

*Being the Church in your  
Small Group*



## **Being the Church in Your Small Group**

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### When You Meet Together

## **Introduction**

Welcome to this series of small group studies! Through this training you will learn of God's purposes, His destiny for your own life and the wonderful plans He has for your friends and your family. God has chosen to live His life through you. Just as He has transformed your life as a follower of Jesus, He will enable you to lead others to experience His salvation, too.

As you follow the Lord and celebrate His goodness with others, God will place you in a spiritual movement. This spiritual movement ignites when God's Spirit works to help a small group of believers begin new small, healthy, and reproducing groups that quickly spread out to plant other small, healthy, reproducing groups that quickly spread out to plant other small, healthy, reproducing groups and so on until Jesus returns. Each of these groups can be called a church. This process continues and multiplies at such a rapid rate that an entire communities of people have the chance to hear the good news of Jesus and His invitation for eternal life in a very short period of time.

We know this kind of spiritual movement is a divine act and only occurs when God wills it to happen, but we also know that there are things that we can do to help "prepare the way" for a spiritual movement to take place. This training is designed to help equip you prepare the way for a movement of God.

One way to look at this training is that it is a "crash course" on how to live as a Christian and follower of Jesus. We'll cover life-changing subjects like obedience and sharing your faith. We'll learn the fundamentals of faith like how to pray, live together as God's family, and study God's word. And we'll learn eternal life-changing truths like God's purposes and how to live them and share them with others.

You become a trainer and a leader anytime that you have the opportunity to share these truths with other believers. Don't worry about the exact words that are being said. These sessions are designed to help you accomplish the beginnings a spiritual movement. You will learn to MODEL what a new small group might look like. Your job is not to be the leader of this small group church, but a member of the church, sharing the part that God has given you to share. You will also learn how to ASSIST someone to start their own group, to OBSERVE them to make sure they are listening to and learning from God and His Word. Finally, you will become a MENTOR to a new leader providing insight and ongoing advice to them while the new leader begins to reach out to their friends and family with the Good News.

Each time you gather together for your Small group meeting be sure that you take time to:

- GREET and get to know one another.
- CHECK IN with those within the Small group who are stepping out and being obedient to launch their own Small group with their friends and family.
- PRAY for needs within the group and friends and family that are not yet in God's family.
- SHARE the topics, Scripture, and discussion questions in each lesson.
- APPLY the lesson personally and determine who to share it with, and
- FELLOWSHIP with time for tea or snacks.

We believe that God's Spirit is already at work preparing the hearts of people groups all over the world for hundreds and maybe thousands of spiritual movements to begin from followers of Jesus just like you who are obedient to God's call to join in the work of God's Kingdom.



We pray that your small group is one of those that God uses to help launch a reproducing small group church and help start a spiritual movement.

Here are some key leadership principles that are important to understand and follow to grow the small groups into a spiritual movement among your family and friends and throughout the nation of India.

Each time you meet with your own small group begin to practice these four key leadership principles:

**MODEL:** Lead your friends and family through this lesson very carefully. It is designed so that you can read and study the material or, if you are more comfortable, you can read through the lesson to others in your group.

**ASSIST:** Go with the friends from your group to help them share this exact lesson as they reach out to their own friends and family. You can encourage them to lead or share the leadership of the group until they are comfortable.

**OBSERVE:** Each member of your own small group has a spiritual destiny to lead his own family and friends to a strong and lasting relationship with Jesus Christ. Carefully pray and support each member of your small group to begin their own group. As these new, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation leaders begin to take the responsibility for their own group you can take a step to the side and become a “shadow” leader. Take a few moments in the middle of each small group meeting to **CHECK IN** with one another as to how the new Small groups are growing.

**MENTOR:** Each week encourage the members of your own small group to share what they are learning with their own friends and family. As you have modeled the lessons to members of your group, **ASSIST** them to become leaders on their own. Then **OBSERVE** them as they step out on their own. Finally, you will become a **MENTOR**, providing help and advice but allowing them to lead their own groups. Remember, as you **MENTOR** new leaders you are multiplying a spiritual movement of Jesus Followers.

