](#), (*Verses From Grow Character Lessons*) [2 Peter 1:5-9](#), [Galatians 5:13](#), [Psalm 119:133](#), [John 8:32](#), [Numbers 6:24-26](#), [Matthew 6:33](#), [John 16:33](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 28](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 11: Grow Godly Character through Suffering & Trials - Day 4

Renew the Mind

On Day 3, you saw that effectively handling trials involves understanding God's love in using suffering. Today, three more suggestions on how to face suffering will be provided.

Second: Understand who's in the 'boat' with us

Those who study the Bible have pointed out that when the books of Matthew and Mark (see [Matthew 8](#), [Mark 4](#)) share the story of the calming of the storm, they use language almost identical to the famous Old Testament account of Jonah.

The descriptions are very similar! Both Jesus and Jonah were in a boat. Both boats were overtaken by a storm. Both Jesus and Jonah were asleep. In both stories the sailors wake up the sleeper and say, "we're going to die." And in both cases, there was a miraculous intervention and the sea calmed.

In one of his books, Timothy Keller points out that Jesus says, "One greater than Jonah is here," and he's referring to himself. That is, he's saying: "Someday I am going to calm all storms, and still all waves. I'm going to destroy destruction, break brokenness, kill death." And as evidence of this, Jesus calms the storm that they were facing right in that moment!

Have you ever thought of this? That Jesus was thrown into the only storm that can actually sink us – the storm of eternal justice, of what we owe for our wrongdoing? If the sight of Jesus being thrown into that storm is burned into the core of your being, you will never say, "God, don't you care?"

And if you know that Jesus didn't abandon you in that ultimate storm, what makes you think he would abandon you in the much smaller storms you're experiencing right now? Therefore, if you meditate on who Jesus is – who's in the midst of storms **WITH** you in the "boat" – you'll have the ability to stay strong.

Third: Receive God's wisdom in the midst of our suffering and trials

Sometimes God is willing to tell his children what the purpose for their suffering is – if they ask him. Further, when the purpose is revealed, it can encourage his followers as they walk through the trial! You should **ALWAYS** ask God for any wisdom he's willing to provide, **THOUGH** sometimes he may choose not to reveal his purpose at that time. But be encouraged – when he's silent, there's a good purpose for that too!

Fourth: Receive God's love in the midst of our suffering and trials

Though the other three points are all important, **NONE** of them come close to achieving what experiencing God's love can do. Explanations and reasons are helpful for the mind because in part, they answer the question "Why?" But sometimes good answers just aren't good enough!

For example, consider when a crying child looks into their mother's face and asks, "Mommy, why?" Are they usually needing a long explanation? Rarely. Generally, they simply want mom or dad to pick them up and assure them that everything will be okay. All they want is to be loved!

Job never did get any answers to his questions. In fact, God responded to him with many questions of his own! In the end, Job received the greatest gift, God himself, [Job 42:5 \(NIV\)](#) *My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.* What satisfied Job? Seeing and experiencing God's presence!

This is why Paul prayed the following prayer for the Ephesians' church. Read it slowly, [**Ephesians 3:16-19 \(NIV\)**](#) *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

When your heart is being overwhelmed in suffering, an orderly list of biblical reasons as to why this is happening can sting like salt in a wound. You don't stop the bleeding that way. Answers, no matter how good they are, are not fully satisfying. Go to God – he wants to give you the ultimate gift – himself. And he will satisfy!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 3 key points are shared in today's reading, that will help you handle suffering and trials?

Life Application

1. Think of some suffering or a trial that you experienced in the past. Write down some of the details.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit this question and record your answer: "God, what were you doing through that suffering/trial?"

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 29](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 11: Grow Godly Character through Suffering & Trials - Day 5

Renew the Mind

Steps to Grow Godly Character in Suffering and Trials

Step 1: Worship God, knowing he is working all things out for our good

Paul says that God will work out all things for good in [Romans 8:28](#). Do you believe this? Can you praise him in the good times as well as in the hard times? Try it and see what it does for your soul! As David said, [Psalm 42:5 \(ESV\)](#) *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation.* In this way, you're telling your emotions how they should feel about your situation. This approach can be very effective!

Step 2: Go to God daily for comfort and strength to carry on

God will not always give you the reason for your suffering just yet. But in suffering, when you don't know the WHY, you can learn to be content with the WHO! This is a holy habit – thinking about who God is. Consider this promise, [Deuteronomy 33:27 \(NIV\)](#) *The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.*

Step 3: Set our eyes on eternity by meditating on eternal things

Memorize verses about eternity in order to move your focus from temporary things to fix them on eternal things. This will give you hope and the necessary strength to persevere to the end of your trial. The Word hidden in the heart is powerful! There is little in the world we live in that will prompt us to focus on eternity. We have to provide the counter-narrative of eternity being much more important than solely focusing on the "here-and-now."

Step 4: Ask God to reveal what his purpose(s) are

Paul asked God for some of the reasons for his suffering. And God answered him! Of course, this caution needs to be repeated – sometimes you won't get such clarity. Or the answer will come much later on.

Consider when God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac – God didn't tell Abraham that he would supply another sacrifice! **HOWEVER**, Abraham did find out afterwards what God was trying to do in the middle of the test! Sometimes we find out years later and some things we simply won't know until we reach heaven. However, not to ask is to dishonor the Lord – for according to [James 1](#), he invites us to ask.

Step 5: Pray daily for a character trait

Often God will grow your character through a trial, even if he has other purposes. This can be so stretching for us, isn't it? Yet all followers of the Way can grow in character! When you realize how your character is being stretched, begin to pray for that specific trait on a daily basis. You will see incredible things happen!

Step 6: Confess any related sin, including bitterness.

The area that God wants you to grow in is the same area in which sinful, unrighteous, or ungodly behavior will be seen. This needs to be confessed.

Step 7: Receive inner healing, deliverance, and freedom from harmful family patterns

Perhaps an old wound from your childhood or past is contributing to your suffering. Or there is a bondage you just can't conquer alone. Perhaps it's even generational. Turn back to Lessons 4-6 for help.

Step 8: Tell someone and ask for their prayers

You can't survive your trials and suffering alone. God designed you to need others. Ask your spouse or a friend or a small group to pray with you in these days. And when you do, don't just ask for prayer to remove circumstances; ask for prayer to align with God's purposes in this, including growth in godly character.

Step 9: Be filled with and live by the Spirit

You cannot change your character alone. You'll need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, so that you can receive the desire and ability to work on your character.

Paul named four ways to be filled in [**Ephesians 5:18-21**](#). First, when we minister to others - addressing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Second, when we worship the Lord – singing in our hearts to the Lord. Third, when we are grateful – giving thanks to God always, in ALL circumstances. Fourth, when we submit to one another in reverence to Christ.

Step 10: Learn and memorize Scripture about the trait

This will help you remember the trait, but also plant God's truth in your heart.

Step 11: Keep in step with the Spirit

Stop during moments of testing and choose correctly. The Spirit will remind you of the proper responses as you learn in the midst of your trial.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 11 steps are given to help you grow through your suffering and trials?

Life Application

1. Practice the 11 steps to Grow Godly Character in Suffering and Trials.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 30](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 12: Align with God's Purposes in Our Suffering & Trials - Day 1

Renew the Mind

Introduction

Considerable time is given on Days 2-5 to describe thirteen purposes connected to WHY God allows believers to suffer. Suffering is VERY real and can be incredibly difficult! The goal through such learning is to be encouraged, comforted, and to equip oneself to minister to others who are facing trials.

Of course, it's amazing that Jesus himself CHOSE to suffer! In fact, Isaiah looked ahead to what Jesus would face, [Isaiah 53:3 \(NIV\)](#) *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

Praise Jesus for leading the way! Now some do question whether or not God EVER reveals his purposes for suffering. They even point to Job as an example. *However*, the very nature of the test that Job received REQUIRED that he not know the purpose. God was using Job to declare to Satan that Job would trust him without knowing the purpose!

On the other hand, trials different than Job's can only accomplish their purpose if the one who suffers understands the reason for their difficulty. For example, if you're experiencing a trial for the sake of specific correction (see [Hebrews 12:11](#)), you'll need to know the purpose.

Consider this longer passage in one of the prophetic books of the Old Testament. The repeated phrase – "yet you have not returned to me" – highlights the purpose for the suffering. And when they refused to respond, they are told to, "prepare to meet your God."

[Amos 4:7-12 \(NIV\)](#) *"I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up. People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD. "Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards, I struck them with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD. "I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD. "I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD. "Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel."*

It's also true that God might be working out multiple purposes through some trials. He's that powerful and brilliant! Many times these purposes can relate to what God is doing in the lives of others, and the "big picture" of what's happening won't be fully understood until eternity. Yet SOME details, God is often willing to reveal.

And did you know that God, at times, expects nations to discover the purpose for their suffering? For example, when God brought famine to Israel, he told them the exact purpose. Through the prophet Amos, he declared, [Amos 4:6 \(NIV\)](#) *I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me.* The purpose of the trial was to draw them back to God!

The Complexity & Simplicity of It All

As you continue to read, you may wrestle with this thought – does God ever INITIATE suffering or difficulty? Reading the Old and New Testaments, there are many passages that say “yes.” God is said to judge with suffering and punishment, discipline with trials, send a strong delusion as a part of his end times plan, and pour out his wrath. This is God’s Word too. Some of these things are directed at both believers and unbelievers, some to only unbelievers. May any discomfort we feel about such things not cause us to ignore them. The Holy Spirit inspired those same words, as he did many promises for redemption and vivid descriptions of God’s love. May we let “God be God.”

Yet some prefer not to ever use the word “initiate” in connection with God’s role for suffering. They choose to only go as far as the word, “allow.” It’s a great word, since both the Old and New Testaments also describe the experience of suffering in that way. It’s the most COMMON way we can understand suffering. As we struggle at times to grasp God’s role in suffering, we need to be humble and admit that it can appear complex to us. Why? Because we’re not God!

The Psalms, as an example, reflect the limits of OUR wisdom in wrestling with God’s work and the suffering we and others experience. This very fact means that we should never claim to know why someone else has suffered or is suffering. Filling our minds in this lesson with truths about God’s purposes in suffering shouldn’t negate the reality that our primary responsibility when faced with someone who is suffering is to provide comfort, love, encouragement and prayer. Put another way, the people of God follow in the footsteps of Jesus by first being an ongoing presence in another’s life. Might there be open doors to present some of the truths of this lesson? Yes, but we need to ensure that we have saturated ourselves first in prayer AND carry the very compassion and tone of Christ. When we grasp how limited our understanding is, there is a humility and empathy that others will sense.

While to us there is an apparent complexity that we may try to steer clear of, the picture of God presented in the Bible is simple. His attributes are clearly noted and consistently declared through both the Old and New Testaments. Therefore, even if God were to only allow suffering – i.e. by not yet casting the devil into the lake of fire or by judging the wicked – it also presents him as all-powerful and sovereign. In seeking to elevate God’s love and redemptive purposes, we must not diminish the reality that nothing would happen without his knowledge. Reducing God’s sovereignty to alleviate our or others discomfort with difficult concepts is a losing proposition in the end. We repeat, may we let “God be God.” Further, simplicity of understanding is increased as we *experience* God, as our intellects, or writing, or discussions can only take us so far. Only the Spirit of truth can bring balance and truth more fully to our minds and souls, while not being embarrassed or dismissive about any single passage.

All this said, the Bible tells us over and over again that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked ([Ezekiel 18:23](#)), that he longs to be gracious to us ([Isaiah 30:18](#)) and is a Redeemer unlike no other. We must not minimize the magnitude of God’s goodness. Our goal has been to weave such strong biblical themes throughout this manual, glorifying God in doing so. As one pastor has frequently said, “you cannot overstate an attribute of God. He is unlimited.” Yet, we cannot deny that he is also presented as a consuming fire in various passages of warning (i.e. [Hebrews 12:29](#)) and that our struggle to reconcile the many attributes of God does not indicate anything deficient in him, but instead, reveals our own weakness. As such, may we reflect carefully and prayerfully on all of Scripture, even as we strive to place the proper emphasis on any one theme or attribute of God.

Finally, as we continue to read may we remember the words of the apostle Paul, in a spirit of worship and humility. He wrote these words after speaking about both God’s great kindness and sternness, reflected in his grace to Jew and Gentile, and warnings of being cut off if unbelief and arrogance persisted. [Romans 11:33-36 \(NIV\)](#) *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them? For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

Goals for Knowing the Purpose of Suffering

First: When we discover that God has our best interests in mind, we'll worship him!

Did you know that the greatest worship and love you can offer the Lord is when you worship him in your suffering by faith, BEFORE you know the purposes! May this be a regular practice in your life, to worship God no matter what!

In some cases, as with Job, we will discover the purposes AFTER the trial and worship him for it. As Job noted, [Job 42:3 \(NIV\)](#) *You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge? Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.'*

Certainly, this will be the case in heaven. We will worship God much more deeply when we understand (i.e. [Revelation 7:11-12](#))!

