BE A MAN

MEN'S BIBLE STUDY

8 CHARACTERISTICS OF A GODLY MAN



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INTRODUCTION

Today, we have too many males who don't understand what it really means to be a man. The enemy has so infiltrated our society that being masculine or a real man is considered by many to be a bad thing. By masculine, I am not talking of an overbearing tyrant, but rather a man who properly understands the role that God has given him to lead in both his home and in society.

As Christian men, we need to be examples to those around us in how we live our lives. The Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:2, "You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men;."[1] An epistle is simply a written letter. You and I are written letters that people around us read every time we encounter them. If that's the case, may I ask you, "What is it that people are reading from your life?" Is it something that you would like published for all to read or instead, a letter that you'd rather hide and hope that no one reads?

The great news is that none of our letters are so bad that God can't change them, but it takes grace. That grace comes from God, but because of the grace He gives us, He expects some work on our part. No, I am not presenting a works-based gospel. We are all saved only by the blood of Jesus and His finished work on the cross, but because we are saved, we do good works. The works don't save, but God gives us the grace to discipline our lives. Discipline, a word we all love. I heard one person say, "We all love the results of discipline, just not the effort or the actual work of discipline." But without discipline and work on our part, we will never really become the mature men of God that He wants us to be.

During this "Be a Man" discipleship series, I want to share with you eight characteristics from God's word that exemplify a Godly Man. These are taken out of 2 Peter 1:5-9, which says:

> [5] But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, [6] to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, [7] to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. [8] For if these things are yours and abound, *you* will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. [9] For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.[2]

There are 8 characteristics or disciplines that Peter mentions here–

1. Faith
2. Virtue
3. Knowledge
4. Self-control
5. Perseverance
6. Godliness
7. Brotherly Kindness

8. Love

These are the characteristics that we'll both discuss and work on putting into practice over these next several months. Peter says that if these characteristics live in you then, "*you* will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." However, he says if they aren't in you, that you are "shortsighted, even to blindness and have forgotten" that you were cleansed from your old sins. Peter obviously thought these disciplines were vital to the life of a believer.

Of course, this is not an exhaustive list of Godly characteristics, but they're a beginning to living a more God centered & Christ like manhood in front of those around you. Also, just because there are 8 characteristics, this does not mean this study will only be 8 Lessons, but rather some of these disciplines will entail a couple lessons each. As we start this journey to become the men, husbands, fathers & grandfathers that God has called us to be, I encourage you to find an accountability partner to help hold you accountable for putting these disciplines into action in your life.

Pursuing Christ,

Pastor Mike

CHARACTERISTIC ONE: FAITH
Lesson 1: Our Foundation of Faith

What is Faith? Faith is double faceted. It's like a coin that has two sides. There is firstly our faith, meaning the foundation of what we believe. Like when someone asks the question, "What is your faith?" And we respond by saying, "I'm a Christian." It's the basis or foundation on which all our other beliefs and values are established and that we endeavor by the power of the Holy Spirit to follow.

Secondly, faith is trusting & believing God for an answer to prayer without seeing the evidence of it. It's a belief and hope that God will come through in a situation, even when it seems impossible. The writer of Hebrews defines this aspect of faith in Hebrews Ch. 11 when he says in verses 1-3:

> [1] Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.
> [2] For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony. [3] By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.[3]

In this Lesson, we will focus on the first aspect of faith- our Foundation of Faith.

The construction of every building, whether a home or a skyscraper starts with the foundation. Why? Because it's the most important step and without a solid foundation, the weight of the building itself will cause it to be unstable and eventually crumble to the ground. The same is true in our lives. Our faith must be built on Jesus and His words, they alone are that rock solid foundation. Jesus himself explains this in Matthew 7:24-27 when He says:

> [24] "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: [25] and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.
> [26] "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: [27] and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."[4]

In this parable, Jesus talks about two men, one wise and one foolish. As we look at these two men what was the difference? Jesus explains that they both heard the same words that He spoke, they both had the same opportunity to build in the right place, the only difference was one chose to obey His words while the other didn't. Jesus said the only distinction between a wise man who builds his house on a solid rock foundation and a foolish man who builds on a weak sandy foundation is whether they choose to not only hear His words but also obey them. Jesus gives every one of us the same

opportunity to build the house of our lives on rock or sand, it all depends on your choices to obey His words or not. The question is, are you building your life on Jesus?

Your foundation of faith to follow Christ is not just in the moment of salvation, which is a completely free gift, but also in the decisions you make to follow Him every day. The foundation of a home is not just made up of a footer but also the blocks that are laid down individually and cemented together. In the same way, we lay the blocks to the foundation of our faith by the daily choices we make to obey God's Word and put Christ first in all our decisions. It's also essential to remember that even though we may have laid a good foundation, we must periodically check it. For just like in the natural a home settles and may show through in cracks in the walls, sometimes we can allow our spiritual foundation to become settled (comfortable), and cracks begin to appear in the walls of our life. Therefore, it's important to consistently reexamine our lives to ensure we are continuing to build it on Jesus alone and His Word.

So, if it's critical to build our lives on the right foundation, which Jesus says is obeying His words, how can we do that if we don't know His words? Simply put, we can't. This is why having a daily quiet time with the Lord is vital to our spiritual growth. You may be unfamiliar with the term "quiet time" but let me explain. A daily quiet time with the Lord is a preset, intentional time every day that you get away from any distractions to a quiet place that you have fellowship with the Father in prayer, meditation and reading the Bible. The whole purpose is to help you grow more intimate in your relationship with God and to help you grow spiritually.

I can tell you from personal experience, that my relationship with the Lord and my knowledge and understanding of His word grew tremendously when I implemented this practice in my life soon after I gave my heart to the Lord at 19 years old. For me, I started out with 10-15 minutes of quiet time, but it soon grew to over 30 minutes and now it is not uncommon for me to spend an hour or two in quiet time with the Lord. I count it as the most important part of my daily routine and I believe you will too, if you implement this fundamental discipline in your daily life.

Lesson 1 Questions

1. What does is it mean to have a Foundation of Faith in your life?

2. What did Jesus say was the only difference between the wise man and the foolish man in Matthew 7:24-27?

3. We have all made bad choices in life, even after becoming a Christian, however God is in the business of fixing messed up “blocks” in our lives. What is a “block” in your life that you need the Lord to help you repair?

4. Why is it important to have your own daily Quiet Time with the Lord? What are some practical ways to implement this practice into your daily life?

CHARACTERISTIC ONE: FAITH
Lesson 2: Our Faith in Action: Part 1

In our previous lesson, we talked about the two aspects of faith. We elaborated on the importance of our foundation of faith, that it must be built upon Christ and His Words alone. In this lesson, we will discuss our faith in action. Our faith in action can also be broken down into two parts. First, how do we walk out our faith in our daily lives and second, how do we have faith to believe God in situations that seem impossible. Today, we'll discuss the first.