**Lesson 1**  
**Following Jesus – Be a Fisher of Men**

**OPENING**

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

**MEMORY VERSE**

***“Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20) (NIV)***

Being a follower of Jesus is always a life-changing and eternity-changing event. It seems like everything in our life changes the moment we make that decision. Old things pass away. A new life begins. That’s the way it was for the very first followers of Jesus, too.

Let’s look at God’s Word from a book written by Luke about the life of Jesus. The Bible says –

*Now it came about that while the multitude were pressing around [Jesus] and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fisherman had gotten out of them, and were washing their nets. And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon’s and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the multitudes from the boat.*

*And when He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” And Simon answered and said, “Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but at Your bidding I will let down the nets.” And when they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish; and their nets began to break; and they signaled to their partners in the other boat, for them to come and help them. And they came, and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink.*

*But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am sinful man, O Lord!” For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also James and John, sons of Zebedee, who*

*were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.” And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him. (Luke 5:1-11) (NAS)*

Before we knew Jesus, most of us lived a life of struggle and frustration just like those fisherman who had been out on the boat all night without catching a fish. But when Jesus is around, suddenly everything is different. Just hearing His words changes everything. We know we can trust Him, even when He asks us to do something that doesn't make sense – like the fishermen going back to the same place where they couldn't catch any fish. And when we see Jesus for who He really is – how holy and powerful He is – it makes us realize how really sinful we are. But Jesus loves us so much that He wants us to go with Him, give up what we thought was important and make a fresh start. Being a follower of Jesus means the start of a brand new life.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. If you were one of the fishermen on the boat, do you think it would have been easy to trust Jesus and go back out to fish even though you hadn't caught anything all night?
2. What do you think it meant for the fishermen to “leave everything and follow Jesus”? What did it mean to their families and friends? How would you feel if you were one of those disciples? Would you feel nervous? Would you feel excited? Why?
3. What does Jesus mean when He said, “*From now on you will be catching men*”?
4. What are some things you might have to leave behind to follow Jesus?

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.



## Lesson 2

### Celebrate Your New Life In Christ

#### OPENING

1. **GREET one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.**
2. **CHECK IN to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:**
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.**
4. **SHARE the lesson that follows...**

When someone becomes a follower of Jesus and joins God's family, the Bible says it's a time to celebrate! The scriptures say it's like finding a lost treasure, or a child coming home after many years away. Jesus describes it as a new birth. When someone trusts their life to God it's a life-changing event, an eternity-changing event, and the single most important thing they'll ever do in this life. God says He's made us a part of His family. He even calls us His children. When we become a follower of Jesus, God gives us a whole new life. And a new life is a reason to celebrate!

As new believers, we have **A REASON to Celebrate**. The Bible says – *God made great and marvelous promises, so that his nature would become part of us. Then we could escape our evil desires and the corrupt influences of this world.* (2 Peter 1:4) (CEV) The same God who created the entire universe and everything in it has always loved us and had a plan and a purpose for our life. We spent our lives separated from God because we did things our way instead of His way. The Bible says -- we were separated by our sin. God's Son, Jesus, is the only way we could get rid of that sin. When we accept Jesus as our Savior and ask Him to be in charge of our lives, we can finally experience God's love and know His plan and purposes for our lives. Remembering those simple but powerful truths helps a new believer appreciate the amazing thing that God has done in their lives.

As new believers, we share **The PRIVILEGES of being a child of God**. The Bible says – *We have everything we need to live a life that pleases God. It was all given to us by God's own power, when we learned that he had invited us to share in his wonderful goodness.* (2 Peter 1:3) (CEV) Being a part of God's family is the greatest gift anyone could ever get. The Bible says every believer is a "child of God", an inheritor of God's kingdom, and a joint-heir with Jesus. The Bible says every believer is given eternal life. The Bible says every believer is given God's Holy Spirit to help them live a good life that pleases God. Jesus gives every believer all the authority they need to do God's will, and Jesus has authority over everyone

and everything in the entire universe! Jesus said that everything He has He gives to us, because we're now a part of His family.