Second: When we understand God's purposes in our trials, we can align with him

Jesus understood the Father's purposes for his suffering. He saw the eternal good it would bring to many (including to you)! And because of this Jesus aligned himself with these purposes. As Hebrews says, [Hebrews 12:2 \(NIV\)](#) *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 ...* Jesus endured the shame and pain of the cross, rather than shrink away from it! Aren't you glad? Of course, this endurance was fueled by understanding the Father's good plan!

While God won't always reveal his purposes, there are two other reasons a believer may struggle in their trial. First, they might not even ask God for wisdom OR wait for an answer. Sadly, many do this! James challenges believers regarding this, noting that they do not have because they do not ask (see [James 4:2](#)).

Second, many believers are busy "seizing the day" instead of eternity. Many followers of the Way are obsessed with the world's goals of wealth, health, and ease. But that's the wrong outlook as God has placed eternity in your heart ([Ecclesiastes 3:11](#))! Instead, you're to live for a different place! And those who are focused on the present will resist seeking God for wisdom on the purposes for their suffering.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 2 goals can be accomplished through knowing the purposes for your suffering?

Life Application

1. Consider the last trial that you faced (or a current one). Have you been seeking God in discerning his purposes for it?

2. Review (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) [John 15:5-6](#), [Romans 12:2](#), [Matthew 28:18-20](#), [1 Peter 5:8](#), [John 10:27](#), [James 1:22](#), [Psalm 1](#), [Colossians 3:2](#), [Psalm 39:4](#), [Matthew 5:16](#), [Matthew 6:9-13](#), (*Verses From Grow Character Lessons*) [2 Peter 1:5-9](#), [Galatians 5:13](#), [Psalm 119:133](#), [John 8:32](#), [Numbers 6:24-26](#), [Matthew 6:33](#), [John 16:33](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 31](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 12: Align with God's Purposes in Our Suffering & Trials - Day 2

Renew the Mind

Purpose # 1 for Suffering & Trials – To Encourage Repentance

It's clear that God has used suffering to cause people to return to him on a national level. The book of Judges, along with all of the prophets, declare this truth often! However, this can also happen for individuals as well.

Consider Jonah, who was running from God's calling. Specifically, he was going the wrong way on a ship! What did God do? It says, [Jonah 1:4 \(NIV\)](#) *Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.* Who sent the wind, causing a massive storm? God. And what was the purpose? To encourage Jonah to repent (to turn) from his rebellious path. God can do the same kind of work in our lives, but likely using different methods!

David also experienced suffering, to motivate him to repent. David had committed both adultery and murder ([2 Samuel 11-12](#)). To discipline him, God struck David's child with an illness and the child died. This may seem harsh, but the perspective of humans is "clouded" by how much the seriousness of sin is minimized.

What was the result of this suffering? David turned back to God! [Psalm 51](#) records his repentance, [Psalm 51:4 \(NIV\)](#) *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.*

In the New Testament Paul told the Corinthian church that they should examine themselves every time they take the Lord's Supper. Now they celebrated the Lord's Supper OFTEN, as the book of Acts notes. This means that Paul is saying believers should examine themselves frequently. It's a good thing to ask – do we do this? And he gave the reason, [1 Corinthians 11:29-30 \(NIV\)](#) *For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.*

This is very serious. Paul says that MANY were weak and sick, and some had even died because they had come under judgment of the Lord! Their suffering should have caused them to turn from their sin.

Purpose # 2 for Suffering & Trials - To Grow in the Fear of the Lord

This one is related to the first purpose. This second purpose for suffering, to grow you in the fear of the Lord, can help KEEP you from sin in the future.

Teaching can play an important role in developing the fear of the Lord. Moses said, [Deuteronomy 6:1-2 \(NIV\)](#) *These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.*

We can also pray for a fear of the Lord, as David did, [Psalm 86:11 \(NIV\)](#) *Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.*

Another way we acquire the fear of the Lord is through discipline from God. This is all good! Why? Because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ([Proverbs 9:10](#)). In fact, it can bring life, [Proverbs 14:27 \(NIV\)](#) *Fear of the Lord is a life-giving fountain; it offers escape from the snares of death...*

Of course, when God allows or initiates suffering in your life, this can help a fear of the Lord develop. For example, when Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit and the apostles, God struck them dead – which is a form of discipline ([1](#)

Corinthians 11:30). What was the result for others? It says, **Acts 5:11 (NIV)** *Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.*

Suffering, leading to a fear of the Lord, still happens today! God hasn't changed his ways! Consider this story from Pastor Ray Duerksen:

A couple at our church plant in Ontario badly mistreated us. Therefore, I vowed no one would ever treat me like that again. Though I didn't leave the church immediately, my heart left. Within approximately 1-2 years, the Spirit directed us to resign and move to Manitoba. He then confirmed to both of us that I could renew my Airline Transport License, so that I could provide for my family. Two air carriers in Winnipeg immediately gave me a job! I must be at the center of God's will, yes?! Not so fast! You see, in the secret recesses of my heart, though I couldn't see it clearly, I was hatching my Jonah escape from God's unpleasant assignment to minister in the church. After I renewed my license and secured two flight jobs, he then took both away in the space of ONE HOUR! I was stunned and angry, knowing God was working. I threw a shoe; OK, maybe two! There it was – my heart fully on display! With that door firmly closed, I applied to TWO churches in the area – both less than a 100. They wouldn't even talk to me, though they both didn't have pastors! You see, God was determined that I would grow in the fear of the Lord! I was so desperate for work, that when my father-in-law suggested that I might want to learn to drive a highway tractor and trailer, I took him up on it. INTERESTINGLY, a door for this opened immediately and I had work! For the next 3 1/2 years God took me away from everything that was dear to me: my wife; my children; my career; and even ministry. I was so upset, that one day I even broke my hand, as I swung out at the side of the padded bunk. Eventually, I calmed down and surrendered to the Lord. My joy came back and I resigned myself to driving a truck for the rest of my life. I even ordered a second one. At that point, the Spirit prompted me to cancel the order, and soon after, I was hired by Southland Church. On my first early morning drive into work at Southland in 1996, I literally began to shout out loud with joy as I was driving (thankfully, alone!). I couldn't believe it that I had 'done my time!' I am SO GRATEFUL to God for teaching me to grow in the fear of the Lord, because it has been key to accomplishing so much of what I have done for him in obedience.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 2 purposes for suffering and trials are given in today's reading? Explain them as best that you can.

Life Application

1. What is a time in your life when you suffered in a way that it caused you to turn from sin? If you need help thinking of something, ask the Holy Spirit to show you.
2. When is a time in your life when you grew in a fear of the Lord? Was suffering or a trial connected to this growth in any way? Pray for the churches in your country, that they would grow in a healthy fear of the Lord. Even write out your prayer.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 32](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 12: Align with God's Purposes in Our Suffering & Trials - Day 3

Renew the Mind

Purpose # 3 for Suffering & Trials - To Learn to Depend on the Lord

In his wisdom God knows that his children will need times of suffering to draw them back to him. Even though he is SO good and worthy to be followed, in pride even the best kids can stray from the Way. Even followers such as the apostle Paul needed the “fire of suffering” to cause a dependence on God.

Paul explained, **2 Corinthians 1:8-9 (NIV)** *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.* There is an intensity to such a passage, isn't there?

Suffering can cure people of the spiritual disease of self-sufficiency. Or as Joni Eareckson Tada said, “I have learned that the weaker we are, the more we need to lean on God; and the more we lean on God, the stronger we discover him to be.” This was exactly what Jesus meant when he said to Paul, “My power is made perfect in [your] weakness.” (**2 Corinthians 12:9**). Jesus said that we were made to be connected to the Vine – that no fruit comes from self-sufficiency because his divine power isn't working through us!

Purpose # 4 for Suffering & Trials - To Reveal What's Hidden in Our Hearts

After Jonah repented of his rebellion against God, he went on to deliver a message of judgment to Nineveh. Jonah couldn't wait to see what would happen – as Nineveh was an enemy of Israel, Jonah's people!

However, the people of Nineveh actually repented – so God did not judge them! Was Jonah happy? No! He responded with furious anger! It says, **Jonah 4:1-4 (NIV)** *But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. Jonah had wished them dead.*

Jonah also got mad at God for allowing a worm to destroy a plant that had been protecting him from the sun, a plant that God had caused to grow. Why would God allow that, he wondered?

So God engaged Jonah in conversation: “Should you be angry about the plant?” And then he challenged him further, **Jonah 4:10-11 (NIV)** *You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?*

There it was – Jonah's heart had been exposed for what it was by God's discipline. He didn't care about 120,000+ souls. In the same way, God knows the secrets of your heart (**Psalm 44:21**) and will one day judge those hidden motivations. Or as Paul said, **1 Corinthians 4:5 (NIV2011)** *He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts.*

Therefore, in his mercy, God uses suffering and trials NOW so that you'll not be judged LATER for any dark things in your heart.

Purpose # 5 for Suffering & Trials – To Reveal Christ Through Us to Those Blinded by Satan

The devil has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so they cannot see Christ. Paul said, [2 Corinthians 4:4 \(NIV\)](#) *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

However, God counters what the devil is doing by revealing Jesus in various ways. First, he uses miracles.

We know that miracles, signs and wonders are an important way in which God reveals the power of Christ to unbelievers. For example, in [Acts 3](#) we read the account of Peter and John healing a blind person. When the people recognized the former blind man now walking and praising God, they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened.

Second, he reveals Jesus through the good lives and deeds of believers. See what Peter says about this, [1 Peter 2:11-12 \(NIV\)](#) *Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

Finally, he can reveal himself through how he sustains believers through suffering. This is often very powerful evidence for unbelievers! Many have given their lives to Jesus because they witnessed how a believer was joyful through suffering. It's because to respond properly to trials and suffering requires supernatural strength and power – the power of the risen Christ!

Purpose # 6 for Suffering & Trials - To Prepare Us for Ministry Assignments

Paul explained this purpose, [2 Corinthians 1:3-4 \(NIV\)](#) *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.*

Isn't it true that the best person to minister to someone who has lost a loved one is someone else who has experienced this? And that goes for any number of a long list of trials! This is another purpose for suffering – so that you can help others who suffer in the same way. What a beautiful purpose!

Purpose # 7 for Suffering & Trials - To Motivate Others to Minister

Paul's suffering because of his bold ministry inspired others to follow his example. Or as he said, [Philippians 1:12, 14 \(NIV\)](#) *Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel ... Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*

You can be motivated by the faithfulness of historical people who suffered well – e.g. Dietrich Bonhoeffer – and by contemporary examples. And YOU also can inspire others to minister by suffering with joy and continuing to serve others! What a wonderful plan!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 5 purposes for suffering and trials are given in today's reading?
3. What are the 3 different ways that God can reveal himself to a blinded unbeliever? How can suffering do so?

Life Application

1. Look at the 5 purposes for suffering that were shared today. Take your time going through them and write down 1 example from your own life for each. If you cannot think of one for any specific purpose, feel free to use someone else's example that you're aware of.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Genesis 33.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 12: Align with God's Purposes in Our Suffering & Trials - Day 4

Renew the Mind

Purpose # 8 for Suffering & Trials - To Strengthen Our Perseverance

Perseverance is so important! Perseverance is one of those foundational traits because much of what you accomplish through your faith will be dependent on whether you persevere. Giving up can hinder one's growth! But how can you grow in perseverance? Well, suffering and trials can really help! James describes this process well, [James 1:2-4 \(NIV\)](#) *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

Paul said the same, [Romans 5:3 \(NIV\)](#) *Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance.*

It can be said that everyone has come into this world with "underdeveloped endurance muscles." These will grow however, if you learn to embrace suffering. In fact, think of Paul. How did he stay faithful?

Suffering trained him! He went through flogging, prison, stoning, shipwrecks, criticism, hunger, and without sleep ... the list goes on and on! That's why he could say towards the end of his life, [2 Timothy 4:7 \(NIV\)](#) *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* May that be said of you as well!

Purpose # 9 for Suffering & Trials - To Bring Glory to God

Sometimes God heals or delivers you from hardship in order to bring glory to himself. This sounds amazing, but it requires suffering in the first place! In responding to the sickness of a man named Lazarus, Jesus said, [John 11:4 \(NIV\)](#) *This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.* And Jesus only returned to heal Lazarus once he had been dead for 4 days!

Of course, you'll also need to accept that sometimes God doesn't heal or deliver someone, in order to bring even more glory to himself! In fact, in suffering God often receives more glory IF and WHEN his children react, just as great saints throughout the ages have responded.

That is, God's strength can be revealed as it becomes clear to those watching that no human being could respond to extreme suffering with such grace and dignity unless they had help. Paul referred to this purpose when he reported, [2 Corinthians 4:7-11 \(NIV\)](#) *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.*

When Paul and Silas were tossed into prison, they ended up singing - hardly what you'd expect prisoners to be doing! This had a HUGE impact on those who were listening. And what happened next?