Faith is useless unless we put action behind it. One can say all day that they're a Christian, but if the fruit of the Spirit is not being shown in their lives by their actions it means nothing. Jesus said in Matthew 7:16-20:

> 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.[5]

Fruit on a natural tree is something you can see, touch and taste, as well as something that brings nourishment to our physical bodies. In the life of a person, fruit is their character that is reflected in their works or actions. When people come around you and I, what fruit are they able to pull from our lives? Do they see, touch and taste "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."?[6] If not, why? I think many believers, especially in this younger generation, have bought into the lie that says, "I'm saved, so it doesn't really matter how I talk, or act or what I do, because Jesus already paid the price for my sin," Basically, the thought is you can do whatever you want as long as you prayed a prayer. It's what is termed the hyper-grace movement. In other words, it teaches that God's grace is already there for us, therefore we can live how we want and still be blessed and make it into heaven.

However, there are major problems with this line of reasoning. First, it flies in the face of how Jesus, the Apostles and the early believers lived as examples for us to follow. Second, it goes against the heart and message of the teachings of Jesus and the writings of the New Testament authors. The Apostle Paul when confronting this very line of reasoning in the early church said in Romans 6:1-3:

> 1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?
> 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.[7]

In this passage, Paul is addressing the same hyper grace issue that the church has faced throughout her existence. He is plainly saying here that although we have grace applied to our lives through Christ, we shouldn't abuse it but rather, walk in a new way. It's the way of faith combined with our actions or works.

James explains this in writing to believers in James 2 when he says:

> 14 What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not
> have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of
> daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and
> filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what
> *does it* profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.
> 18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith
> without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that
> there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! 20 But do
> you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not
> Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?
> 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith
> was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "*Abraham*
> *believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness*." And he was called
> the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by
> faith only.[8]

Once again, our works do not save us, only our faith in what Jesus did on the cross can. However, because we are saved, we do good works. To put it another way, works or actions in our life are an outflow of our salvation and our relationship with the Father. I want to encourage you not to just say you're a Christian, but to walk your faith out before others as Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."[9]

Lesson 2 Questions

1. What does is it mean to live out your faith?

2. Since Jesus saved us by His grace, is it okay to continue to make excuses for sin and ungodly actions in our life?

3. When people are around you, what kind of fruit are they receiving from your life?

4. What is the main area that you are struggling with right now that you need the Holy Spirit to help you overcome?

CHARACTERISTIC ONE: FAITH
Lesson 3: Our Faith in Action: Part 2

How do we respond when things aren't going our way? Maybe it's a sudden health issue, a financial crisis, or a dream the Lord has spoken to you that seems impossible. The question is, are we going to believe God and His Word when we face those seemingly insurmountable mountains or are we going to succumb to the doubtful voices around us or even in our own mind?

This is where our faith comes into play, because the fact is, our faith isn't even necessary unless there is something pressing it into action. Think about it, unless we are faced with a problem then our faith is unnecessary. Even the foundation of our faith, belief in Christ, first had to start with a problem. The problem was our sin, which separated us from a relationship with the Father. But, by repenting and having faith in Jesus and what He did for us on the cross, we were saved.

This same concept applies when we are facing tribulations in our own life as believers, there will be problems, but with God there is always a solution if we act in faith. I am not suggesting that God's solution is whatever you want it to be or even speak it to be. But you can be sure of this, nothing will happen if we don't at least have faith that believes that the God of the impossible can come through. Jesus put it this way when addressing the father whose young boy was possessed by a demon in Mark 9:23, "…"If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."[10] We must believe! Believing is our faith put into action.

The writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 11:1-3, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible."[11] In other words, he starts by showing us that even though we can't see faith, it is real because of belief.

He continues by saying in verses 4-6:

> 4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. 5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, *"and was not found, because God had taken him"*; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. 6 But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him,* for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.[12]

He states that, "without faith it is *impossible to please"* God, then throughout the rest of chapter 11, he tells of the testimonies of the patriarchs of faith that preceded us in the Hall of Faith. Before we go any further in this lesson, read Hebrews 11:7-39:

7 By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly
fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned
the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.
8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he
would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was
going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling
in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he
waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.
11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a
child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had
promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born *as
many* as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by
the seashore.
13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them
afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were
strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare
plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that
country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to
return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God
is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.
17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had
received the promises offered up his only begotten *son,* 18 of whom it was said,
"In Isaac your seed shall be called," 19 concluding that God *was* able to raise *him*
up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.
20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.
21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and
worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff.
22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the
children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.
23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents,
because they saw *he was* a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's
command.
24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of
Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God
than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ
greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.
27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as
seeing Him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of
blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.
29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry *land, whereas* the
Egyptians, attempting *to do* so, were drowned.30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell
down after they were encircled for seven days. 31 By faith the harlot Rahab did
not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with
peace.
32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and
Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also *of* David and Samuel and the prophets:

> [33] who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, [34] quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. [35] Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. [36] Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. [37] They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—[38] of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in* dens and caves of the earth.
> [39] And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, [40] God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.[13]

Every one of these testimonies is an example to us of faith in action, believing God before we see the results of our faith. I remember one personal story from my own life that I have shared many times. Over 20 Years ago, about 3 years into pastoring FaithHouse Church I wasn't making very much of a salary while pastoring full time. My wife was running our small Christian school and was making less than anyone else on staff even though she was their leader, but it's what we felt the Lord called us to do, so things were very tight on our budget. One month there was too much month at the end of the money, and we didn't know how we were going to pay our rent and another bill that was due the very next day. My wife and I were pretty stressed out about it, because we believe in paying our bills, but we were at a crossroad, were we going to believe the situation or have faith and trust God? Also, we never even hinted to anyone else about our situation, only God knew.

About seven o'clock that evening I told my wife I was going out to the church to pray about our situation, so I did. I went back home almost three hours later, and she was sitting on the coach with our youngest son who was still a baby. I told her that I had peace about the situation and that we just needed to believe God for a miracle, so we prayed a simple prayer of trust. We finished praying and I told her to I would put Aaron in his crib. As soon as I stood up and started across the living room our doorbell rang. It was 10 o'clock in the evening on a Tuesday night and I wondered, "Who in the world would be ringing our doorbell at this time in the evening?" I looked through the window, and it was a couple from our church. I immediately thought, "Oh know, what's wrong?" I preceded to open the door and asked if everything was okay and they reassured me that everything was fine and asked if they could come in. When they came in, they looked at both of us and said, "The Lord has been speaking to us to do something for a couple days, and we want to be obedient. Here this is for you all." As they handed me an envelope.

Mary and I just looked at each other, then back at them and started to cry as we explained to them that we had just finished praying about this situation just one minute before they rang the doorbell. After we thanked them and talked for a few minutes, and

cried some more, we hugged them, and they left. When I opened the envelope, they had given us $1,000, almost exactly what we needed to pay our rent and another bill that was due the next day. God is so faithful, we just need to have faith and believe.