Finally, as new believers we have to honor **The RESPONSIBILITIES of being a follower of Jesus**. The Bible says that God gives us great gifts, and He expects us to use those gifts to do great things. The Bible says – *from everyone who has been given much, much will be required*. (Luke 12:48) (NIV). Being a part of God's family gives us new family privileges, but it also gives us new family responsibilities. The most important responsibility God gives us is to be a disciple – a follower of Jesus.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What does it mean to celebrate your life in Christ?
2. What privileges does God provide us as His children?
3. What are the responsibilities of being a follower of Jesus?

### **PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES**

*Break up into smaller groups of two or three. Give each person the opportunity to work through each of the following activities.*

1. Share the four parts that make up your personal story.
2. Practice sharing your story with your group of two or three others.
3. Make a list of 5 people who you know that need to hear about Jesus.
4. Pick one person from your list and practice a “role play” of sharing faith through your story. Practice your story a couple of times until you feel comfortable sharing.

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.**
2. **FELLOWSHIP with time for tea or snacks.**



### Lesson 3

#### What It Means to Obey Christ

#### OPENING

1. **GREET one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.**
2. **CHECK IN to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:**
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.**
4. **SHARE the lesson that follows...**

When Jesus began His ministry on earth, He said, *“Follow Me,”* and He led a group of disciples into a life of doing God's work. Jesus didn't overwhelm His followers by taking them away and teaching them everything they needed to know all at once. Jesus gave them what they needed to know when they needed to know it. It was one-step-at-a-time, on-the-job training. And it's a perfect model for us.

Being a good disciple doesn't mean we have to have a lot of knowledge before we join God's work. When we learn something new, we can start living it right away. We don't need to know everything about worship before we start loving God. We don't need to know everything about fellowship before we start connecting with other believers. We can start living like Jesus right now. We can start serving others. And, we can start sharing how Jesus has changed our lives. As followers of Jesus, God expects us to put whatever we learn into practice in our own lives. He doesn't expect us to be perfect, but He does expect us to start trying. God expects every disciple to **OBEY**. And when we start living what we learn, God calls it obedience.

God created us. He knows what's best for us. And God knows the best thing for us is to obey what He tells us to do. God also knows there are many blessings that come with obedience. God says obeying Him is how we become part of His family. God says in the Bible – *“if you will faithfully obey Me, you will be my very own people.”* (Exodus 19:5) (CEV) God says obeying Him is the best gift that we could ever give Him. The Bible says – *“to obey is better than sacrifice”* (1 Samuel 15:22b) (NIV). God says obeying Him is the way we get to know Him better. The Bible says – *“we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments”* (1 John 2:3b) (NIV). And most importantly God says obeying Him is the best way to show we love Him. Jesus said – *“If you love me, you will do as I command.”* (1 John 14:15) (CEV)

As a disciple, God's plans and purposes for us are not all about us. God wants more for us than just to obey Him in our own lives. **God expects every disciple to TEACH OTHERS**

**what they've learned.** Jesus said -- *"Go and make disciples of all the nations, and ... teach them to obey everything I have commanded you."* (Matthew 28:19-20) (NIV). Before someone can obey, someone else has to teach. Every disciple has a responsibility to obey what they learn and teach what they learn, as well. Those are the two parts of God's plan for His disciples – to obey and to teach.

Every time we take a step and learn something new from God, God wants us to share it with someone else who needs to take the same step. Jesus said – *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it -- Love your neighbor as yourself."* (Matthew 22:37-28) (NIV) When we begin to love God with everything we've got and begin to love our neighbors as ourselves – that's obedience. When we share with others, how they can begin to love God and love their neighbors – that's teaching. Being a disciple means obeying and teaching.