There was an earthquake which shook the foundations of the prison, opened all the doors and loosened all the chains of the prisoners. They were literally free to go! The jailer, running to see what happened, was about to commit suicide. He thought that all the prisoners had escaped. But Paul and Silas called out, assuring him that none of the prisoners had chosen to escape!

This confused the jailer so that with trembling he brought them out of prison and asked, [Acts 16:30 \(NIV\)](#) *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* And that night he and his entire household were saved and baptized. Here's the point – without

the suffering that Paul and Silas faced and their joyful response, God's kingdom may not have been added to that night! Put another way, through the suffering, God was glorified!

This has happened often throughout history! Here's another story:

Dirk Willems (an Anabaptist – who Mennonites trace their roots to) was pursued by a company of those who wanted to persecute him for his beliefs when he escaped from prison in the middle of winter. He fled across the thin covering of ice on a river and seemed to have escaped when, looking back, he saw one of his pursuers break through the ice and cry for help. Dirk immediately turned back and managed to rescue him, but on orders of the commander on the other side of the river, the man he saved arrested him on the spot. Willems was burned at the stake on May 16, 1569, paying for this deed of mercy with his life. Other Anabaptists suffered horribly on the torture rack; some were strangled; others were beheaded, some were drowned, many were burned at the stake and buried alive. So powerful was the Anabaptists' behaviour at the time of their executions, that they were increasingly carried on in secret, or the martyrs were gagged, or a clamp placed over their tongue.

They gave thanks that they could witness to the truth in this way! In fact, when the state persecutors clamped their tongues, the Christians would try to slip their tongues out so they could shout prayers and praises out to God. The persecutors devised a way to stop that – they clamped the tongue, and then burned the tip of the tongue so it would swell and couldn't be pulled out of the clamp. What was the result of all this suffering? Many were drawn to the faith because of the way they suffered, even when facing death!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 2 purposes for suffering and trials are given in today's reading?
3. How can your suffering (or the suffering of others) bring glory to God?

Life Application

1. Look at the 2 purposes for suffering that were shared today. Take your time going through them and write down 1 example from your own life for each. If you cannot think of one for any specific purpose, feel free to use someone else's example that you're aware of.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 34](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 12: Align with God's Purposes in Our Suffering & Trials - Day 5

Renew the Mind

Purpose # 10 for Suffering & Trials - To Reveal That God Is Enough

Corrie Ten Boom, a Nazi concentration camp survivor once said: "You may never know that Jesus is all you need, until Jesus is all you have." That's a powerful insight!

Job cried out to God for an answer for why he suffered. Instead, Job learned that his complaints had been addressed to a creator whose power and wisdom exceed all understanding ([Job 40-41](#)). In the end, Job got something that satisfied him more than all the intellectual answers his friends offered – he got God himself. And that was better than any immediate answer!

The Psalmist echoes the same truth, [Psalm 73:26 \(NIV\)](#) *My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

Purpose # 11 for Suffering & Trials - To Keep Us from Falling and Losing Our Reward

It can be easy to get lazy in one's faith. To slowly drift away. Well, suffering helps all followers of the Way to consider their path! Think of the apostle Paul. God used him in great ways! How did he stay strong? How did he avoid the very real danger of pride? He explained, [2 Corinthians 12:7 \(NIV2011\)](#) *To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.*

These 'thorns of suffering' allow God's grace to flow into our lives, producing humility, which makes the gospel so attractive to others. Isn't it true that many people become more teachable, gentler, less rash, less defensive, kinder and more submissive when they have suffered?

Your Father in heaven is NOT an enabling parent, like some human ones. He loves you too much to leave you the same. He won't crush you, but neither will he shield you from everything that will keep you on the most incredible Way! Rather, he allows things that will result in us becoming what we truly wish to be deep down inside!

Purpose # 12 for Suffering & Trials – To Cause Us to Long for Heaven

Something inside you keeps telling you that there has to be more. So does the Bible! And your sufferings will also point in this direction. If you experienced what Paul had experienced, wouldn't you be looking forward to heaven too? Maybe what you have already experienced has created a longing in your heart for him!

Gavin Reid, a church leader, tells of a boy in his congregation who shattered his back falling down the stairs at the age of one. Consequently, he had been in and out of the hospital. When Gavin interviewed him in church the boy remarked, "God is fair." Gavin stopped him and asked, "How old are you?" The boy replied, "Seventeen." "How many years have you spent in the hospital?" The boy answered, "Thirteen years." He was asked, "Do you think that is fair?" He replied, "God's got all eternity to make it up to me!"

When people have no suffering, they try to make their current life their place of comfort. When they suffer, they long for something else. Or again, the words of Paul, [2 Corinthians 5:2 \(NIV\)](#) *Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling ...*

Purpose # 13 for Suffering & Trials – To Make Us Truly Grateful for All Eternity

Again, there are warnings to not fall in love with this world and its ways ([1 John 2:15-17](#)). Suffering is a bit of a reality check. It will open your eyes to what this world REALLY has to offer. And when you suffer here? How will this make you FEEL in eternity? You will feel amazing! As Paul put it, [2 Corinthians 4:17 \(NIV\)](#) *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 4 purposes for suffering and trials are given in today's reading?

Life Application

1. Look at the 4 purposes for suffering that were shared today. Take your time going through them and write down 1 example from your own life for each. If you cannot think of one for any specific purpose, feel free to use someone else's example that you're aware of.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 35](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 13: Guard Against the Traps of Sex, Money and Power - Day 1

Renew the Mind

Introduction

Three temptations have been responsible for the struggles of many followers of the Way: sex, money, and power. Praise God that there IS grace and forgiveness available from the heavenly Father! Nevertheless, the damage done when a person gives into temptation is often severe.

For example, when King David committed adultery he was forgiven by God. YET, David also lost all moral authority in his home and in the nation. This is very costly! And when he used his political power to have Uriah the Hittite murdered, the cost of this sin was the loss of his own son.

Regarding the failings and punishment of the Israelites in the Old Testament, Paul says, [**1 Corinthians 10:11-12 \(NIV\)**](#)
These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us ... So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! Paul gives great advice, that even when you're standing firm, be alert to the possibility of falling! This alertness includes thinking about what's at stake.

What is at Stake?

First: The reputation of Christ and his church is impacted

Throughout the New Testament you can read of Paul's concern for the reputation of the church. Why? Simply for the sake of the people in the church? No. It's because Jesus' name is linked to the reputation of the church. In fact, it's stunning to realize that Jesus would allow this connection to exist, but he does!

This is of great importance because of the temptation to label Christians as hypocrites. Even Tacitus, a responsible Roman historian, commented that Christians were "loathed for their vices" in the early church period.

Many will slander and mock those who are followers of the Way, and even Jesus himself. Peter tells believers – BE GOOD! – so that the slander of others isn't based on truth, [**1 Peter 3:16 \(NIV\)**](#) ... *keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

Jesus also calls you to good character, causing others to recognize Jesus for who he is, [**Matthew 5:16 \(NIV2011\)**](#) ... *let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* As a believer, you're to shine in a good way! This can be attractive to others. Once again, Peter gives advice on this, [**1 Peter 2:12 \(NIV\)**](#) *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us ...* We need to take words like this very seriously.

Second: People will sadly be victimized

Power imbalance is a reality in many relationships such as doctor-patient, trainer-athlete, counselor-client, teacher-student, and pastor-church member. What makes people so vulnerable in such relationships is the amount of trust they place in those with power, or because they fear personal loss if they do not comply with pressure being exerted.

If those with perceived or real power in these relationships take advantage of this power imbalance for personal gain (e.g. control, money, sex), they victimize the other person or persons. And the warning to those who harm children is VERY serious, [**Matthew 18:6 \(NASB\)**](#) ... *if anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in me – to*

stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned the depths of the sea.

It is really sobering that very severe warnings were delivered by Jesus himself, such as pronouncing seven woes on hypocritical religious leaders ([Matthew 23](#)).

Third: A loss of children, youth and adults from the church

Aren't sexual sins, the abuse of power, and the mishandling of money significant reasons for many abandoning the church, taking their children along with them? Isn't it true that many young people, in their time of developing convictions, walk away from Jesus and/or the church when they see clear hypocrisy?

Fourth: The credibility of the church's teaching on what's right and wrong will be diminished

Paul explains this well, [Romans 2:1 \(NIV\)](#) *You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.*

It's already VERY difficult for the church or individual believers to represent truth to the culture, regarding evils such as abortion. This difficulty is magnified when many Christians are involved in their own sins such as pornography, lying, greed, and taking advantage of others.

Fifth: There can be a loss of blessings on earth and/or reward in heaven

The apostle Paul announced, [2 Timothy 4:7-8 \(NIV\)](#) *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* When Paul said that he had finished the race, he didn't mean simply that he had hung on and completed living the number of minutes God had determined for him to live. NO!

Paul was saying that he had completed everything God had prepared in advance for him to do ([Ephesians 2:10](#)). And it also means that he wasn't disqualified along the way. Or in his own words, [1 Corinthians 9:27 \(NIV\)](#) *No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

Moses, on the other hand, was disqualified before he finished. And God wouldn't allow him to enter the promised land, though Moses pleaded for God to reconsider. Further, though your salvation is not necessarily impacted when you fall into sexual, financial, or power-related sins, your reward could be.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 3 common areas of sin that Christians fall into? And can this also happen for leaders?
3. What 5 things are at stake when you're making choices about sexual purity, financial integrity, and how power and influence are used?

Life Application

1. What are some examples of sexual sin, financial sin, and abuse of power that you can think of?
2. Ask God to help you to be serious about ALL sin in your life. Perhaps write this prayer out.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 36](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 13: Guard Against the Traps of Sex, Money and Power - Day 2

Renew the Mind

The Limitations of Accountability for Sexual Sin

Many will encourage those who struggle with sexual sin to seek out "accountability." To be accountable to another person involves literally "counting how you're doing and reporting it to them." The hope is that through such accountability, humility, encouragement, prayer and a serious attitude towards sin will all be experienced.

Though accountability is important you'll see that it has limitations. Why?

Reason 1: Leaders also fall

Followers of the Way will often seek accountability from their leaders. However, leaders have struggles as well! Of course, those who are leading should have a measure of maturity! But research shows that their personal lives are often no better. This doesn't mean that leaders are to blame for your sin, or the sin of any believer, but that accountability to leaders will not guarantee your own personal purity!

Reason 2: Lying, even by redefining sin

President Bill Clinton looked in the cameras and said: "I did not have sex with that woman." What the President did was redefine sex, so that oral sex was not included in its definition. Therefore, accountability is limited by the reality that many will lie about their sin, or redefine what sin is. As many have noted, if a person wants to sin, no amount of accountability will keep him from it

Reason 3: Accountability starts at the wrong end

For some, accountability implies questions like: "Did you do this? Did you do that? Are you staying away from these things?" Of course, such questions are entirely appropriate and encouraged in a healthy accountability relationship. However, assuming that the truth is shared, it's already too late!

To deal with the present epidemic of sexual sin, believers need to refocus on the front end of the problem. Instead, this needs to be asked: "How do you prevent this from happening in the first place?"

Guarding Against Sexual Sin

Of course, accountability relationships are still good! But how can you stay clear of sin in the first place?

First, you need to recognize that there's a desire within you that will tempt you to stray from God's ways (see [Romans 7](#)). This desire is called "the flesh" in the New Testament. Second, you'll need to remember that there's an enemy who is seeking your downfall, by appealing to the desires of your flesh.

Third, you'll need to seek out PRACTICAL STEPS, even rules for your life, that can close the door to sin. This is NOT legalism. At times, you'll hear people discourage practical steps by calling them "legalistic." But what is legalism? One definition of legalism is: focusing on rules/rituals rather than a relationship with Jesus.

Put another way, these rules do not qualify you for a relationship with Jesus nor do they replace your connection to him. Those who have intentionally attempted to grow in godly character, come to see just how formidable the sinful

nature and the enemy really are. With this heightened awareness, a follower of the Way who wants to grow understands that the best strategy for avoiding these temptations is to keep himself out of their path (i.e. avoiding any triggers, or places of opportunity)!

That is, putting practical steps in place REFLECT that you do love Jesus and are RESPONDING to what he's already done for you. Even Jesus pointed to dealing with sexual sin very intentionally, [Matthew 5:29-30 \(NIV\)](#) *If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.*

Obviously, Jesus was using hyperbole in his challenge. Most would still sin with their mind, even if they had no hands! Isn't this true? However, he did take the consequences of sexual sin so seriously that he endorsed whatever it would take to steer clear of it. Would you say that you're willing to do WHATEVER is necessary?

Proverbs calls this approach discretion, or wisdom. The person who develops such traits will experience much less pain in life! Consider these words carefully, [Proverbs 2:11-12, 16-18 \(NIV\)](#) *Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse ... will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead.*

Another passage in Proverbs says, [Proverbs 5:7-11 \(NIV\)](#) *Now then, my sons, listen to me; do not turn aside from what I say. Keep to a path far from her [adulterous woman], do not go NEAR the door of her house.* This is a practical step, or might it be said, "take a step by staying away from her steps!"