Maybe there's a mountain that you're facing today. It doesn't matter what it is, God sees it. He is the God of the impossible. No matter what the enemy or anyone else says to the contrary, have faith and believe God and His Word!! Remember, "all things are possible to him who believes."[14]

Lesson 3 Questions

1. Do we even need an active faith if everything is going well? What do problems present us with?

2. What is "faith in action" as described in Hebrews 11:1-3?

3. Does having faith guarantee that you'll have exactly what you pray for?

4. What is a situation you're going through now that looks impossible that you need to have faith for?

CHARACTERISTIC ONE: FAITH
Lesson 4: Our Faith at Home

What is your life like at home? Do you portray one thing at church or in front of others, but you don't follow through with that at home in front of the ones that matter most? This doesn't mean that we are perfect or that we don't make mistakes, but do we make excuses for our behaviors that we would never do in front of others. The reality is God sees us all the time and in your home is where it matters most.

As husbands, we are called to lovingly lead our wives in the things of God and be a voice of reason when emotions are running high or as my wife and I like to call them, "moments of intense fellowship." Unfortunately, I didn't always get this right, especially in our early years of marriage. The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 5:25-29:

> [25] Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, [26] that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, [27] that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. [28] So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. [29] For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. [15]

Think about that, Jesus was God in the flesh, He held all authority, but He loved us so much that He gave Himself for us. Are we doing that with our wives? Are we laying down what we want or our preferences for her. Now of course I'm talking about personal preferences, not Biblical issues, which we need to stand strong on. One thing I found out about myself was that I was so concerned about being right and proving to her that I was, that I didn't take time to really listen to her point of view. That wasn't real love. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 says , "**4** Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, **5** does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, **6** does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; **7** bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. [16]

As true men of God, we need to be able to differentiate, by the Holy Spirit, the things that are vitally important and stand on those things without compromise, while also laying down some of our preferences to those of our wives. Of course this goes both ways, a godly wife should not always be trying to get her way either. It's a godly balancing act of compromise on both parts. However, I believe it's the man's responsibility to initiate by sowing these acts of love and compromise to his wife's wants

and needs. For a woman, one of her biggest needs is for her husband to be a godly example for their children.

As fathers, we are called to teach our children the Word of God and lead them by living out a Godly life in front of them. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 says:

> "[6] And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. [7] You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. [8] You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. [9] You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.[17]

Further, Ephesians 6:4 states, "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."[18] My responsibility to my children as they were growing up was to love and care for them, but even more importantly to teach them the things of God, not just by my words, but by my example. Was I living at home what I preached? I can honestly say that for the most part, I did. Was I perfect? By no means, there were definitely times that I blew it with Mary and the kids. Whether it was with my attitude, my anger or my words. However, when I did blow it, I always did my best to make it right with them.

I have found that the failing of many men is their pride. We feel we are right, and we very well may be, however our words and attitude may be completely wrong. This is what we need to repent of, especially with our family. The key is that when we do make a mistake, we need to own up to it and ask our wife and children to forgive us and then endeavor by the power of the Holy Spirit to not continue in that pattern of behavior. To me the key to being a real man of God is owning up to our failures by repenting first to the Lord and then to those we've hurt, then making the necessary changes not to continue in that behavior.

Lesson 4 Questions

1. Why is it so important to not just "preach" the Word to your wife and children, but to live it front of them?

2. In what ways can we love our wives as Christ loved the Church?

3. In what ways can you be an example to your Children of following Christ?

4. Is there anything you need get right with your Wife or Children that you have not done yet? If so, what is it?

CHARACTERISTIC TWO: VIRTUE
Lesson 5: Moral Goodness

Over the next couple of lessons, we will discuss the second characteristic that Peter tells us to add to our faith, virtue. Virtue isn't a word that's spoken very much in modern society and unfortunately, it's for good reason. There are many that have forgotten the importance of adding this trait to their lives. The word translated *virtue* here is the Greek word ἀρετῆς (aretēs) and it simply means moral goodness & excellence. In other words, the good moral fiber and character of a person. Does one make the right moral choices regardless of who they are around or even if no one is watching? Virtue is about making Godly choices because deep down we know it's the right thing to do, even if making that choice will cost us.

This characteristic is vital for the life of a believer, particularly for men, because we're to be examples of moral goodness and excellence to those around us, whether at home in front of our family or out in the public arena. Every day we're given the opportunity to make right or wrong choices, but I believe the decision to make the right choice begins long before we come to the moment of choice. Pressure only pulls out what's already inside of us or as Jesus points out in Luke 6:43-45 when He says:

> 43 For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. 44 For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. 45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.[19]

Our immediate choices are a result of things that we've previously allowed to be formed in our heart, and they will ultimately come forth when the pressure mounts, whether good or bad. For example, what comes out when you squeeze a lemon? Not apple or orange juice, but lemon juice, the pressure is only bringing out what's already inside of it.

The problem is, all of us are born with a tendency towards wrong moral decisions, motives or attitudes because we're born in sin. Consequently, our immediate response when pressed with a moral decision is to do what comes naturally, to sin and make the wrong choice. Think about a time when you were a child and you were caught doing something wrong. Your immediate response was probably to deny it, even though you knew you were guilty because you knew there were consequences if you told the truth. It's that inward nature of denial that comes from sin. When we decide to follow Christ, we are completely freed and cleansed from sin spiritually, but it doesn't mean that our

thinking or deep-rooted convictions or lack thereof change immediately. Put another way, salvation is immediate, but sanctification is a process. It's a process of continually exchanging our thinking for God's thinking, our morals for His morals, our desires for His desires and our actions for His actions. The only way to do this by way of transformation as Paul says in Romans 12:1-2 when he says:

> [1] I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.
> [2] And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.[20]

The process is submitting ourselves to God by listening to the Holy Spirit, not conforming ourselves to the patterns or actions of the world, but being transformed by renewing our minds. They only way I know to renew one's mind is through the reading and preaching of God's Word and then by the power of the Holy Spirit applying what we've learned to our lives. This is the only way that we become Christ like and start to portray the virtuous life that Jesus lived in our own lives. Is it easy? Hardly! It takes work, commitment and tenacity, because there are going to be things that you won't get right the first time, sometimes the second time and even sometimes more, the key, as we say in our Recovery Alive program, is to *Keep Not Quitting*! Immediately repent and start a new day making Godly choices.

I want to encourage those of you that have been on this walk with Christ for a long time that you continue to add moral goodness or godly choices to your life. If you're just starting on this journey with Jesus, I encourage you to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you areas in your life in which you've struggled to have good moral fortitude and for Him to help you in your next challenge to make the right choice. I can tell you from experience, He will convict you but also encourage and give you the power to make the right moral decisions.