**Being a disciple means being a FOLLOWER and a LEADER.** A disciple being a follower is easy to understand. God created His disciples to be followers. When Jesus called His disciples, He said *"Follow Me."* But God also created His disciples to be leaders. Sharing what we've learned with others is how we move from being a follower to a leader. The Bible says – *Freely you have received, freely give.* (Matthew 10:8b) (NIV) The Bible says – *You have often heard me teach. Now I want you to tell these same things to followers who can be trusted to tell others.* (2 Timothy 2:2) (CEV) The Bible says – *You must follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.* (1 Corinthians 11:1) (CEV) It's not just enough to obey. God expects every disciple to obey and teach. God doesn't want us to be selfish and keep everything we learn for ourselves. God blesses us to be a blessing.

Many of us think we can only teach others if we're experts or we can only lead others if we've been a disciple for many years. But the truth is, if we wait until we're perfect and mature before we start teaching and leading, we never will. Nobody knows all they need to know about living a life that pleases God. Every believer has something to learn – even the most mature Christian. We're not all as patient as Job. We don't all have the faith of Abraham. And no one loves as much as Jesus. Only Jesus lived a perfect life. Leading isn't about being perfect or knowing everything. Leading is about being one step ahead.

Have you ever seen a mother duck walking with her young ducks behind her? The mother duck leads and the young ducks follow. But if you look closely, you'll see that something else is happening. The first young duck follows the mother but also leads the second young duck. The second young duck follows the first young duck but also leads the third young duck. All the way down the line, the young ducks are following and leading – at the same time.

God wants His disciples to be followers and leaders at the same time. Every believer has room to grow and every believer has something to share. As a follower, we must be willing to take the next step, and, as a leader, we must be willing to help someone take the same step we just took. We take a step and then help someone else. They take a step and then help someone else. One step at a time. Obeying and teaching. That's how God's family grows. That's what being a disciple is all about.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Do you think it will be easier for you to be a leader or a follower as a disciple? Why?

2. What do you already know about Jesus that God might want you to share with others?

### **PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES**

*Break into smaller groups of two or three. Give each person the opportunity to work through each of these activities.*

1. Mark your Bible, write down on a separate sheet, or try to memorize the verses in Romans known as the Romans Road.
2. Pick another person from your list of who needs to hear about Jesus and practice a “role play” of sharing faith through God’s Word.

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

## Lesson 4

### How to Become a Christian

#### OPENING

1. **GREET one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.**
2. **CHECK IN to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:**
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.**
4. **SHARE the lesson that follows...**

We've all got a story to tell. Sharing our personal testimony – what Jesus has done in our own life -- is important because. Even as brand new believers, we already have more experience being a Christian than anyone who doesn't believe. Our experience is authentic. It's real. It's what's happened to us. And it's what's happening to us right now. We don't have to have a program or a plan to share that. We just have to have a willing heart.

When we share our personal testimony, there are some skills that can make us more effective in helping others to take a step of faith and believe in Jesus for salvation.

First, it's important to tell others – **What my life was like BEFORE I met Jesus.** For most of us that means we lived lives our own way. For many of us it means we were selfish, or angry, or jealous. For all of us it means we were separated from God by our sins. Before we know Jesus, we all try to fill our lives with things that will take the place of God. It's important to share what our life was like because it helps whoever we're sharing with to identify with us. Some of the circumstances, attitudes, and values we had before we were believers are the same ones they have right now. Sharing how we used to live will help someone identify with us and may help them realize as we did, we need something more.

Next, we should share – **How I REALIZED I needed Jesus.** Trying to replace God with anything else usually leaves us lonely, depressed and broken. When we don't have Jesus in our lives, God keeps trying to get our attention and lead us to a better path. It's important to share how we realized we needed Jesus because the person we're sharing with may have felt those same feelings and needs but didn't know there was an answer. Allowing someone to see how we suffered from the same hurts, habits and hang-ups that are in their life right now, will help them realize that maybe they'd like to make the same choice we did and trust Jesus for a better life.