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 3 reasons are given for the limitations of accountability regarding sexual sin?

Life Application

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your life. Have you been relying too much on accountability to keep you free from sexual sin? Or do you need to ADD some accountability?
2. Since you're to care for the reputation of the church, pray for the sexual purity of your own church and of the churches in your country.
3. Memorize [1 Peter 2:12](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 37](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 13: Guard Against the Traps of Sex, Money and Power - Day 3

Renew the Mind

Practical Steps to Guard Against Falling Into the Trap of Sexual Immorality

When you read through the six practical steps below, you may be tempted to focus on one to the exclusion of the others. If you do, you'll be making the same mistake that many have made in thinking that accountability is the one thing that is needed. On the other hand, we're not saying that every practical IDEA noted within the six steps should be implemented.

Instead, what's needed is a complete (holistic) solution that combines ALL six categories listed below.

First: Seek freedom from sexual bondage

A bondage to sin is a controlling pattern. Bondages to sexual thoughts and behaviors may be caused by several things such as family patterns, demonic activity, or intentional personal participation in sexual sin. These are deeply rooted patterns and are not easily reversed or removed, humanly speaking.

However, deliverance was made possible by what Jesus won for you at the cross, and is made available through repentance, renouncing, inner healing, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Some of these were discussed in Lessons 4-6. Do not hesitate to go back! They are, "tools for life."

Second: Develop a personal walk with Christ and grow in holiness

This was covered in a previous series of lessons, called Abide. Of course, one of the reasons to keep growing in Christ is to develop the ability to resist temptation to sin. In fact, those who seriously want to overcome sin will be very intentional in their relationship with Jesus.

Third: Develop a healthy fear of the Lord

Today, much attention is rightfully given to the love of the Lord. Yet little is said about the fear of the Lord, despite the reality that the Bible has much to say about it. For example, believers are commanded to offer God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe – why? Hebrews commands, [Hebrews 12:28-29 \(ESV\)](#) ... *let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.*

How does such a fear of the Lord impact a person? This is what Moses said, [Exodus 20:20 \(NIV\)](#) *Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.*

What will keep you from sinning? A fear of God!

Fourth: Grow a strong marriage

One of the greatest gifts that you can give any children you have, your communities, and anyone that you lead is a strong marriage! If a person will demonstrate to their children and their church around them an excellent walk with the Lord AND an excellent marriage, they will do two critical things for both. First, they will be modeling godly behavior. Second, they will provide others with an environment of spiritual and emotional health.

Here are several practical suggestions to help grow a strong marriage:

- Together, the couple should discover things that they can enjoy doing together for the remainder of their lives
- They should pray for each other and for their marriage
- They should build rhythms into the marriage and family, including a day of rest, family vacations, time seeking God together, etc.
- They should each discover what their spouse's love-language is and treat them accordingly
- They should listen in prayer together about decisions that need to be made

Fifth: Practical workplace considerations

A person should carefully and prayerfully consider their work environment to ensure that there are no opportunities for sexual sin or false accusations. Can people see into your workspace, even when you're meeting with others? If not, with effort, this can be changed.

Are you ever alone in the office with only one other person? Again, with effort, this usually can be avoided. Also, if communication is taking place at work of an overly personal nature, are you revealing this to your spouse (if married) or other mature believers (if single)?

Sixth: Practical traveling considerations

If your job has a traveling component to it, do you have clear safeguards in place – that have been communicated to others?

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 6 practical steps are given to guard against sexual sin?

Life Application

1. Carefully and prayerfully look through the steps shared today. Are you taking every step necessary to avoid sexual sin? Be humble and sober-minded. Remember that "pride goes before the fall!"
2. Review (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 6:9-13, (*Verses From Grow Character Lessons*) 2 Peter 1:5-9, Galatians 5:13, Psalm 119:133, John 8:32, Numbers 6:24-26, Matthew 6:33, John 16:33.
3. Review 1 Peter 2:12.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 38](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 13: Guard Against the Traps of Sex, Money and Power - Day 4

Renew the Mind

Guarding Against Financial Sin

Do we view the money we have, and the ability to produce wealth, as from God? Let's consider carefully what God says to his people, **Deuteronomy 8:17-18 (NIV)** *You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth ... Everything we have is from God!*

And we're responsible to be wise with what we have been given. The words of Jesus on this matter are challenging, **Luke 16:11 (NIV)** *So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches?* This idea of being responsible to God to steward the money and possessions we have is incredibly counter-cultural. But Jesus, in various passages, is reminding us that what we do with money and possessions impacts our eternity.

This need for stewardship extends to avoiding financial sin. And financial sin, biblically, is much more than not robbing a bank or spending our money on drugs! Growing followers of the Way understand that godliness impacts both the spirit of what we do with money and possessions AND the details of our spending, giving and saving.

If we remember God's love for us, and live in that love, doing everything possible to have integrity in this area will not be a burden. Or as John describes obedience, **1 John 5:3 (NIV)** *This is love for God: to obey his commands and his commands are not burdensome ...*

At times, one of the best ways to check our lives for any type of sin is to reflect on questions. So here's a list of questions that we can work through as we seek to follow the Way in this area of our lives.

1. Do we pay for everything that requires payment? Including online? At work? Specific verses can help us take this seriously. For example, **Hebrews 4:13 (NIV)** *Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*
2. Are we honest with others when we talk about our finances – do we make it sound like we are poor, when we actually have the basics of life?
3. Are we accumulating unnecessary debt for things that we don't need? God's word has much wisdom on this, **Proverbs 30:8 (NIV)** *Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.*
4. Do we express gratitude and contentment before God and others regularly? Or are we often thinking about or talking about what we want or consumed by our current possessions? Paul said, **1 Timothy 6:6 (NIV)** *But godliness with contentment is great gain.*
5. If we've taken advantage of someone financially or cheated on our taxes, have we confessed this, corrected this behaviour and asked God what we can do to make it right?
6. Have we given ourselves over to the cultural lies of "I must always have the latest thing" or "I need to get this to impress others?" In light of this, we can think about whether we're fully obeying God's call to help others and to further his work. Do we let cultural lies increase our spending, robbing us of the opportunity to give more? We can reflect on these words, **1 John 3:17 (NIV)** *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?*

7. A form of financial sin is idolatry – having other “masters” – such as money or excessive possessions. Jesus said, **Matthew 6:24** (NIV) *No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. Why should we carefully consider what we do with our money and possessions?

Life Application

1. Work through the questions in this lesson. Invite God to both affirm you and correct you. Record what you receive.
2. Are there intentional steps that you can take to walk in greater integrity with your finances and possessions? (if married, listen in prayer with your spouse).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 39](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Renew the Mind

Guarding Against the Abuse of Power

Did you know that we all have power? Of course, the word “power” is seen negatively because it’s often used improperly or abused. What we mean by “power” is influence. Today, we’re going to consider an important question – do we use our power or influence to build others up and further the kingdom of God? Or do we misuse or waste our power or influence?

The abuse of power is ancient. Cain killed Abel. As brothers, they had influence in each other’s lives. Cain severely misused his influence. Even after killing his brother and being confronted by God, he asked, [Genesis 4:9 \(NIV\)](#) “... am I my brother’s keeper?” Well Cain, you should have been! Whatever his motive – maybe jealousy – he abused the relationship.

Abuse of power or influence can take many forms, including more subtle ways than murder! Again, it’s a stewardship question, to be considered in light of Jeremiah’s words, [Jeremiah 10:23 \(NIV\)](#) *Lord, I know that people’s lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps.*

Where might you have influence or power? Does anyone report to you at work? Do you volunteer at church or the community, where others either look up to you or give you influence in your life? Are you a parent? Are you a child of elderly parents? (as people get frailer, they often give much influence to their children) Are you in close relationships with a spouse, friends or within a small group? Even if relationships are “equal,” we still have influence.

As in the previous lesson, one of the best ways to check our lives for any type of sin is to reflect on questions. So here’s another list of questions that we can work through as we seek to follow the Way in this area of our lives.

1. Do we manipulate or seek control through harsh words, passive aggressiveness, lies or by promising or withholding things or money from people?
2. Do we seek to build others up? We need to seek to practice the words of Paul, [Philippians 2:3-4 \(NIV\)](#) *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*
3. Have we tried to “send a message to others” by either nagging them or by withdrawing time or love from them?
4. Do we try to change others through our own efforts, or are we a person of prayer? Even when issues have to be addressed (as is normal in all settings), are things bathed in prayer – before, during and after a conversation?
5. Do we use our influence to try to get what we want, or are we trusting God to supply what we need? Yes, we need support from others! But what’s our focus – to try to force this support, or to first bring our needs to God? Do we operate in faith or unbelief?
6. Influence or power are gifts from God. Do we use our influence to further his kingdom? Parents need to ask this question often. Our kids first belong to God, as one of the purposes of marriage is stated by one of the prophets, [Malachi 2:15 \(NIV\)](#) *Has not [the LORD] made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring.*
7. Finally, if we witness an abuse of power or influence, are we willing to both pray and appropriately act?

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Why should we carefully consider what we do with our power and influence?

Life Application

1. Work through the questions in this lesson. Invite God to both affirm you and correct you. Record what you receive.
2. Are there intentional steps that you can take to better use any influence or power you have? (if married, listen in prayer with your spouse).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 40](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 14: Persevere to Experience Renewal - Day 1

Renew the Mind

Jesus urges and commands followers of the Way to KEEP growing. This means continuing to be renewed – body, soul, mind and spirit. God has this plan for YOU! Would this describe your life right now?

And what about those in your home, church, small groups, etc.? Linked to the growth that Jesus expects in your life will be your faithfulness in discipling others.

So how can you continue to experience growth and renewal? Perseverance is key!

Why It's Important to Persevere - Part 1

First: It's a key way to resist the devil

The devil's attacks on the apostle Paul were relentless. Consider one of Paul's references to it. Things got so difficult that he said, [2 Corinthians 1:9 \(NIV\)](#) *Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death.*

Many believers forget that they're invited to do battle, something that's called spiritual warfare. And a chief weapon for winning in spiritual warfare is perseverance! Consider this story of a specific woman who was committed to prayer:

"Mrs. Loewen would get sick every Saturday night, get very little sleep and then would be too tired to get up for the Sunday morning prayer meeting. One Saturday evening she said to the devil: "Go ahead and make me sick if you like. But I am going to prayer in the morning anyways." She attended the prayer meeting the next morning and was never sick on Saturday night again!"

Satan LOVES when followers of the Way give up - when their circumstances, the tasks set before them, and the daily challenges of life are too much for them to endure! Too many do give up, sometimes on the verge of victory! Spiritual warfare is not a small part of being a disciple of Jesus. It impacts your entire life! Will you fight, as Revelation describes? Are you taking your faith seriously? [Revelation 12:11 \(NIV\)](#) *They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

The winner will ALWAYS be the one who doesn't give up. If we stick it out, the devil won't! And if he knows that we will endure, he will give up all the sooner. Sometimes the only effective weapon, and often the last to be employed, is just saying, "I'll die before I let this thing go!"

God has certainly ensured the conquest of the powers of darkness. Nevertheless, he has chosen not to leave us out, delegating responsibility to us. Spiritual warfare is not a fragment of the Christian life – it is a major part of being a follower of the Way.

Second: It's essential for growing in character

James connects maturity and perseverance, declaring, [James 1:4 \(NIV\)](#) *Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

To grow in character you'll need to PERSEVERE in developing: proper responses to daily pressure, appropriate reactions to people who annoy you, and humility in submitting to God's discipline in your life. All of this will grow your character!

Third: It increases our impact: the salvation and spiritual growth of others

Listen to Paul's passion, [**2 Timothy 2:10 \(NIV\)**](#) *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.* Paul is saying, "I'll do ANYTHING, push through ANY hardship, so that you people may be saved and grow!"

Jesus had warned that Paul would face much suffering to carry out his calling. In Acts it notes, [**Acts 9:15-16 \(NIV\)**](#) *But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man [referring to Paul] is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*

Jesus persevered, to bring salvation to you! Paul followed in his footsteps, and Timothy in Paul's. Now you're to carry on this mandate to persevere. And here's a good phrase to remember, "Someone is hanging on your nail, so be careful to remain firm!"

You might say, "but that's a lot of responsibility!" Yet this is simply a response to the greatness of what Jesus has done for us. When we give up, quit or fall, so do those who are "hanging" on to us. Persevere! Stand firm! Endure! It's the least that followers of the Way can do!