Lesson 5 Questions

1. What is virtue and why is it important?

2. What can we practically do to “exchange our thinking for God’s thinking, our morals for His morals, our desires for His desires and our actions for His actions”?

3. What is an area of your life that you’ve struggled to make the morally good or Godly choice?

4. What can you do to help you make the right choices under pressure in the future?

CHARACTERISTIC TWO: VIRTUE
Lesson 6: Living a Life of Excellence

In our last lesson we talked about the first aspect of virtue, moral goodness, in this one we will discuss the second part of virtue, excellence. When I speak of excellence, I am not talking about perfectionism, but rather having an attitude and spirit of excellence in everything one does. Merrium-Webster's dictionary defines excellence as, "Superior, very good of its kind: eminently good: First Class."[21] In other words, top notch. Unfortunately, there are many people, including some Christians, that lack this important characteristic, they would rather get along by doing the bare minimum. However, as followers of Christ and according to examples in God's Word, we aren't afforded the option to just skate by.

The Apostle Paul tells in Colossians 3:23-24, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ."[22] Whatever you do! Whether on the job, at school, at home, at church, whatever and for whoever, do it with all your heart like you're doing it for the Lord. In other words, everything that you do, do it with a spirit of excellence. From the smallest most insignificant job to the most complex, do it with excellence. I remember when I served as a Dental Technician in the US Navy, it would burn me up when I would hear other sailors say, "That's good enough for government work!" What?! Not for me! From swabbing or buffing decks to finishing a crown that would spend years in someone's mouth, I tried to do everything with excellence, because I knew the Lord was always watching.

When I think of excellence, my mind always goes back to two Patriarchs, Joseph & Daniel. Joseph was one of the younger sons of Jacob, as well as very favored by his father. His brothers became jealous of him, mocked his dreams and sold him into slavery. He was taken to Egypt and ended up in Potipher's house. But Joseph exuded the characteristic of virtue. He was both morally good and excellent, therefore God's favor was on his life and because of this, his master's house prospered. Potipher then promoted him to the become the overseer of his home & all his affairs. Amid this, Potipher's wife tried to seduce Joseph into sleeping with her. Let's read this portion of the story in Genesis 39:7-11:

> 7 And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. 9 *There is* no one greater in this house than I,

> nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"
> [10] So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her *or* to be with her.[23]

Potipher's wife eventually falsely accused Joseph of rape, and he was thrown into prison. Despite this, Joseph excelled even in prison, to the point that the chief jailer put him over all the prisoners and the Lord made whatever Joseph did to prosper. After many years, Joseph was released from prison and put into second in command of all of Egypt and God used him to prepare Egypt for a great famine and save many people, including his own father and the brothers that had earlier betrayed him. I believe it all came from Joseph putting God first and keeping a spirit of excellence in whatever circumstance he found himself in.

Like Joseph, Daniel found himself in captivity. Also, like Joseph, he excelled in everything that he put his hand to. After many years and a new king, Daniel's peers became jealous of him because the King was about to set him over the entire kingdom. Let's pick up the story in Daniel 6:1-5:

> [1] It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; [2] and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. [3] Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an ***excellent spirit was in him***; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm. [4] So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. [5] Then these men said, "We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God."[24]

Daniel's peers played to the king's pride and deceptively got him to sign a decree that proclaimed if anyone bowed to anyone other than the king himself, they would cast into a den of lions. But because of his faith and love for God, as well as his excellent spirit, Daniel defied the decree and continued to bow and pray to the God of heaven. As a result, he was thrown into the lion's den. However, God delivered Daniel and those that accused him, including their families were thrown into the lion's den and were destroyed. Daniel was restored to his position, all because he trusted God and had an excellent spirit.

This is same spirit that I believe God wants us to have as believers, especially as men who are leaders, husbands, fathers and grandfathers. But I believe it starts with our attitude. Not an attitude of pride because we do things with excellence, but one of

humility, because we are given the opportunity to be an example of excellence for those around us to follow. I want to encourage you to examine your heart and ask the Lord, what areas you need to have more of an excellent spirit in and then regardless of the task, great or small to approach it wholeheartedly as you are doing it for the Lord, because ultimately, you are.

Lesson 6 Questions

1. What is excellence and why is it important?

2. Why is it important to live a life of excellence?

3. What is an example of being excellent even when no one else is looking?

4. What's an area of your life that you know you need to be more excellent in?

CHARACTERISTIC THREE: KNOWLEDGE
Lesson 7: The Good & the Bad

In this lesson we are moving onto the next characteristic that Peter tells us to add to our lives, knowledge. For too many years, knowledge has been deemed as a carnal or bad thing within the church. Yes, our knowledge can sometimes get in the way by becoming a roadblock to believing in the supernatural, but that's only when we put natural knowledge above God and His Word. However, God created us with a brain and the ability to gain wisdom and the ability to use it in the right way. Proverbs 18:15 says, "The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge."[25] We need to understand that Satan is not dumb and as believers we need to fill our minds with knowledge so that we can stand against all the schemes that he throws at us. The key is what kind of knowledge, whether good or bad, do we fill our minds with and how do we use it.

Before we go any further, we must differentiate between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is simply knowing the facts about something, but wisdom is adding understanding to that knowledge and applying it correctly to our lives or a particular situation. In Proverbs 4:5-9 Solomon says:

> [5]Get wisdom! Get understanding!
> Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.
> [6] Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you;
> Love her, and she will keep you.
> [7] Wisdom *is* the principal thing;
> *Therefore* get wisdom.
> And in all your getting, get understanding.
> [8] Exalt her, and she will promote you;
> She will bring you honor, when you embrace her.
> [9] She will place on your head an ornament of grace;
> A crown of glory she will deliver to you."[26]

In other words, don't just seek knowledge, but more importantly seek understanding so that you can use it accordingly.

An important thing to note is that there is both good and bad knowledge. In essence, all good knowledge comes from God, is pure and leads us to make righteous decisions, whereas all bad knowledge comes from the enemy and leads us to make unholy choices. As I said the devil is not dumb. Many times, he takes a truth and twists it just enough that it still looks somewhat truthful, however it's clothed in deception. He even uses intelligent people, who have no fear of God to pervert Biblical truths to make things that are explicitly wrong according to God's Word, appear to be both normal and natural. However, good and true knowledge only comes from having a healthy fear of

God and his Word. Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction."[27] Just because someone can talk intelligently, has a degree or some letters after their last name, it doesn't mean they have wisdom. As I have often stated, "There are many educated fools." Psalm 14:1 states, "The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."[28] Again, education and knowledge alone don't make one wise, it's having a healthy fear of God.