We also want to share – **How I accepted Jesus’ invitation and COMMITTED my life to Him.** As part of sharing our faith, we should share how someone shared Jesus with us, or how we read or saw something that showed us how to give our lives to God. However it happened, it's important to be specific and share the details, even the actual words that we spoke. By telling someone what we did, where it happened, and what we said, we're giving them a model, or an example, of how they can make the same decision and maybe even use the same words. They may not be ready to take a step of faith now, but as we share the details of our own decision, they will know how to pray a simple prayer and ask Jesus into their hearts, too. By sharing our experience, we share a step they may want to take.

Finally, we want to share – **The DIFFERENCE Jesus has made in my life.** Even if it's only been a few days, or just a few hours, something happens when we give our life to God through His Son, Jesus. For some of us, we feel like a great burden has been lifted off of us. For some, we feel the love and acceptance of God for the first time in our lives. For others, we experience good things like a restored relationship or a new attitude. Some of us may not even “feel” much at all at first, but in our heart we believe and know that God has saved us and promises to hear our prayers. Whatever our experience is, it's important to share it, because the good things that God does for us – the good gifts, the solved problems, the healed relationships, how He changes our hearts – all of those things are encouragements for someone to take a step of faith and receive Jesus as the Savior of their life.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What was your life like before you became a follower of Jesus?
2. How did you realize that you needed Jesus in your life?
3. How did you accept Jesus’ invitation and commit your life to Him? Who was there? What did you do?
4. What difference has Jesus made in your life? How do you feel inside? What do you think the days ahead will be like?

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

## **Lesson 5**

### **How to Share Your Faith**

#### **OPENING**

- 1. GREET one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.**
- 2. CHECK IN to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:**
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
- 3. PRAY for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.**
- 4. SHARE the lesson that follows...**

#### **MEMORY VERSE**

*“Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”*  
(Matthew 28:19-20) (NIV)

God’s Word changes lives. When we share our faith, it's important to share not only our own experience but also what God says about this decision and why it's important. As followers of Jesus, we believe the Bible is the word of God and God never makes mistakes. What happened to us is meaningful but God can use His word to touch hearts and change lives in a way that we may not. It's a good idea to have a Bible with us and use it as we share, and if possible, we should allow the person we're sharing with to read the passages out loud. That way they can see and hear what God is saying to them through His word.

There are many scriptures that tell us about becoming a follower of Jesus, but one of the best ways to share is by using a handful of verses from a letter Paul wrote to the Romans. Here are the verses and how we can share them –

**God is the CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE and makes Himself known to everyone.** In many places around the world, people worship different gods. When we talk about sharing God’s love for us with others, we first want to make sure that everyone understands who it is we’re talking about. The Bible says – *From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God.* (Romans 1:20) (NLT) God doesn’t hide who He is. In fact, He makes Himself obvious, everyday, just by the things around us. The earth is here because God spoke it into being. The plants and trees and animals exist because God created them. We are alive because God created us and gave us life. God says that no one has an excuse not to believe that He exists and to obey His rules. He created everything.

**When we do things OUR OWN WAY instead of God's perfect way, God calls it sin.** The Bible says – *All have sinned. All fall short of God's glorious standard.* (Romans 3:23) (NLT) The Bible says sin is real and that everyone has sinned. Even though God created us and has a perfect plan for our lives, at some point we've all rejected God and His plan and done things our own way.

**There is a PRICE TO PAY for doing things our own way.** The Bible says – *the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 6:23) (NLT) The Bible says that price is death. Since sin is a problem in our spirit, the death that sin causes is in our spirit. Physical death is bad, but spiritual death means being separated from God for eternity. The Bible says that death is the outcome for everyone who sins. There are no exceptions. But the Bible also says that there is another plan – a way out. The Bible says that God's plan to save us from our sins is His Son, Jesus.