Fourth: It's the only way to complete everything that God has planned for us

God has a plan for your life. This isn't just meant to encourage, but to cause you to think about the question – are you fulfilling this plan? Are you seeking to be diligent in this? Paul declared, [**Ephesians 2:10 \(NIV\)**](#) *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

God has a unique race for you to run. It's a marathon, with short sprints along the way! In fact, he planned WHEN in history each of us would be born, as well as WHERE we would be born. God's purposes for this included his desire for people to be saved. Concerning David, Luke said, [**Acts 13:36 \(NIV\)**](#) *For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed.*

For such perseverance like David you'll need Paul's attitude. He was focused, hardworking and knew what he was on earth for, [**Acts 20:24 \(NIV\)**](#) *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 4 reasons are given today for the importance of perseverance?

Life Application

1. Can you think of a time in your life when perseverance was required to complete a task that God gave you?
Write this down and praise him for helping you!
2. Can you think of a time in your life when you gave up and it negatively impacted others? Confess this to God.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 41](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 14: Persevere to Experience Renewal - Day 2

Renew the Mind

Why It's Important to Persevere – Part 2

Fifth: It inspires others to persevere

The Bible encourages those who are alive to be inspired by those who persevered before them. [Hebrews 12:1 \(NIV\)](#)
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.

In the same way, your perseverance can inspire others! When you hear stories of miracles, you likely find them heartwarming and exciting. However, when you hear of or observe those who persevere in the face of opposition, hardship and loss, there's another level of inspiration! For example, consider this story:

From Pastor Ray and Fran Duerksen:

Fran and I are inspired whenever we consider the perseverance of John and Lorraine Baergen! Since a devastating New Years Day car crash in 1981, when a drunk driver hit their car, the Baergens have continued to live with the aftermath of that crash for the past 36 years (2018). Lorraine's face required 81 stitches the night of the crash. In that condition, she took up the role of keeping her shattered family together. John nearly lost his life and spent months in hospital. He has endured many surgeries over the years, for the multiple facial and bodily injuries incurred. Yet, as difficult as that has been, the worst by far, is what happened to their oldest son, Byron. To this day he lives with severe physical and brain-injury impairments. In his mid-forties now, Byron lives under the watchful care of John and Lorraine and must be helped each day with the most basic human functions. Yet, whenever we see the Baergens, they are filled with such joy, enthusiasm for ministry, as well as encouragement and blessing for others. They're always that way. John and Lorraine exemplify grace under pressure. Fran and I have admired them since we met them in 2007. They inspire us! We highly recommend their autobiography, [Unwritten](#). It will inspire you too! If you wish to purchase their book, please contact Lorraine at: LorraineB@churchrenewal.com

Sixth: It's how we obtain answers to our BIG prayers

How many times have you perhaps been close to receiving an answer to your BIG prayers, but gave up? This question should challenge you! Persevering prayer is the key to seeing some of our most significant prayers answered. And it is also the key to fruitfulness in our lives. Many have given up JUST before they were about to enter a period of fruitfulness.

Jesus felt that persevering in prayer was so vital that he taught on it multiple times. Or as Luke says, [Luke 18:1 \(NIV\)](#)
Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

Seventh: It's how we endure to the end and are saved

In the Old Testament, you can observe this plainly in the life of Job. He suffered terribly! And yet, when his wife encouraged him to curse God, [Job 2:10 \(NIV\)](#) *He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.*

Job's faith had been tested and found to be genuine. Many, like Job's wife, leave God when his blessings are removed. They show that they loved God for these blessings, not for who he is. They love the gifts, not the Giver. Sadly, not everyone who starts out on the narrow road, which leads to life, finishes.

Jesus prepared his followers with the truth about suffering, and the call to endure. For example, he taught, [Matthew 10:21-22 \(NIV\)](#) *Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands to the end will be saved.*

Of course, we're not talking here about sinless perfection – no! What perseverance means here is that no matter how often you fail, and no matter what happens to you in life, you don't give up on following Jesus!

Eighth: Our reward is based on persevering

Surely you LONG to hear the following words from Christ, [Matthew 25:21 \(NIV2011\)](#) *Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!*

For such words to be spoken, perseverance is required! These words aren't guaranteed to be declared over us. This is not the burden of perfection, but out of love, an intentional plan to continue to honor God – no matter what!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 4 reasons are given today for the importance of perseverance?

Life Application

1. Make a list of all of the responsibilities in your life. Then, beside each item, write down what you need to persevere in so that you can succeed in each of these areas.
2. Memorize [Hebrews 12:1-2](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 42](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 14: Persevere to Experience Renewal - Day 3

Renew the Mind

How to Persevere – Part 1

First: Consider the cloud of witnesses

This verse was shared yesterday, but consider it once again, [Hebrews 12:1 \(NIV\)](#) *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.*

The word “therefore” in [Hebrews 12:1](#) connects this call to be inspired with a list of noteworthy heroes of the faith in chapter 11. In [Hebrews 12:1](#) what is being pictured are these heroes in a stadium surrounding the track, observing you run the individual race marked out for you. What an effective illustration this is!

God gives you life and starts you in the race. But you need to continue on! And being inspired by those who have gone before you will help! This is why reading good Christian biographies is important, along with considering the lives of faithful (but not perfect) biblical characters.

Second: Be in community with like-minded people

Followers of the Way are commanded, [Hebrews 10:25 \(NIV\)](#) *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.* A key way to persevere is to be in community with others who are persevering in the journey of renewing their lives. Is this who you spend time with regularly?

Third: Throw off whatever hinders

In [Hebrews 12:1](#) there's also the idea of “throwing off everything that hinders.” Can you imagine running a marathon with a heavy backpack on! To persevere, you'll need to consider the advice of Paul to Timothy, [2 Timothy 2:4 \(ESV\)](#) *No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.*

We might also be inspired by Moses. Moses laid aside the benefits of royalty for the sake of his God-given assignment.

What hinders many believers from finishing the race? Their careers, anxieties, hobbies, wealth, fame, movies, etc. Each runner must honestly judge what hinders him or her, and aggressively lay it aside, even if others seem to be unhindered by the same thing.

Fourth: Throw off any sin that entangles

This is also what [Hebrews 12:1](#) says. In fact, if good things can hinder you (again, like a heavy backpack),

how much more will sin? It is said to entangle! That's like running a race with rope tied around your legs. Impossible!

When you're tempted to sin, it's good to think about this question – what is the full cost of this? Not only am I sinning against God, but I may also be robbing God of the fruit that he desires to produce through my life.

Of course, you can be entangled by both present sins AND the guilt of past sin! Both have to be “cut away.” This kind of guilt is something Paul could have been limited by, but he proclaimed, [Philippians 3:13-14 \(NIV\)](#) *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, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Fifth: Fix your eyes on Jesus for empowerment

The author of Hebrews also spoke about this, **Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)** *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 set aside every weight that could hinder his “race.” This is why he empathizes with us (**Hebrews 4:15**) and can give us much wisdom in running our “race.”

And not only did Jesus model perseverance for us, he knows how to run the race of faith perfectly! This isn’t a theory; it’s real AND practical! Moment by moment, day by day, month by month and year by year, as we look to him, we’ll find the necessary strength to persevere and complete the race. Consider Paul’s incredible prayer, **Ephesians 3:16 (NIV)** */ pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What 5 keys to persevering are given today?

Life Application

1. Look at the 5 keys for perseverance shared today. Slowly, prayerfully and carefully consider your own life. Are these habits present?
2. Review [Hebrews 12:1-2](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 43](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 14: Persevere to Experience Renewal - Day 4

Renew the Mind

How to Persevere – Part 2

Sixth: Receive hope from the Holy Spirit

When a believer has hope, they can stand in the face of almost anything! On the other hand, if they LOSE hope, it takes very little to knock them down. How can YOU be filled with hope?

First, you can be fueled by reading about the glorious future that God has planned for those who trust in Jesus! The New Testament, for example, is full of such declarations! As Paul said, [**Romans 15:4 \(NIV\)**](#) *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

Second, you can receive hope directly from the Spirit through prayer! In the same chapter, Paul declares, [**Romans 15:13 \(NIV\)**](#) *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Seventh: Remember the promises God has given us

What personal promises has God made to you along the way? If you cannot think of any, ask him for promises. He is very generous! Along the way these promises may fade away, becoming just distant memories. Therefore, we need to refresh them in our hearts, so as to stir us up to action once again.

Eighth: Pray and ask for prayer

Do you think God wants you to persevere? Of course! And what does John promise when a prayer is made according to God's will? God will hear! [**1 John 5:14 \(NIV\)**](#) *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.* Further, just as Paul regularly asked for prayer from others, don't neglect this part of being brothers and sisters in Christ!

Ninth: Choose not to be discouraged

Do you get tired and discouraged? Everyone does! But Paul says, [**Galatians 6:9 \(NIV2011\)**](#) *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

You will reap a harvest ... IF you don't give up! When you choose discouragement, you're saying, "it can't be done." That's the exact opposite of saying, "I know God can do it because he's said" The Bible says you need to resist discouragement.

Again, it's a choice! Discouragement comes from thinking discouraging thoughts; but you can change your thoughts any time. In fact, what will you choose to focus on: your purpose or your problems; God's power or your weakness; Christ or your circumstances?

People of genuine faith choose to keep going. They remind themselves, "I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me." [**Philippians 4:13**](#) They also realize that it's sin to dwell on negative thoughts, as it's disobeying God's Word, [**Philippians 4:8 \(NIV\)**](#) *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.*

So today, and tomorrow, and the next day – may you choose to resist all discouragement!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 4 keys to persevering are given today?

Life Application

1. Look at the 4 keys for perseverance shared today. Slowly, prayerfully and carefully consider your own life. Are these habits present?
2. Review (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) [John 15:5-6](#), [Romans 12:2](#), [Matthew 28:18-20](#), [1 Peter 5:8](#), [John 10:27](#), [James 1:22](#), [Psalm 1](#), [Colossians 3:2](#), [Psalm 39:4](#), [Matthew 5:16](#), [Matthew 6:9-13](#), (*Verses From Grow Character Lessons*) [2 Peter 1:5-9](#), [Galatians 5:13](#), [Psalm 119:133](#), [John 8:32](#), [Numbers 6:24-26](#), [Matthew 6:33](#), [John 16:33](#), [1 Peter 2:12](#), [Hebrews 12:1-2](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 44](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 14: Persevere to Experience Renewal - Day 5

Renew the Mind

Skip to the Life Application questions for today.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

Skip to the Life Application questions for today.

Life Application

1. Take time to re-read the verses that were shared in Days 1-4 of this lesson. Meditate on them. Do this in a spirit of prayer – asking God to help you become a person who perseveres.
2. Make a list of people that are special to you and are believers – family, co-workers, those from your small group. Pray for them to learn how to persevere. Do not rush this. It's such an important quality for believers to have!

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 45](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 15: Grow in the Fear of the Lord - Day 1

Renew the Mind

Introduction

In this lesson you'll see how important the fear of the Lord is for continued growth and renewal in your life. It's true that the love of God is VITAL because from it flows fellowship with God AND an abundant life of joy, peace, freedom from guilt, wholeness, and hope! Praise God!

Of course, most modern-day worship songs are about God's love. But do not forget what the Bible teaches, Proverbs 1:7 (NIV) *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.* Many struggle and stumble along, as they lack the right KIND of knowledge. And this knowledge is found through a proper fear of the Lord.

You'll need both the love of God AND a fear of the Lord. Consider how this verse includes both, Psalm 103:17 (ESV) *But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children.*

The fear of the Lord is important because that is what keeps us within the bounds of a relationship with God, so we can have fellowship with God, experience the abundant life, and keep our reward! This is a BOTH-AND tension we must always maintain, as we would be unwise to neglect one for the other.

What is the Fear of the Lord?

Solomon said, Proverbs 14:27 (NIV) *"The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life ..."* Few think of the fear of the Lord as life-giving! But it is and it's God's idea!

Peter speaks of the love one has for the Lord, 1 Peter 1:8 (NIV) *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy ...*

However, just a few verses later, Peter is quick to add the BALANCE in this relationship when he says that this heavenly Father is also your judge. And what response is appropriate for this truth? Fear of the Lord. 1 Peter 1:17 (NIV) *Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.*

God is LOVE (1 John 4:8), but he's also a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). Does this mean you're to be afraid of God? Absolutely NOT! As Moses said, Exodus 20:20 (NIV) *...Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.* This isn't a contradiction!

Clearly, Moses distinguished between being afraid of God and the fear of the Lord. If you are afraid of God, you'll run FROM Him. For example, Adam hid FROM God's presence because of disobedience. But if you have a fear of God – a healthy respect for him – you will run TO him.

There's even more to understand regarding a fear of the Lord. Here are some further thoughts:

First: We can seek to be a “God-fearer”

God-fearers are ones who are intentional in their devotion to God. Cornelius was described this way, [Acts 10:2 \(NIV\)](#) *He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.* The root Greek word for fear, “phobos,” is used here. However, the context – “devout” – helps us understand that the primary meaning attributed to the word “fear” has to do with devotion. We also note that a fear of the Lord led to generosity!

Second: The fear of the Lord is used to describe awe and reverence for God

You can see this in the early church, [Acts 2:43 \(NIV\)](#) *Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.* The Greek word translated here as “awe” is “phobos,” which is usually translated as “fear.” The context makes it clear that the people were in reverent awe of God’s wonders.