If we know that good knowledge only comes from God, it makes sense that we learn what God says. Obviously, the only way to do that is by reading and studying His Word. When the Apostle Paul was writing to his protégé, Timothy, he warned him of the coming days by saying in 2 Timothy 3:13-16:

> 13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them,* 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
> 16 All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.[29]

Several verses later he says that men will not endure sound teaching but instead will turn from the truth and listen to people who will tell them whatever makes them feel good. This has been going on for the past two thousand years and it's getting worse as time goes on. That's why it's imperative that we as men of God study to gain the knowledge and wisdom to stand against false teachers and false teachings. But how can we know something is false, unless we know the truth? It is common practice when training bank tellers how to tell the difference between real money and counterfeit money, that they spend hours training and feeling real money, that way when they feel something different, they automatically can tell something is wrong. In the same way, as we gain more knowledge and wisdom about the truth of God's Word, we can immediately discern when something is false.

For us to know the truth, we must put the truth in our brain. It doesn't just magically appear with no effort of our own. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."[30] The only way to transform our mind is by putting something new into it. New knowledge. New wisdom. New understanding. Paul also says in Philippians 4:8:

> Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.[31]

What are you putting into your mind? As the old saying goes, “Garbage in, Garbage out.” If we want to be gaining God’s knowledge, then we need to be filling our minds with God things. I want to encourage you to truly invest in, not only reading, but also studying God’s Word, then you will be able to stand firm against all the lies that the enemy has deceived so many people with these days.

Lesson 7 Questions

1. What’s the difference between knowledge and wisdom?

2. Where does true knowledge begin and why?

3. How do we learn to tell the difference between true and false doctrine?

4. In what ways can you personally improve your knowledge of God?

5. What is it to think on the right things and why is it important? What are some things that you may need to stop listening to?

CHARACTERISTIC THREE: KNOWLEDGE
Lesson 8: Increasing Your Knowledge of God

In our last lesson we learned about good and bad knowledge, and we touched on the importance of gaining good knowledge. In this lesson we will continue with increasing our knowledge of God. All of us learn things from our childhood on up through adulthood from our parents, teachers, friends and those around us. Our minds are like recorders that take in information that becomes a part of who we are and in turn determines how we think, act and make decisions.

Unfortunately, for many of us, we were taught from a very carnal or worldly perspective and therefore think and respond according to what we've learned. Even being raised in a Christian home by loving, godly parents doesn't leave us immune to wrong thinking because no parent is perfect, even the most well-intentioned ones. Therefore, it's essential that whether one is a new Christian or one that has been serving the Lord for many years that we are continually filling our minds with God's Word so that we can respond to challenges the way God instructs us to and not how we learned growing up.

In Romans 12:1-2, the Apostle Paul says:

> Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. [32]

What is Paul saying here? He is talking about presenting every part of ourselves to the Lord– spirit, soul & body. He was reinforcing what Jesus said in Matthew 22:36-37, when questioned by one of the Pharisees as to what the greatest commandment was, when He responded by saying, "…YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." [33] Paul, as well is saying that we worship God by presenting all our being to Him, including our minds. However, he goes one step further by pointing out that our minds by nature are corrupt and carnal or as he puts it "conformed to this world". In other words, the devil has so conformed our mind to this world and continues to try to, that the only way to be transformed is by renewing our minds and it is then that we will know and prove what God's good, acceptable and perfect will are.

The question then is, "How do we renew our minds?" The only reasonable answer is that we need to put new thoughts into our mind. We need to put the thoughts of God into our heart and mind by gaining knowledge of Him from His Word. This is why

reading, studying and memorizing the Bible is so important, it transforms our thinking from our old carnal nature into thinking the thoughts of God and what He says about us. So, let's look at the different ways we can get the Word of God into our hearts and minds to transform our thinking.

First, we get God's Word into our heart and mind by the preaching of the Word. This is why it's important to be a part of a local Church body where you can listen to a Pastor, who has committed themselves to studying God's Word and expounds upon it for our better understanding. This is how Jesus taught the Word to his followers and those who gathered around Him. Most Christians lives were first touched and transformed by the Gospel through the power of the preaching of God's Word.

Second, we get God's Word into our heart and mind by reading and studying the Bible. Aren't reading and studying the same? No, they're not. You can read without studying, but you can't really study without reading. I believe it's important to do both. For example, I have a systematic Bible reading plan that I read every day to start my day off right and get me in a proper mindset. But I'm just reading it. Yes, the Holy Spirit highlights certain verses and speaks to my heart through it, but I'm not studying it. Studying the Word, is going deeper, by looking up definitions of words in a passage or verse, cross referencing with other Scriptures, finding out the historical context or even why the author wrote the original book/letter.

Finally, we get God's Word into our heart and mind by memorizing it. Psalm 119:11 says, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You."[34] Jesus said in John 14:25-26, "[25] "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. [26] But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."[35] I can't tell you the number of times as a young man just starting out on my Christian walk and even in the years since that memorizing Scripture helped me overcome temptation or kept me from making a stupid choice in my life. But how do you make this a practice? Today there are apps for memorizing scripture, but I've found the easiest way is to get some index cards and write a verse or verses that you feel the Holy Spirit is wanting you to memorize and carry it with you. Then several times a day for a whole week, keep reviewing it until you feel confident that you've "recorded" it in your mind.

As I mentioned earlier, our minds are like recorders. It's our responsibility as men of God to do as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 when he says:

> For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, [36]

We are called to take every carnal thought captive and renew it with the thoughts of Christ and His Word. I want to encourage you to be faithful in your church attendance where you can hear the Word preached, read and study the Bible and finally, memorize Scripture so that you can stand when you are tempted.

Lesson 8 Questions

1. Why do we by nature think the way we think?

2. What is the difference between being “conformed to this world” and being “transformed by the renewing of our mind”?

3. What 3 ways can we fill our heart and mind with God’s Word?

4. Why is it important to memorize Scripture?

CHARACTERISTIC FOUR: SELF-CONTROL

Lesson 9: Am I the Only Who Struggles

2 Peter 1:6 "to knowledge self-control…"

I believe one of the biggest challenges for men in general is self-control. Historically, more people have fallen sexually, financially or otherwise because of a lack of self-control than any other reason. I believe a big reason for this is that many men feel they're the only ones that ever struggle with certain areas of self-control. This is exactly how the enemy holds many men hostage in areas of lust, money, power or even addiction. Further, it's very difficult for most men to admit that they ever struggle with self-control. The reality is that every person has struggled with something in their life; whether it's a person who seems to have it all together that is dealing with being controlling or having anger issues, to someone that has an eating disorder or another that is struggling with alcohol or drug abuse. Every person has dealt with some kind of weakness because we live in a fallen sinful world.

If we look back at many of the great patriarchs of the Bible, we can see that even they had issues with self-control. Think about it, Noah got drunk after God used him to build the ark and save his family and the animals from the flood. David committed both, adultery and murder, after God used him to bring deliverance to the Israelites from the Philistines, yet he was still considered a man after God's own heart. Solomon was one of the wisest and richest kings, but his lack of self-control is greatly documented with his many wives and concubines.