**God loves us and sent His Son Jesus to DIE FOR US and pay the price of our sins.** Even when we sin against God, He still loves us. The Bible says – *God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.* (Romans 5:8) (NLT) God is perfect and Heaven, where He lives, is perfect. So, God had to do something about our sin in order for us to be together. We've learned that the penalty for sin is death and someone had to pay that price. God sent His own Son, Jesus, who never sinned to die on a cross for us. Jesus died so that we wouldn't have to. Jesus paid the price for our sins, so that we could have a new life – an eternal life – with God. God loves us so much that He sent His own Son to die in our place. And He did it even while we were rejecting Him.

**When we CONFESS and BELIEVE, Jesus saves us from our sins.** God gave us the ability to choose what we want in life and He won't force us to choose His Son. But God says if we want a relationship with Him, we only have to accept Jesus and ask Him to be in charge of our life. The Bible says – *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.* (Romans 10:9-10) (NLT) We've all tried living life our own way. We've all sinned and fallen short of God's perfection. We need Jesus. Believing Jesus is who He says He is – the Son of God who came to die for our sins – is a matter of trust. Believing God raised Jesus from the dead and that He now rules in Heaven is a matter of trust. Believing that faith in Jesus will give us a new life with God in eternity is a matter of trust. We all have to trust in something. God says He wants us to trust in Him and His Son, Jesus.

When someone decides to take the step that we took and become a follower of Jesus, we can help them pray a simple prayer that allows them to accept God's gift of eternal life and dedicate their new life to Him. The exact words may be different, but each prayer should offer an opportunity for someone to **admit** that God has not been first in their lives and ask Him for forgiveness of their sins, to **believe** that Jesus died to save them and rose again and is alive today, to **receive** God's free gift of eternal life, and to **invite** Jesus to come into their heart and be in charge of their life.

The prayer can be as simple as this one –

*Dear Jesus, thank You for making me and loving me even when I went my own way. I realize that I need You in my life and I'm sorry for my sins. I ask You*

*to forgive me and to give me a fresh start in life. Thank You for dying on the cross for me. As much as I know how, I want to follow You from now on. Please come into my life and make me a new person inside. I accept Your free gift of salvation and know it's something that I can never deserve on my own. I want to live for You and Your purposes for the rest of my life. Amen.*

**GOD PROMISES to save us when we call on His name.** When we prayed, we asked God to give us a new start in life, and God promises to give it. When we prayed, we asked Him to lead our new life, and God promises that He will. The Bible says – *Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* (Romans 10:13) (NLT) There may be times when we don't “feel” as if our life has really changed or that Jesus is living inside us, but our salvation is not about the way we feel. Our salvation is about God's character and His Word. God never lies. Whatever He says is true. And when God promises something, no matter how we feel about it, God always delivers. God's truth is our assurance of salvation.

When small groups begin to rapidly grow God's family by helping start other small groups and those new groups continue the growth by helping start other new groups, we call that a spiritual movement. But before a spiritual movement can begin there must be at least one small group. And before there can be a small group, there must be at least a few believers. And before there can be believers, there must be at least one follower of Jesus who is willing and able to share their faith.

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.



## **Lesson 6**

### **Looking at Your Life**

#### **OPENING**

- 1. GREET one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.**
- 2. CHECK IN to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:**
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
- 3. PRAY for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.**
- 4. SHARE the lesson that follows...**

Before we met Jesus, we were so busy doing things our own way that we didn't even think about the fact that God might have a better plan for our lives. We made the decisions. We chose the direction. We did the things that we wanted, when we wanted, and how we wanted. It was our life and we were in charge. But when Jesus shows up, His way of doing things is so different than our way that it forces us to look at our plans and His plans and decide which is right. That's what happened one day when Jesus met a woman at a well.

Let's look at God's Word –

*So [Jesus] came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; and Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman therefore, said to Him, "How is it that you, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."*

*She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob are You, who gave us this well, and drank of it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up into eternal life." The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty, nor come all the way here to draw." He said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus*

said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly.”