The same usage is evident in the Old Testament, [Psalm 33:8 \(NASB\)](#) *Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.*

Third: The fear of the Lord means we fear God’s displeasure and discipline

This is spoken about in the New Testament, as well as in the Old Testament, [Revelation 3:19 \(NIV\)](#) *Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.* Of course, it’s true that we’re to love God and be loved by him. Peter writes about this, [1 Peter 1:8 \(NIV\)](#) *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy ...*

However, just a few verses later, Peter is quick to add the BALANCE in this relationship, when he says that this heavenly Father is also our Judge, and as such we need to relate to him in the fear of the Lord ([1 Peter 1:17](#)).

Fourth: The fear of God is a healthy fear that unbelievers require to escape final judgment

The wicked do not fear God, thinking that their wickedness will not be found out. As one Psalm says, [Psalm 36:1 \(NIV\)](#) *I have a message from God in my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked. There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

Fifth: The fear of God is what believers require to keep from falling away

Referring to the inclusion of Gentiles (non-Jews) into God’s salvation plan, Paul said, [Romans 11:19-20 \(ESV\)](#) *Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.”*

That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear.

Fear is an appropriate response to the truth that God will not spare anyone who does not continue to believe, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Fear here does not refer to a paralyzing fear. Rather, it’s the kind of humble fear that does not take God or salvation for granted.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. According to today's reading, in your own words, describe what a fear of the Lord is.

Life Application

1. Can you think of 2 or 3 examples of when you walked in a healthy fear of the Lord? Write them down. What was the fruit of these times? Write this down as well.
2. Can you think of 1 time in your life when you did not operate in a fear of the Lord and it negatively impacted you? Write this down.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 46](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 15: Grow in the Fear of the Lord - Day 2

Renew the Mind

What the Fear of the Lord Accomplishes

First: it can keep us from drifting into sin

In [Acts 5](#), a couple named Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of land and *pretended* to give all of the money to the church. When Ananias brought the money to the apostle Peter, the Holy Spirit revealed to Peter that Ananias was being deceptive. Peter confronted Ananias about it, and look at what happened next, [Acts 5:5 \(NIV\)](#) *When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.*

Next, Sapphira arrived, and she was also deceptive. She too died on the spot and, [Acts 5:11 \(NIV\)](#) *Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.* Some say, "That was an isolated case." Not so! Consider what Paul said, [1 Corinthians 11:28-30 \(NIV\)](#) *A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why MANY among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.*

Paul clearly says that MANY are weak, ill and some have even died prematurely because of judgment from the Lord! If they had developed a healthy fear of the Lord in their life, such sin would have been absent from their life.

Of course, not everything bad that happens to someone is because they've sinned. Job is a classic example, as is a blind man that Jesus refers to (see [John 9:1-3](#)).

Second: It can motivate us to obey

It takes FAITH to act in obedience to something God directs. For example, Hebrews says about Abraham, [Hebrews 11:8 \(NIV\)](#) *By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.*

And yet that KIND of faith is helped along immensely by a genuine fear of the Lord, [Hebrews 11:7 \(NIV\)](#) *By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family ...*

Third: It can guard us from being consumed by pleasing people

Being a follower of the Way does NOT always mean pleasing others. Have you thought about this? In fact, it's true that, [Proverbs 29:25 \(NIV\)](#) *Fear of man will prove to be a snare ...* Perhaps take a moment to meditate on this! When you make decisions, do you consider what God wants, or only what will make others happy?

When people fear others, they're alarmed, anxious, avoid rejection at all costs, and seek other's approval. But when you fear God, you'll serve his interests despite how others will react. Consider what it says about some midwives in the book of Exodus, [Exodus 1:17, 20-21 \(ESV\)](#) *But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live ... So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.*

We need to learn to fear God over our spouses, friends, colleagues, partners and even those who have authority over us.

Fourth: It gives us a foundation for building a successful life

Lives, like houses, are built on foundations. And for this wisdom is needed, [**Proverbs 24:3 \(NIV\)**](#) *By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established.* Once again, the foundation for such wisdom is the fear of the Lord! [**Proverbs 9:10 \(NIV\)**](#) *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom ...*

Fifth: It can provide confidence at the final judgment

Do you want to stand before Jesus, aware of his mercy, yet confident that you've followed him? A fear of the Lord will help you live this life! As John said, [**1 John 2:28 \(ESV\)**](#) ... *little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.*

Sixth: It's the key to friendship with God and experiencing his love

Many claim that they're a friend of Jesus. For example, Abraham was called a friend of God [**James 2:23 \(NIV\)**](#) *And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.*

Yet friendship with God is linked to a fear of the Lord. As Jesus said, [**John 15:14 \(NIV\)**](#) *You are my friends IF you do what I command.* And elsewhere it's noted, [**Psalm 25:14 \(NIV\)**](#) *The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.*

Some are disappointed that they don't experience more of God's love. Yet God draws close to those who properly respond to who he is AND his ways. It's similar to any human relationship; true intimacy is sustained by respect and honor.

Caution: Jesus is NOT our "buddy" and should never be referred to as such. A "buddy" – as we use that term – speaks of a purely horizontal relationship. Instead, a friendship can be either horizontal or vertical – obviously, a friendship with the Lord is vertical.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 6 things does a fear of the Lord accomplish, according to today's reading?
3. How do experiencing God's love and a fear of the Lord relate? Explain.

Life Application

1. If you are part of a family that lives at home or live with roommates that are believers, invite them to have a discussion with you in the next few days on the fear of the Lord. Or you could do this with your small group at church.
2. Praise God that he is worthy to be in awe of and to love! Write out a prayer of praise.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 47](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 15: Grow in the Fear of the Lord - Day 3

Renew the Mind

Nations Are Expected to Fear the Lord

God expects the nations to fear him, not just individual people or believers. As a well-known psalm declares to rulers of the nations, [Psalm 2:10-11 \(NIV\)](#) *Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling.* In fact, there's much taught about this in the Bible!

First: God LOVES the nations and wants them to be saved

The Old Testament teaches that God owns all the land, [Leviticus 25:23 \(NIV\)](#) ... *because the land is mine.* And it also records God as saying that he distributed land, not only to Israel, but to all the nations, [Amos 9:7 \(NIV\)](#) "Are not you *Israelites the same to me as the Cushites [Upper Nile]?*" declares the *LORD.* "Did I not bring *Israel* up from *Egypt*, the *Philistines* from *Caphtor [Crete]* and the *Arameans [Syrians]* from *Kir*?"

[Deuteronomy 2](#) says that the Israelites were not allowed to take land from the Edomites, Moabites, or Ammonites because God had given lands to those nations. Therefore, Israel had to pay for anything they used (e.g. water) when passing through these nations.

In fact, God loved the other nations so much that he set Israel in the midst of them to display who he is! As one prophet declared, [Ezekiel 5:5 \(NIV\)](#) *This is what the Sovereign *LORD* says: This is *Jerusalem*, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her.* Put another way, God's love for the nations is so great that he does everything possible to draw them!

Remember God had promised to Abraham, [Genesis 12:2-3 \(NIV\)](#) *I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*

Of course, not only did God want ALL the nations of the world to know him, but he also expects them to act a certain way. If they don't, they are forewarned that they will experience the consequences.

Second: God uses warnings and judgments of increasing intensity

God is not an angry, harsh, or vengeful God. Many have a distorted image of God, thinking that he is an angry God in the Old Testament and a kind, compassionate and gracious God in the New Testament. Not so! The patient way in which he dealt with Israel AND the nations (in the Old Testament) is proof of that. A common truth noted about him in the Bible is, [Exodus 34:6 \(NIV\)](#) ... *the *LORD*, the *LORD*, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness ...*

He is SO loving! Yet the sin of individuals and nations does require discipline. But God doesn't lash out. Instead, step-by-step, with perfect wisdom, he warns and judges with increasing intensity. This is actually merciful! And he does this for the nations too!

First, God sent prophets to initially warn the nations, [Jeremiah 7:25-26 \(NIV\)](#) *From the time your forefathers left *Egypt* until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the prophets. But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their forefathers.* Again, consider the mercy of God! He starts with warnings, not judgment!

And he still sends prophets today, with warning. Read the story of Esther Ahn Kim, or some of the words of Billy Graham and David Wilkerson.

Second, when there was no response from a nation, God sent natural and economic disasters. Or as Amos records, **Amos 4:6-7 (NIV)** *I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me ... I also withheld rain from you ... yet you have not returned to me.*

Do present day nations respond to weather disasters by human zeal – “we WILL rebuild” – or do they fear the Lord and consider that repentance may be required?

Finally, God sent invading armies, as Nehemiah refers to, **Nehemiah 9:30 (NIV)** *For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighboring peoples.*

Third: God shows compassion if nations repent, as he is gracious

Again, remember that God increases the intensity of warnings and judgement SLOWLY because he is gracious and compassionate. And when there's repentance, a change of behaviour? He responds quickly! Jeremiah recorded the heart of God, **Jeremiah 18:7-8 (NIV)** *If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What was discussed today about the fear of the Lord and the nations – the key 3 points?

Life Application

1. Would you say that you have viewed disasters that occur in nations as possible judgment from God? Why or why not?
2. Spend some time praising God for being gracious but also for taking sin seriously – even nationally and internationally.
3. Pray for your country, that it would recognize that God calls ALL people and nations to repentance. Cry out to God for his will to be done!

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 48](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 15: Grow in the Fear of the Lord - Day 4

Renew the Mind

Churches Need to Fear the Lord

Most Christians know that Jesus LOVES the church (in a universal sense), giving himself up for it. Paul refers to this wonderful truth, [Ephesians 5:25 \(NIV\)](#) *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*

Yet do you realize that Jesus, as owner and Lord of the church, is CURRENTLY evaluating and judging local churches? This is what he did with the seven local churches mentioned in [Revelation 1-3](#). He is no different today! In fact, in Revelation John saw Jesus as a ruler not simply as a meek, tame baby in a manger.

It's interesting that churches celebrate Christmas, with much imagery associated to Jesus as a baby. They also focus on Easter, with the cross being the center point of such remembering. These are VERY important! But what about meditating on Jesus' ascension? (where he returns to heaven, at the right hand of the Father, in a place of authority) Do churches emphasize this at all?

We know that Jesus only spent the briefest of his "eternity" as a baby or on the cross. From eternity past, he has been as we see him in [Revelation 1](#)! How is it that we have given barely any attention to him in his present state?

C.S. Lewis brilliantly captured what John saw in his book, "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe." Consider this portion from the book:

"Aslan is a lion – the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh," said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion?" "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver... "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

This is Jesus as LORD – God himself – as he is now! And he isn't a "figurehead" ruler such as the Queen of England. Instead, he is present among the local churches, ruling, evaluating, and judging them in their 'present' time! And he warned, [Revelation 3:19 \(NIV\)](#) *Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.*

Similarly, Peter said, [1 Peter 4:17 \(NIV\)](#) *For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?* Sometimes when there's trouble in the church, it's assumed that the devil is attacking – and it very well may be. He loves attacking churches!

But consider another possibility – could it be the Lord of the Church fighting against a disobedient local church? This can happen. Consider that:

1. Jesus threatened to remove the lampstand of one church ([Revelation 2:5](#))
2. To another he said that he would come and fight against them with his mouth ([Revelation 2:16](#))
3. He threatened a third church that he would cast them on a bed of suffering if they didn't repent ([Revelation 2:21-23](#))
4. And to a fourth church Jesus warned that he would spit them out of his mouth ([Revelation 3:16](#))

If we don't wrestle with this, we might have fallen into the trap of having no fear of the Lord. In fact, if we don't stop to ask and listen in prayer, we may not learn when the sources of our troubles relate to his discipline.

How to Grow Personally in the Fear of the Lord – Part 1

The fear of the Lord is a gift from your gracious, heavenly Father. He does not want you to fail the final exam on judgment day. Or as Paul said, [1 Corinthians 11:31 \(NIV\)](#) *But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.* When we stand before Christ, we stand alone and we'll not be able to point fingers and say it was someone else's responsibility. This means you can take responsibility for growing in a fear of the Lord. How?

First: Consider the consequences of disobedience in the lives of others

It can be wise to observe what happens when others disobey God. Paul noted about the Israelites, [1 Corinthians 10:11 \(NIV\)](#) *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us ...*

The Bible is full of such examples! Samson, Saul, Judas, many kings of Israel, Jezebel, Ananias and Sapphira – they all experienced major failings! The world around you also contains many examples. In considering these examples, you're doing it not to sit in judgment over others, but to ensure that you keep moving ahead in YOUR own walk.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. How do you know that churches need a fear of the Lord, that Jesus expects it? Explain.
3. How can you grow in a fear of the Lord? What is shared in today's reading?