Even the Apostle Paul talks about his struggle by giving us this example in Romans 7:21-8:2, when he says:

> "I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." [37]

Does Paul excuse his sin or lack of self-control? No, but he says that the battle is real, our spirit man and our flesh are constantly warring with one another. But he ends by saying the only one that can free him is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the same for all of us! It is only as we completely surrender our will, our sins, and our desires to Jesus and

then begin to make different choices by the power of the Holy Spirit, that we are truly able to have self-control and power over sin. In other words, Jesus has already given us the victory by defeating sin through the cross and rising from the dead, but we must appropriate that victory over our lives and then walk it out every day.

Let me give you an example from my own life. I've never been secret about my early addiction to pornography. I was introduced to porn by a cousin at the age of 12 and it led to a very promiscuous lifestyle through my teenage and early adulthood years. I literally lived the typical life of a sailor for my first year and half in the Navy. Even after I got saved at 19 years old, I struggled to keep both my thought life and physical body pure for a couple of years. It wasn't until I heard my Pastor preaching from 2 Corinthians10:3-5, where Paul talks about "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" that things began to change. Further, they spoke of when David sinned with Bathsheba, and my Pastor said, "David couldn't help but see Bathsheba the first time, it was the second look that cost him." It was at that point that I began to take every lustful thought captive and vowed not to take a second look, even when my flesh wanted to.

Does that mean I haven't been tempted since or the enemy has never brought back images from my past back to my mind? Absolutely not! I've just learned how to take those thoughts captive, rebuke them and then fill my mind with God's Word. One verse I have memorized and have used whenever tempted is 1 Corinthians 10:13 which states, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."[38]

As men of God, we can't fall into the isolation trap that the enemy sets by telling us that we are the only one that struggles with sin or self-control, thus keeping us from sharing those faults with others and perpetuating a continuing cycle of failing. James 5:16 says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."[39] This doesn't mean you need to share all your struggles with everyone. However, I want to encourage you to find some trusted Godly brothers who will not only pray for you but also help hold you accountable in your personal life.

Lesson 9 Questions

1. What are some of the greatest areas of self-control that men struggle with?

2. How does the enemy keep us in the trap of isolation and the cycle of continued sinning?

3. Why is it important to confess our faults to God and others?

4. Do you have at least one or two Godly men that you can confide in that will pray for you and help hold you accountable?

CHARACTERISTIC FOUR: SELF-CONTROL

Lesson 10: How to Get & Keep Self-Control

2 Peter 1:6 "to knowledge self-control…"

In our last lesson we learned how the enemy lies to us by making us think that we are the only ones that have a problem in a particular area, which makes us hesitant to share our struggles with others, thus keeping us isolated and in a continuing cycle of sin. In this lesson, we are going to learn some practical ways to cultivate and keep the fruit of self-control in our lives.

First, why is self-control so important? Proverbs 25:28 says, "*Like* a city that is broken into *and* without walls, Is a man who has no control over his spirit."[40] The New Living Translation puts it this way, "A person without self-control is like a city with broken-down walls."[41] If we think of the biblical times when the Proverbs were written, almost all cities had walls built around them to keep their enemies out. No walls, no protection from the onslaught of the enemy. In the same way, when we don't have self-control, we leave ourselves open to the attacks of the enemy.

James talks about this in James 1:12-15, when he compares the consequences of a person with self-control and one who lacks it when he says:

> Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.[42]

This whole passage is talking about self-control when tempted. The one who endures or has self-control, receives life, the one who doesn't gets death. Notice where the temptation starts, it starts with an inner desire that the enemy tempts us with. At that point is not yet sin, it is only temptation that we have a choice to rebuke and cast down by the power of the Holy Spirit or to embrace and conceive through our flesh. If we don't use self-control, that desire turns to sin, and that sin when fully walked out brings death. The choice is ours, but the necessary consequences always follow. The more you practice self-control the easier it becomes, however the opposite is also true, the more we lose self-control when tempted, the easier it is to lapse back into old habits; it becomes the downward spiral that James talks about– desire, sin and ultimately death.

If self-control is so critical, how does one get it and maintain it? Well, you don't really "get" self-control, it's a fruit and discipline that the Holy Spirit grows in us to resist the flesh's passions and appetites. It must be cultivated by listening to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and making the choice to obey God's Word. In other words, it's not an overnight process. It's not just one moment of saying, "Yes" to the Holy Spirit or "No" to your flesh, but rather the culmination of many yeses and noes along the way. However, I believe it all starts with having a proper understanding of who you are in Christ, that once you've repented of your sins and made Christ the Lord of your life that you ARE a new creation in Christ Jesus, your old has indeed passed away. Further, you now have the power of the living God inside of you to help you overcome sin. As the Apostle Paul puts it Romans 8:11-13:

> But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. [43]

Paul says here that when Christ lives in you, then you have the same power to overcome the flesh as Jesus did, but it's our choice to use that power by crucifying our flesh. It's us working in coordination with the Spirit. God has given us the power of the Holy Spirit to resist, but He also gives each of us the freedom of self-will to either follow the Spirit or our flesh.

Given this choice, what are some practical ways that we can learn to have more self-control and follow the Spirit? First and foremost, we must have a daily life of prayer. Prayer is our time of fellowship and communion with the Father. It's in this place of communion that the Holy Spirit speaks words of encouragement and yes, sometimes words of correction. It's also where we get renewed in the Spirit to face the challenges and temptations of the day.

Second, we need to sow the right things into our minds. In one of our previous lessons, we learned that we can only be transformed by renewing our minds and that is only done by putting God's Word into our mind and heart. We must replace what we use to think with what God says in His Word about us and how we should live– this only happens through consistent, systematic reading and studying of the Bible.

Third, we must deny our flesh and obey what we've learned from the Word. James talks about the futility of hearing the truth and then not obeying it in James 1:22-25 when he says:

> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.[44]

It's not enough to just hear or know the truth, the blessing hinges on whether you obey it or not. Is it easy? No! But as previously noted, the more we obey and sow to the Spirit, the stronger our spirit man becomes and the easier it is to have self-control and resist the flesh.

Another very practical way to resist the flesh is by not putting yourself in a compromising situation in the first place. For example, there have been many Christians, both men and women that have fallen into sexual sin. Because of this, I do not counsel women alone or have conversations via social media or texts concerning personal matters. Likewise, you should avoid situations or circumstances where the enemy may tempt you to fall. For instance, If you are struggling with a certain weakness, such as an addiction, it's wise not to put yourself into a situation or around people where you could be easily tempted.

I want to encourage you to make an appointment with God every morning, where you can worship and open your heart to commune with Him, fill your mind with God thoughts by reading the Word daily, purpose in your mind and heart that you are going to be obedient to follow God's Word and finally, don't put yourself in position where you know you would be easily tempted, but rather get around other believers who will encourage you to make right choices.