*The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father. You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know; for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. God is spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.” And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, “What do you seek?” or “Why do You speak with her?” So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city, and said to the men, ‘Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ is it?’ They went out of the city, and were coming to Him.*

*In the meanwhile the disciples where requesting Him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” But He said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” The disciples therefore were saying to one another, “No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work. Do you not say, ‘There are four months, and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal; that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice forever. For in this case, the saying is true, ‘One sows, and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.*

*And from that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all the things that I have done.” So when the Samaritans came to Him, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world.” (John 4:1-42) (NAS)*

Jesus knows us just like He knew the Woman at the Well. He knows everything we’ve ever done or said or even thought. He knows all the things that we’re ashamed of and have tried to hide; everything inside that we hope no one can see. And He still loves us. Jesus offers us the same thing that He offered her – a chance to exchange our problems for His plans, a chance to trade our broken lives for His perfect way. Asking Jesus into our hearts is just the first step of a journey that will last the rest of our lives. Every time we make the decision to leave our old ways behind and to learn new ways from Him, we take another step and grow closer to Him.

## **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.**

**2. FELLOWSHIP with time for tea or snacks.**

## Lesson 7

### My Plans And God's Plans

#### OPENING

1. **GREET one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.**
2. **CHECK IN to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:**
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.**
4. **SHARE the lesson that follows...**

Good things don't happen by accident.

There is nothing good that comes into being that isn't first intentionally planned by someone. Every living thing no matter how small, every machine no matter how big, from a simple tool to the entire universe – **Everything starts off as A PICTURE and A PLAN** in either the mind of God or in the mind of man. There must be a picture, because a picture shows us what we hope to be, or where we hope to go, or what we hope to accomplish. A picture shows us our goal when the work is done. There must be a plan, because a plan tells us how to get there – the path we have to take in order to reach our goal. Without a picture and a plan nothing good would ever be accomplished.

God has a picture and a plan for everything He does. The Bible says – *Your plans for us are too numerous to list. If I tried to recite all your wonderful deeds, I would never come to the end of them.* (Psalms 40:5) (NLT) When God sets out to do something, He doesn't just hope for the best and wait to see how things turn out. God plans His work and then He works His plan. God created us to be like Him. God created us with a mind and intelligence and the free will to make choices in life, and He expects us to use what we've been given. So, God expects us to have plans, too. God wants us to have a picture and a plan for our lives, because He knows that if we don't intentionally plan our life, someone else or something else will take control. It may be a person, it may be circumstances, it may be even the inability to make a decision, but something will lead us.

Because He's perfect, because He's all-powerful, Because He knows everything and has already made plans even to the end of time, it will always be true that **God's plans are BETTER THAN my plans**. No matter how hard we try, we'll never understand as much as God does and so no matter how hard we try, our plans for our own lives will never be as good as His plans for our lives. God says – *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are*

*my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*” (Isaiah 55:8-9) (NIV) As a follower of Jesus, God wants us to have a plan for everything we do for Him. He wants us to have a plan to become better disciples. He wants us to have a plan to share and teach others. He wants us to have a plan to help God’s family grow by sharing His Son Jesus with the world. God wants us to have a plan, but because He knows best, God wants us to rely on His Holy Spirit to help guide us to His plan, and He wants us to be willing to change our plans any time He shows us a better way.

So what is God’s perfect picture of who we should be and His perfect plan for our lives? First, **JESUS is God’s perfect picture of who I should be.** The Bible says – *God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son.* (Romans 8:29) (Message) When God created us, He made us in His own image. But when we spend our lives doing things our own way instead of God’s way, we start to damage His perfect design. God wants us to go back to His first, perfect picture of who He created us to be – someone who loves Him and obeys His commands and follows His path to do the great things He created us to do. That perfect picture of a life of obedience is the picture of His Son, Jesus, and God wants us to be just like Him.