Life Application

1. Pray for your church. Pray for both the leaders and the people who attend the church. Pray that you would collectively grow in a fear of the Lord.
2. Consider 1 or 2 people you know that have suffered negative consequences because they lacked a fear of the Lord. This isn't judging them but learning from them! What choices were made? What were the results? Write down the details, but not the names (you can use initials).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Genesis 49](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 15: Grow in the Fear of the Lord - Day 5

Renew the Mind

How to Grow Personally in the Fear of the Lord – Part 2

Second: Meditate on God's goodness AND severity

When King Josiah of Judah listened to the reading of the Law, it stirred up a fear of the Lord in him, causing him to make necessary course corrections to avoid God's judgment. He said, [2 Chronicles 34:21 \(NIV\)](#) *Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the remnant in Israel and Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD's anger that is poured out on us because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book.*

Then the Lord told Josiah through Huldah, that because he had humbled his heart, his eyes would not see the disaster that would come. Clearly, Josiah had a healthy fear of the Lord, and as we meditate on or consider this story, our hearts are alerted to give attention to obedience in our own lives and avoid unnecessary discipline.

You can observe this requirement in the Old Testament. For example, it says, [Deuteronomy 31:12 \(NIV\)](#) *Assemble the people--men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns--so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law.*

Now think about this for a moment. They met together to "learn to fear the Lord!" Is this one of your goals when you get to get together with brothers- and sisters-in-Christ? Of course, the fear of the Lord is not just an Old Testament idea! Consider what Paul explained, [Romans 11:22 \(NKJV\)](#) *Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.*

What does Paul mean that you should also consider the severity of God? The context (fell and will be cut off) shows that he's speaking about judgment. Elsewhere he notes, [2 Corinthians 5:10 \(NIV\)](#) *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

This is the judgment of believers that Paul has in view here. This isn't an isolated passage either. Paul said the same to the church at Rome, [Romans 14:10 \(NIV\)](#) *You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.*

Don't be fooled – just because you haven't experienced judgment or consequences for sin yet, doesn't mean it's not coming. Judgment delayed is not judgment denied! Even for the believer.

Third: Consider past discipline that we've experienced

Isn't this true that, [Hebrews 12:11 \(NIV\)](#) *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. However, God disciplines his kids for their own good. Or as Hebrews also says, Hebrews 12:10-11 (NIV) ... God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness ... Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*

If you think back to past discipline, this can help you rapidly grow in your fear of the Lord. The question is: do you allow God to teach you through this? Or as Revelation says, [Revelation 2:29 \(NIV\)](#) *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Fourth: By praying for the fear of the Lord

You can ask for the desire and ability to fear the Lord, because it is God's will for you. And God assures you that if you ask anything according to his will, you have what you ask for ([John 14:14](#)).

A Story

This was shared by a pastor in response to God's work in his life:

This morning's small group was incredible for me. It actually felt to me like the whole thing was set up for the Holy Spirit to talk to me. When we listened to God about possible course corrections in our life, or how to be used in his kingdom, I simply got the words "Trust and obey." Nothing life changing there. Then we were encouraged to ask, "Is there anything standing in the way?" Immediately I got the words "self discipline"..."Go to bed on time, get up on time, be diligent in not wasting time at day's end browsing the internet. Spend time with God. God said, "I want to KNOW you and I want you to KNOW me." I confessed my lack of self-discipline as sin and I asked him what practical steps I should take to change. He gave me 3 do's and 2 don'ts that are very practical things for me to apply.

Along with the do's and don'ts he brought to mind [Revelation 3:19-20](#). It says, "those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."

At first, I just thought about how he wants to come in and eat with me and that I should pursue getting to know him better. Then I noticed the word 'discipline' in verse 19. It jumped right off the page. Definitely a word for me. "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline." Instantly I knew that this was more than just a 'self' discipline reminder from the Lord. Now to make it make sense to you, you need to understand that I am a farmer, councillor and pastor. I think for the time being that is where God wants me, but the last few weeks have felt like I have been under heavy attack from the enemy on every front. My wife would back me up, saying, "we must be doing something right, because the devil is attacking us" through many different pressures, and struggles, personnel issues and relentless breakdowns on the farm. We've been throwing around one liners like "pressure creates diamonds" and "fire refines the gold". As I read this verse though, the lights went on. It has not been an attack from the devil, it was discipline. From my heavenly Father. Discipline for my lack of 'self' discipline. "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline." I was humbled that God loves me and at the same time embarrassed that I needed discipline. This was all so real to me, I could not stop from weeping.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. How can you grow in a fear of the Lord? What 3 ways are shared in today's reading?

Life Application

1. Thank God for being a good Father, for being concerned about your eternity (including your rewards) enough to discipline you now.
2. Review (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 6:9-13, (*Verses From Grow Character Lessons*) 2 Peter 1:5-9, Galatians 5:13, Psalm 119:133, John 8:32, Numbers 6:24-26, Matthew 6:33, John 16:33, 1 Peter 2:12, Hebrews 12:1-2.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Genesis 50.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 16: Be Humble - Day 1

Renew the Mind

What May Lead to Pride

Humility is SO important, as the Bible teaches that, [**1 Peter 5:5 \(NIV\)**](#) *God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.* Wow! What a promise for those who are humble! Yet it also notes that the opposite, pride, is a serious problem. What can lead to pride in one's life?

1. Knowledge

[**1 Corinthians 8:1-2 \(NIV\)**](#) *... knowledge puffs up while love builds up. Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know.* Education is good, but many respond to education with pride and self-sufficiency.

2. Possessions

[**1 Tim 6:17 \(NLT\)**](#) *Tell those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money.*

3. Abilities

[**Deuteronomy 8:18 \(NIV\)**](#) *Remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth ...*

4. Power

[**2 Chronicles 26:16 \(NIV\)**](#) *But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.*

5. Youthfulness

Youth may think that they're invincible and feel like they'll live forever. [**James 4:13-14 \(NIV\)**](#) *Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*

6. Achievements

[**2 Kings 19:23 \(NLT\)**](#) *You have said, "With my many chariots I have conquered the highest mountains ..."*

7. Cultural or Racial Background

[**John 4:9 \(NIV\)**](#) *The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)*

Opportunities and gifts all come from God. You can praise God for them, or they can become fuel for pride. And such pride always precedes a fall or failure – ALWAYS. As Proverbs states, [**Proverbs 16:18 \(NIV\)**](#) *Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*

What Humility ISN'T

First: "Spiritual talk" doesn't prove we're humble

You'll need to watch out for false humility in your life – religious or spiritual talk that is meant to make you look good. When God asked Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt he said, [Exodus 3:11; 4:10, 13 \(NIV\)](#) *Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? ... I have never been eloquent O Lord, please send someone else to do it.*

Moses' response sounds humble, even "spiritual." But then the next verse reveals what God thought about such a nice-sounding response, [Exodus 4:14 \(NIV\)](#) *Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses.* Why did God respond this way?

Because Moses was really exalting himself in three ways: he was telling God that he, Moses, knew better; he was relying on his ability or lack of; he was thinking only of himself, not Israel. This wasn't humility; it was pride in disguise! He was simply looking after his own interests. Here's another one that sounds and might even be humble but might not be: "I'll pray about it." Often this can be a mask covering what's really inside – pride.

Second: Difficult circumstances in life doesn't mean we're humble

Moses clearly didn't start off humble. But look at what is said of him later on – after he became a great leader, [Numbers 12:3 \(NIV\)](#) *Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.*

Interestingly, Moses was proud when he had no position over Israel but became humble as a leader! Obviously, a "low" or "high" position has nothing to do with humility!

Third: Possessing great spiritual gifts doesn't mean we're humble

Many are wowed by great gifts – particularly, the gift of prophecy! Yet Paul said, [1 Corinthians 13:1 \(NIV\)](#) *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels ... If I have the gift of prophecy ... if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*

Some prophetic people believe that because they get a word from the Lord, they MUST be special – so they won't submit to or love others. But it counts for nothing, even if God uses the Word. For example, did Balaam ([Numbers 23-24](#)) give some correct prophecies from God? Yes! Does this mean he was humble? No! As the New Testament notes, [2 Peter 2:15 \(NIV\)](#) *They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.*

Just because a person possesses a "great" spiritual gift, doesn't mean that they're humble!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 7 things that can lead to pride in a life?
3. What is humility not?

Life Application

1. Look at the list of things that can lead to pride. Examine your life. Have any of these things led to pride in your own life? Write down these examples and record what the consequences were of such pride.
2. Can you also think of times in your life when you showed false humility? Write these down as well.
3. Memorize Proverbs 9:10.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Titus 1.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 16: Be Humble - Day 2

Renew the Mind

On Day 1, you saw three things that humility ISN'T. Today, you'll look at two more, and what it IS.

Fourth: Avoiding talking about ourselves or what God did does not equal humility

Some would say that all boasting is prideful and wrong. It may be, but not necessarily. Think of what this verse says, **Psalms 44:8 (NIV)** *In God we make our boast all day long ...* Further, Moses boasted about God's works, such as Israel's deliverance from Egypt.

The key is motive! In fact, to NOT boast about what God has done may be a sign of pride! Put another way, some stay silent because they're more concerned about what people think of them than what God thinks of them. This can be equal to elevating oneself, a subtle form of pride.

Telling what God has done – as long as you frame it that way – is one of the humblest things you can do and it glorifies God! It's wise to not make assumptions about another person's pride or humility based on their boast or silence. Why? Because you don't have the ability to judge someone's heart or motives!

Fifth: Self-confidence doesn't mean we're NOT humble

David, at his father's request, visited his older brothers who were in battle against the Philistines. When he arrived, he noticed that all the soldiers, including his brothers, were in a strange new battle position: hiding behind rocks in fear of Goliath!

So David asked, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" This infuriated his oldest brother Eliab, who snapped back at David: **1 Samuel 17:28 (NIV)** *Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.*

David shook off this verbal assault and rushed forward with confidence to slay the mighty giant with one stone! Was he arrogant, conceited, or proud? NO! In fact, often the truly humble are mistaken for being arrogant because they appear confident! And sometimes the cowardly are mistaken for being humble! But meekness isn't weakness. God had something to say about David, **Acts 13:22 (NIV)** *I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.*

What Humility IS

First: Humility is obedience

A truly humble person is willing to pay a price, as they follow their Master wherever he leads. Notice

the link between Jesus' humility and obedience, **Philippians 2:8 (NIV)** *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!*

God will give you vision for your future, showing you where to go and stirring up desire to go there. Immediately, you'll think of a logical pathway to get there. YET, at times God will lead you against logic.

For example, God could have led the Israelites from Egypt via a shorter way. Instead, it says, [Exodus 13:17 \(NIV\)](#) *When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt."*

True humility acknowledges God's wisdom even when you don't understand. Proverbs says, [Proverbs 3:5-6 \(NIV\)](#) *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.* You'll notice that those who are humble in the Bible are faithful to obey. This is true wisdom! Does this describe your own life as well?

Second: Humility is complete dependence on God

There's no need to be confused about what God values. As the prophet says, [Isaiah 66:2 \(CEV\)](#) *The people I treasure most are the humble— they depend only on me and tremble when I speak.*

Remember that David appeared to be arrogant, yet he knew that his ability came from God. For example, he says to king Saul, [1 Samuel 17:37 \(NIV\)](#) *The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.*

A key expression of such humble dependence is PRAYER. One of the greatest tests of whether a person is humble is their prayer life. How much insight from God do we forfeit simply because we do not ask God to show us unsearchable things? After all, God said through one of his prophets, [Jeremiah 33:3 \(NIV\)](#) *Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is humility not? What 2 things are shared about this today?
3. What 2 characteristics of humility are shared today?

Life Application

1. Consider your life— do you give credit to God for the things you have accomplished, including before others? If yes, keep going! If not, confess to the Lord that you've been taking credit, even indirectly through your silence. Then make a commitment to clearly tell others of God's work in and through you.
2. Review [Proverbs 9:10](#).

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Titus 2:1-8](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 16: Be Humble - Day 3

Renew the Mind

On Day 2, two things about humility were described. Today, four more characteristics are highlighted.

Third: Humility doesn't require recognition

When a follower of the Way refuses to demand recognition, they're walking in the footsteps of Jesus. It was said of him, **Philippians 2:5-7 (NIV)** *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

This doesn't mean that Jesus or his followers won't be recognized. Instead, those who are humble wait for the Father to decide the right time. Put another way, the humble are not so much hungry for recognition, but simply receive it as a "bonus blessing." This verse describes this in a brief, but clear way, **1 Peter 5:6 (NIV)** *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*

Fourth: Humility is being teachable

I think you can agree that the following verse is SO true! **Proverbs 13:10 (NIV)** *Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.* No one has enough time on earth to learn everything! Being teachable, therefore, is a HUGE part of being humble. The person who doesn't want to learn from others, no matter their age, is needing significant growth in humility.

You can ask yourself these questions as a test of your teachability:

1. How often do you seek advice from others?
2. When someone is giving you advice, do you consider that you might learn something?
3. Do you ever change your mind about something after listening to others?