Lesson 10 Questions

1. What is self-control and why is it important?

2. Proverbs 25:28 says. "A person without self-control is like a city with broken-down walls." In what ways does this apply to our spiritual life when we lack self-control?

3. What is the start and progression of sin according to James?

4. What does it mean to "be doers and not only hearers of the word"?

5. What are 4 practical ways that we can develop the fruit of self-control in our lives?

CHARACTERISTIC FIVE: PERSEVERANCE

Lesson 11: Take Up Your Cross Daily

2 Peter 1:6 "…to self-control, perseverance…"

Sometimes, Life is not that easy. Marital or relationship problems, financial distress, health issues, problems on the job, you name it, every person faces such challenges. The problem with many Christians, is that they were told the lie, "Come to Jesus and all your problems will go away." That couldn't be further from the truth. Yes, Jesus is there to guide us, give us wisdom and help us through life's problems, however I've found that for most, once you give your life to Christ, the enemy places a target on your back. When you were in the world, he already had you, but now that you are serving God, you're his enemy. See, it's one thing to have a salvation experience with Jesus, it's another thing to really walk it out. That's why we need perseverance.

There are those that preach a gospel of no suffering, that if you are facing challenges then you are doing something wrong. Really, if that's so then what about the Apostles and some early followers of Jesus? Paul and Silas were thrown in jail, Paul was beaten, imprisoned and shipwrecked and John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos all for preaching the Gospel of Christ. Most of the Apostles, except for John were martyred for their faith. Jesus said in John 16:33, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you ***will*** have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."[45] I am not talking just gloom and doom here. Do I believe that God wants to bless us, provide for us and give us victory? Yes, He does, but it doesn't mean that it will always be easy.

Think about the patriarch Joseph in the book of Genesis. God gave him a dream that he would one day rule and be in authority over his brothers. I'm sure he thought, "This is great, sign me up God!" However, he had no idea what the next 13 years or so would hold. He didn't realize that he would be betrayed by his own brothers, put into a pit, sold into slavery, falsely accused of rape and then imprisoned for several years, before the vision came to pass. He didn't understand that he had to go through some training before reigning. The Apostle Paul reminds us of the purpose for the trials in Romans 5:1-5, when he states:

> Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only *that,* but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint,

> because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.[46]

Tribulations aren't to ultimately break us down; they are to make us into the person God wants us to be to accomplish His plan for our lives. Yes, part of that is a breaking of our pride and our self-sufficiency, but if we stay submitted to the process, it's also to build character in us and to work off the rough edges so that our dependence is not on ourselves, but on Him. The key is not to run when the flames turn up, but to persevere regardless.

Jesus said in Luke 9:23, "…If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."[47] This is Jesus, God almighty, yet He shed Himself of all His glory to walk humbly on this earth as a man; to feel what we feel, to be tempted in every way like we are, yet without sin. He was ridiculed, mocked and betrayed, not by just one of his disciples, but at one point all of them. He was beaten, spit upon and finally nailed to a cross to suffer and die not just for us, but because of us. He understood what it meant to take up one's cross daily and He said if we desire to come after Him, we need to do likewise.

A part of perseverance is taking up our cross daily, but what exactly did Jesus mean by this? If we look in context of the following few verses, He explains it by saying in verses 24-26 by saying:

> For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.[48]

Taking up our cross, means that we lay our life down for the Gospel; that we don't chase the riches of the world, but we lay our treasures up in heaven. It means that we are not ashamed of Jesus or His Words, instead we proclaim the good news to all the world, despite their constant ridicule, because we understand that life on this earth really is temporary.

As you face your challenges over this next week, ask the Father, "Lord, what are you trying to work out of me in this situation? Help me to listen, be obedient and persevere through the process." Also, in your prayer time this week ask the Lord to show you specifically how you can take up your cross daily and follow Him.

Lesson 11 Questions

1. What is perseverance?

2. Does God promise us that we will only have blessing and victory in our lives as some say?

3. According to Romans 5:1-5, What is the purpose for trials and tribulations in our life?

4. What does Jesus mean when He said to “take up your cross daily and follow Me.”?

CHARACTERISTIC FIVE: PERSEVERANCE

Lesson 12: Keep Going When You Want to Quit

2 Peter 1:6 "…to self-control, perseverance…"

Have you ever felt like all of hell was against you? When it seems like one thing after another seems to keep going wrong? In our last lesson we talked about taking up our cross daily to follow Jesus and to do so we had to add the characteristic of perseverance to our lives. In this lesson, we will continue that theme but focus on how to keep going even when we feel like giving up.

I believe perseverance in the life of a believer, regardless of one's calling, must first have the goal of patterning our lives after Christ's and to live according to the Word of God. In 2 Peter, Peter is addressing a network of churches that have been under constant attack to leave their faith in a culture that was completely at odds with their Christian Principles. There were false teachers that were denying Christ, twisting the teachings of Paul's "freedom in Christ" message to mean "anything goes" morally or sexually and even that there would be no judgement for doing such things. Peter is combatting this false teaching and encouraging his fellow believers to persevere amid this corrupt society.

We can see this same atmosphere in our present time. Even some that call themselves pastors, which when you judge their fruit are false prophets, are denying the power of Christ & preaching a false doctrine of inclusivity without change. The world and these false teachers are constantly bombing the airwaves and social media with their doctrine, and they criticize and slander any God-fearing Christian who opposes them. We may have better developed civil infrastructures, newer advancements in medicine and more innovative technologies, but spiritually, socially and morally we live in a time much like Peter was addressing. We all need encouragement to persevere and to stay faithful to the true Gospel of Jesus, even when we feel like quitting.

This is where the power of the Holy Spirit comes in. Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."[49] This word "power" that Jesus uses here is the Greek word dynamis (δύναμις), which means power, might, ability, and strength. In other words, Jesus is saying that when we receive the Holy Spirit that we will have all the power that dwelt in Him. The same power, the same might, the same ability and the same strength. The Apostle Paul speaks of this in Romans 8:11 when he says, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to

your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."[50] Put another way, even if a situation looks dead in your life, He can reinvigorate it by the power of His Spirit that is in you.

It's this power that gives us the ability to keep going in the face of seemingly impossible circumstances or even after considerable failings or setbacks. Believe me, on the road to fulfilling your God-given purpose you will face roadblocks. A person that perseveres is one that doesn't allow the roadblocks to stop them, by the power of the Spirit they find a way around them. I used to have a motivational picture in my office which read:

"He failed in business in '31.
He was defeated for state legislator in '32.
He tried another business in '33. It failed.
His fiancée died in '35.
He had a nervous breakdown in '36.
In '43 he ran for congress and was defeated.
He tried again in '48 and was defeated again.
He tried running for the Senate in '55. He lost.
The next year he ran for Vice President and lost.
In '59 he ran for the Senate again and was defeated. In 1860, the man who signed his name Abraham Lincoln was elected the 16th President of the United States.