Fifth: Humility puts others' interests first

As Paul says, **Philippians 2:3 (NIV)** *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.* What an attitude! This includes approaching life expecting that others might have better things to say or a better approach! It will mean being open to them, which can place us in a position to be willing to serve others. This is truly the Way of Jesus!

Paul himself was willing to pay a steep price in order to bring the gospel to others and to have them grow: in prison many times, five times he received 39 lashes, three times beaten with rods, once stoned and left for dead, three shipwrecks, often without food, in danger of bandits, and emperors (**2 Corinthians 11**). Who did Paul do this for? For others! That's humility.

Sixth: Humility quickly confesses sin to God and to others

Most of us are familiar with the following verse, [2 Chronicles 7:14 \(NIV\)](#) ... *if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.* Notice that humility is connected to both prayer and to repentance. And we would add that quick confession is also important.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 4 characteristics of humility are shared today?

Life Application

1. Look at the 4 characteristics of humility that were shared today. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you about how you are doing with each of these. Remember, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble!
2. Ask 1-2 people who know you well to provide you with feedback on these 4 characteristics. Ask them to be really honest! Of course, choose to not be offended by their honesty. Also, do not assume that their assessment is perfect – simply take what they said to Jesus.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Titus 2:9-15](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 16: Be Humble - Day 4

Renew the Mind

Why We Need Humility

First: God gives understanding to the humble

Many think that the key to understanding the Bible is in the strength of the mind. However, this can lead to intellectual pride. The mind DOES have a role to play – but not the main role! In fact, the key to properly understanding the Word of God is the heart, not the mind.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day studied the Old Testament more than anyone, but they couldn't grasp that they pointed to Jesus! So he challenged them, [John 5:39-40 \(NIV\)](#) *You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*

In fact, Jesus also explained the problem when he said, [Luke 10:21 \(NIV\)](#) *I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.* This is actually a very profound truth! Don't quickly skip over it! God even HIDES his wisdom so that the intellectually and religiously proud cannot find it with their natural talents.

Why? It's because the temptation of those who have much knowledge is to use it for their own purposes, rather than to love God and others. But God frustrates such efforts! Instead, what will open your MIND to what he says in the Bible is the humbling of your HEART. As it says in the Bible, [Psalm 25:9 \(NIV\)](#) *He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.* This is why Anna and Simeon recognized Jesus as the Messiah, when he was a child! The Holy Spirit revealed it to these humble seekers.

Second: God gives assignments to the humble

David was learning to depend solely on God early in his life. Two times God tested him, giving him the opportunity to kill his enemy Saul (see [1 Samuel 24:4, 26:12](#)). However, David wouldn't take matters into his own hands, a huge part of humility. David had even received a promise that he would be king! But he was humble enough to trust God's timing. And because David allowed this characteristic to be developed in his life, he was able to trust God with leading an entire nation. In fact, the greater the calling and the bigger the assignment from God; the greater the humility required.

Third: God is WITH the humble

In one sense, God is always present with his children. But in another sense, those who are humble will EXPERIENCE this presence more frequently. Isn't this something you want? Here's a passage that highlights this, [Isaiah 57:15 \(NIV\)](#) *For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite."* Many haven't felt what it's like to dwell in God's presence and to hear him continually. This place can only be entered through the door of humility!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Why do you need humility? What 3 things are noted in today's reading? Explain them in your own words.

Life Application

1. Can you think of a breakthrough in thinking that you have received in the past, upon humbling yourself? Write this down.
2. Go to biblegateway.com. Do a search using the words "humility" and "humble." Read what comes up. Don't rush this. Let God really impact you with the importance of humility.

Bible Reading

1. Please read [Titus 3](#).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Lesson 16: Be Humble - Day 5

Renew the Mind

How We Can Acquire Humility

First: Humble ourselves

Many followers of the Way wrongly assume that God will just automatically give them godly character, including humility. But often in the Bible there are commands to humble oneself! Have we made this choice before? Here's an example, [James 4:10 \(NIV\)](#) *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

So, where do you begin? First, you can seek to identify pride in your life. One test of this – do you resist those who lead you, at work, in the church, etc.? Do you avoid prayer? Do you treat people differently, only based on what they can do for you?

Are you judgmental? – this is a sign of pride. Do you draw attention to yourself? There can even be subtle ways where we do this! Are you slow to obey God? Second, you can confess any pride that you see in your life, arising out of the questions just noted. Third, you can pray for the desire and ability to become humble.

Finally, take intentional steps to live in the opposite spirit of pride. Each day will bring “crossroad” moments where you can choose to be humble or prideful. And if you fall, start over again, not with discouragement but with determination.

As author Andrew Murray said: Acts produce habits; habits breed dispositions (tendencies!); dispositions form the will – which is character!

Second: Receive God's training in humility

It would be nice if a person could simply obey God's command to humble themselves all the time, so that God wouldn't have to train them. But the truth is this – you and others will have blind spots. This is the nature of pride!

Take Moses as an example. He was chosen by God to do something incredibly significant – deliver God's people out of the land of Egypt. What a calling! And when he saw an Egyptian abusing a fellow Israelite, he was rightfully angered. *However*, he took matters into his own hands – that was not how God intended to deliver Israel. The result was that he spent the next 40 years learning humility in the wilderness!

It can be said: “In his own strength, Moses killed one Egyptian and delivered no one; but when he submitted himself to God's way, he killed no one and delivered an entire nation!” By the time God was ready to use Moses, he no longer wanted to be a deliverer, as he REALLY understood that only God could do it!

Joseph also experienced significant training times in the “desert.” It wasn't easy at all! May growing familiarity with the Bible not cause us to lose sight of the power of the stories and their lessons! God also sent Israel, an entire nation, into the literal desert for 40 years to humble them so that they would have childlike dependence and gratitude. Moses reminds them, [Deuteronomy 8:3 \(NIV\)](#) *He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*

In the “deserts of your life,” God will be teaching you to quit trusting in yourself (pride) and to trust the messages coming from him (humility). Your weaknesses will also provide an opportunity to learn this lesson, as Paul's did, [2 Corinthians](#)

12:7 (NIV2011) *To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.*

Special Note

1. Congratulations! You've now experienced the Grow Character lessons. Of course, growth as a follower of the Way is a lifelong journey! Praise God for being a good Shepherd. Invite him to continue to teach you.
2. Pray about what your next steps will be. Will you go over some of these lessons again? Do you need to work harder on memory verses? Don't lose anything you've gained and don't stop growing. Jesus is worth it all! Should you move on to another Way manual?

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are some questions you can ask yourself to notice pride in your life?
3. How does God train his children to be humble? Explain.

Life Application

1. Slowly and prayerfully go through the steps that are noted in the section "humble yourself."
2. Review (*Verses From Abide Lessons*) John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 6:9-13, (*Verses From Grow Character Lessons*) 2 Peter 1:5-9, Galatians 5:13, Psalm 119:133, John 8:32, Numbers 6:24-26, Matthew 6:33, John 16:33, 1 Peter 2:12, Hebrews 12:1-2, Proverbs 9:10.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Philemon 1:1-25.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Peer-to-Peer Ministry Tool

Part 1: Start the session

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide the session: "Holy Spirit, I ask you to guide this session, and to show person's name and I anything You want us to see or deal with."
2. Take authority over demonic spirits: "In Jesus' name I bind any spirit that has influence in person's name, and you will go when you are told. You are not to manifest yourself in this session."
3. If you get stuck, ask for help
4. If you are ministering to a peer, DO NOT counsel them. This is about Jesus ministering to them.

Part 2: Identify a struggle

Choose a presenting problem (struggle) from the categories below. You will use the ministry tools in the next step to work through the struggle.

Part 3: Ministry Steps

Use the Ministry Tools below to work through the struggle you identified in the previous step.

Legend:

Person: refers to the person receiving spiritual ministry.

Minister: refers to the person giving or guiding the spiritual ministry time

If, you use the Peer-to-peer Prayer Ministry tools below on yourself, then you are both the **Person** and the **Minister**

Dealing with Destructive Family Patterns

Break generational bondages and sins

How to discover generational sins which are affecting you:

- a. **First:** go carefully through the Generational Healing Inventory card that is below, noting any sinful patterns
- b. **Second:** transfer the sinful patterns to the appropriate places on the Family Tree that is below
- c. **Third:** listen in prayer throughout, asking the Spirit to reveal anything that you need to know

What To Do When We Discover Generational Sins:

1. **First:** You must forgive those from your family history, whose sins have impacted you.
2. **Second:** You must confess the sins of your ancestors.
 - o You can acknowledge the past sins of others. Jeremiah did this, [Jeremiah 14:20](#) (ESV) *We acknowledge our wickedness, O LORD, and the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against you.*
 - o David also confessed the sins of his fathers, aware that consequences for those sins could be experienced in his life, [Psalm 79:8](#) (NIV) *Do not hold against us the sins of the fathers; may your mercy come quickly to meet us, for we are in desperate need.*
3. **Third:** Repent of (turn from) any sin that you have committed.
 - o [Leviticus 26:40,42,45](#) (ESV) *But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me...then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land... I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD.*
4. **Fourth:** Break the generational curse.
5. **Fifth:** Take authority over any spirit that may have gained a foothold (if applicable).

Steps for Godly Character

19th Century Proverb

We sow a thought and reap an act;
We sow an act and reap a habit;
We sow a habit and reap a character;
We sow a character and reap a destiny.

Step 1: Choose a character trait

One way to choose a character is to note a disturbing and ongoing patterns in your life. Are you continually angry? Easily hurt or offended? Do you habitually procrastinate? Are you often sullen?

Another way to do this is to ask the Spirit to point something He wishes to grow in you.

Step 2: Pray daily for that trait

Some say, "Don't ever pray for patience, because you will be sure to invite tests." Well, of course, you will – you can't grow without repeatedly doing it over and over again. If you wish to learn to drive a car or fly a plane, you can't do that without repeating the skills over and over until they become natural to you – the same is true of growing godly character! God will surely answer this prayer, by coming to guide the right circumstances and assist you in the process. ([Phil 1:9-11](#))

Step 3: Renew your mind by meditating on eternity

[Colossians 3:1-4 \(NIV\)](#) Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Step 4: Listen in prayer for practical steps

If you ask the Holy Spirit, he may give you a couple of practical steps that will be helpful in working through this. ([Jam 1:5](#))

Step 5: Forgive and ask forgiveness

When you hold bitterness and offense, the enemy gets a foothold in your life, preventing you from becoming free from your bondage. You must forgive. However, if you are working to remove negative traits such as being rude, or easily angered, or keeping record of wrongs, you will probably need to ask forgiveness from those you have offended, so you can grow. ([Mt 5:23-24](#))

Step 6: Receive inner healing, deliverance & freedom from bondage

Sometimes the character trait cannot be changed because you need inner healing, or you need to be delivered from demonic oppression, or you need to break a soul tie, curse, or generational bondage that you have inherited in your family line.

Step 7: Ask someone to pray for you

Tell someone you can trust about your struggle and ask them to pray for you. ([Jam 5:16](#))

Step 8: Be filled with the Holy Spirit

We cannot grow godly character if the Spirit of Christ isn't powerfully working in us. [2 Peter 1:3](#) (NIV) 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. And that's why we need the filling of the Spirit ([Eph 5:18](#))

Step 9: Learn about and memorize Scripture for your trait

Use a concordance to look up Scriptures about the trait you are working on ([Rom 12:2](#)). He will give you not only empowerment for this, but also the desire to grow ([Phil 2:12-13](#)). Memorize key verses to remind you to pray and so the Spirit can continue to teach you about this, or even give you promises.

Here are some verses to get you started!

Step 10: Keep in step with the Spirit (stop & choose correctly)

When you pray to grow in a particular area of your character, the Holy Spirit is more than happy to assist you in this. He wants to help you! So, first He sets up tests so you may begin to exercise the new patterns of character growth – that's the only way you can establish a new character trait ([Jam 1:2-3](#)).

The tests are designed to cause you to repeat the proper behavioral responses, until your responses become part of your disposition. Though the test may blindside you, what happens next, is incredible. Have you ever noticed that when you make a resolution to change in some kind of behavior, that when the next test comes, time almost seems to freeze for a few moments?

A battle within you ensues, as you weigh your resolution, on the one hand, with how you feel like responding, on the other. At this point STOP – DON'T ACT. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you. Let's just say that it takes 10 seconds before you choose correctly and act out properly. VICTORY! That one correct choice equals one **RIGHTEOUS ACT**. You feel wonderful! You did the right thing!

However, it isn't part of your character at this point. So, another test comes along: same time freeze; same internal battle; and once again you choose correctly – maybe this time it only took 9 seconds for you to choose properly. A third test comes along – this time it only took 8 seconds; then 7 seconds; then 6, 5, 4 or 3 seconds.

Each deliberate act is becoming a little bit easier to choose. There is still a pause, a bit of a battle, and a conscious choice. But at this point, you already know that when the next test comes you will make the right choice. It's becoming a **HABIT!**