The difference between history's boldest accomplishments, and its most staggering failures is often, simply, the diligent will to persevere."

Remember, all of us face challenges and setbacks in life, some more than others, but no one is immune. Many times, we feel like giving up, but regardless of the obstacles that you're facing today, I want to encourage you to persevere– bathe your plans in prayer and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and He will give you the power, might, ability and strength to overcome.

Lesson 12 Questions

1. In what ways are we facing the same pressures as those Peter is addressing in 2 Peter?

2. How are we able to persevere and overcome?

3. Jesus said that we would have “power” after we receive the Holy Spirit, in what ways does God use this power in our lives?

CHARACTERISTIC SIX: GODLINESS

Lesson 13: How do I measure myself?

2 Peter 1:6 "…to perseverance, godliness,…"

Many of us know that as Christ followers there needs to be godliness in our lives, but many have a hard time even defining what godliness is? Wycliffe's Bible Commentary defines it as, "a spirit of reverence and deference to God in all matters."[51] In other words, we give God priority and the final decision in everything. It may go against what we were always taught or even fly in the face of what culture says is okay for today. True godliness says that God's word, not my opinion, triumphs over every matter in life. The way we measure our lives is not in comparison to what everyone else is doing or even what culture allows, but rather our measuring stick is God's Word alone.

One of the greatest tricks of the devil is to get you to compare yourself to others. On one hand, he can have you comparing yourself to others that seem to have everything together and thus cause you to see yourself as less than what the Father truly sees you as. On the other hand, he can flip the script and have you compare yourself to others who don't have it all together and make you think you are better than you really are. Trust me, you can always find somebody that is doing worse than you to make yourself look better. The Apostle Paul warns us of this in Galatians 6:1-5 when he says:

> Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.[52]

As followers of Jesus, we are called to help those who have fallen or struggling, however, in doing so, we can't become prideful but rather investigate our own lives to see if we are following God's word. God's standard for our lives is not in comparison to someone else's life or the world around us, but instead His written Word that He's provided for us.

The problem is that in today's culture we face the challenge of moral and cultural relativism. Moral relativism is the thought that there are no absolute morals or principles for life. This belief system is closely tied to cultural relativism, which is the philosophy that an individual's beliefs and values are a result of the culture they live in and therefore can't be judged against other culture's standards. It allows everyone to do what's right in their own eyes by basically saying, "It might not be right for you, but it's

okay for me." Really, it's nothing new. Every generation throughout history has faced it in one way or another, but it seems to have grown stronger over time.

This obviously goes against what the Bible teaches about absolute truth and morals, and it doesn't stand up when put under logical thinking. Can you imagine if you were a carpenter and building a house with a tape measure that changes every day? One day a foot is twelve inches, the next it's seven inches and the following day it's nine inches. There's no standard of measurements, therefore the house from the foundation up would be completely messed up, yet people do that every day with their lives. They use the excuse, "Well, everybody's doing it now, so it must be okay." (Cultural Relativism). Then we wonder why we build lives that are in disarray. It's simply because instead of using God's Word as our standard, we use our feelings or the world's standards as our measuring stick. We can't measure our lives and choices against what others are doing, because God doesn't grade on a curve. He doesn't look at us today and say, "I know it's hard to keep your pants on and stay pure, because everybody else is sleeping together before they're married, so I'm just going to let you slide on that." No! His word is clear. Paul sets the standard in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, when he states:

> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. 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. [53]

The Creator makes the rules, not the creation and He doesn't even leave it open for debate. We may not like it, and it may offend our preconceived ideas about what we think is okay, but He knows what's best for us and what helps us to lay our head down in peace, instead of turmoil when we go against His standards. The Bible teaches these standards; it guides and corrects us in all matters of life. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."[54]

As followers of Christ, we must pattern our lives after the standards of God's Word alone, however we can't do it in our own strength, it's only through the power of the Holy Spirit that lives in us. Further, we must raise our voices like the Apostle Paul and many other great men of God before us, to today's culture and the ones that are pushing the agenda ungodliness.

Lesson 13 Questions

1. Explain, in the best way you can, what “godliness” is?

2. What is moral & cultural relativism?

3. Why is it not only logical, but also important to have one standard of measurement in our lives? What is that one standard for our lives as people of God?

4. As you reflect on your own life, what area or areas do you realize you need to change to line up with God’s Word?

[1] *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 2 Co 3:2.

[2] 2 Pe 1:5–9 (NKJV).

[3] Heb 11:1–3 (NKJV).

[4] Mt 7:24–27 (NKJV).

[5] Mt 7:16–20 (NKJV).

[6] Ga 5:22–23 (NKJV).

[7] Ro 6:1–4 (NKJV).

[8] Jas 2:14–24 (NKJV).

[9] Mt 5:16 (NKJV).

[10] Mk 9:23 (NKJV).

[11] Heb 11:1–3 (NKJV).

[12] Heb 11:4–6 (NKJV).

[13] Heb 11:7–40 (NKJV).

[14] Mk 9:23 (NKJV).

[15] Eph 5:25–29 (NKJV).

[16] *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), 1 Co 13:4–7.

[17] Dt 6:6–9 (NKJV).

[18] Eph 6:4 (NKJV).

[19] Lk 6:43–45 (NKJV).

[20] Ro 12:1–2 (NKJV).

[21] *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

[22] Col 3:23–24 (NKJV).

[23] Ge 39:7–10 (NKJV).

[24] Da 6:1–5 (NKJV).

[25] Pr 18:15 (NKJV).

[26] Pr 4:5–9. (NKJV).

[27] Pr 1:7. (NKJV).

[28] Ps 14:1. (NKJV).

[29] 2 Ti 3:13–17. (NKJV).

[30] Ro 12:2. (NKJV).

[31] Php 4:8. (NKJV).

[32] Ro 12:1–2. (NASB).

[33] Lk 10:27. (NASB).

[34] Ps 119:11. (NKJV).

[35] Jn 14:25–26. (NKJV).

[36] 2 Co 10:3–5. (NKJV).

[37] Ro 7:21–8:2. (NASB).

[38] 1 Co 10:13. (NKJV).

[39] Jas 5:16. (NASB).

[40] Pr 25:28. (NASB).

[41] Tyndale House Publishers, *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), Pr 25:28.

[42] Jas 1:12–15. (NKJV).

[43] Ro 8:11–13. (NASB).

[44] Jas 1:22–25. (NKJV).

[45] Jn 16:33. (NKJV).

[46] Ro 5:1–5. (NKJV).

[47] Lk 9:23. (NKJV).

[48] Lk 9:24–26. (NKJV).

[49] *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ac 1:8. (NKJV).

[50] Ro 8:11. (NKJV).

[51] Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett Falconer Harrison, eds., *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 2 Pe 1:5.

[52] Ga 6:1-5. (NKJV).

[53] *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2025), 1 Co 6:9-11.

[54] 2 Ti 3:16-17. (NKJV).