To become like Jesus we have to follow God’s plan for how to get there, so **GOD’S PURPOSES are God’s perfect plans for how I should live.** The Bible says – *I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* (Jeremiah 29:10-12) (NIV) God knows that being a good disciple and a faithful follower of Jesus won’t happen by accident, so He purposes to give us a plan for our lives. When we live out God’s purposes – His commands from His Word, the Bible – God uses our obedience to shape us into someone just like Jesus. Every time we take a step and follow Jesus, we take another step in God’s plan to become who He created us to be.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. When Jesus first met the Woman at the Well, whose picture and plan do you think she was following for her life? Hers or God’s? How can you tell? What were the results?
2. What do you think the Woman at the Well thought about Jesus’ offer to try something new? How do you think the Woman’s life might have changed after she met Jesus?
3. Why would God’s plans for my life be better than my plans?
4. What are some things that might keep you from giving up your plans to get God’s plans?

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.**
2. **FELLOWSHIP with time for tea or snacks.**

**Lesson 8**  
**God's Plan For My Life Is To Live Out His Purposes**

**OPENING**

1. **GREET one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.**
2. **CHECK IN to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:**
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.**
4. **SHARE the lesson that follows...**

God has a perfect plan for our lives.

**God's plan for our lives is to live out HIS PURPOSES.** The Bible says – *The Lord has made everything for his own purposes.* (Proverbs 16:4) (NLT) God has a plan and a purpose for everything He does, and they are plans for good and plans for blessing. Our lives can be led by many things. Some of us are led by guilt for things we've done in the past, resentment and anger for things people are doing to us right now, or fear for what someone might do to us in the future. Some of us are led by a desire to get things we want. Some of us are led by a need to please other people. God wants us to leave all of those things behind and be led by His purposes. God's purposes give our lives meaning and motivation and focus. God's purposes make our lives simple and easy to understand. God's purposes help prepare us to live forever with Him.

The first thing we need to know is that **God's purposes come from HIS WORD**. These are not things that a man has made up. God's purposes come directly from Him. We find God's purposes summed up in two important passages in the Bible. The first passage is sometimes called, **THE GREAT COMMANDMENT**, because in it, Jesus gave us what He said was the most important thing we can do in this life. Jesus said – *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it – Love your neighbor as yourself."* (Matthew 22:37-38) (NIV) The second passage where we find God's purposes for our lives is the last instruction that Jesus gave to all His followers before He went to be with God the Father, in heaven. This passage is sometimes called, **THE GREAT COMMISSION**, because in it Jesus gave all of His disciples our mission to the world. Jesus says – *"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."* (Matthew 28:19-20) (NIV)

**SMALL GROUP LEADER:**

*As you present how the Five Purposes come from The Great Commandment and The Great Commission, take time to reinforce each of God's Purposes by repeating the corresponding part of the scripture. For example, when introducing God's Purpose of Worship, repeat the phrase – "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" to make sure everyone understands how the ideas are linked.*

These two passages, The Great Commandment and The Great Commission give us five purposes that God wants all of us to live in our lives. God gives us these purposes because He wants us to go from living our way to living His way. He wants us to find new priorities and new reasons for living. He wants us to become His perfect picture of what He created us to be. The Bible says – *Do not be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him.* (Romans 12:2) (CEV) God wants us to start living a new kind of life. I can do that when I start living His purposes, because **God's purposes CHANGE MY LIFE**.

In The Great Commandment, Jesus says – *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."* **Loving God with my whole life is God's purpose of WORSHIP**. Worship means praising God and giving Him thanks; it means respecting God for the awesome Creator of All Things that He is; it means praying to Him and sharing our heart. But worship means even more than that. Jesus said that Worship means giving everything we are to God so that He can enjoy us... and so that we can enjoy Him. Worship is not about religion – it's about our relationship with God. Worship is more than part of our life – it's how we live our life. God's first purpose for our lives is to celebrate His presence through Worship.

In The Great Commandment, Jesus also says – *"Love your neighbor as yourself"*. God wants us to become like Him and that means loving the people He loves – which is everyone in the whole world. The best way we can show love to the world is to serve them. **Serving God by serving others is God's purpose of MINISTRY**. God gave us everything we are. All our talents, gifts, skills and abilities are everything He's given us to help others see just how much God loves and values them. God's second purpose for our lives is to demonstrate His love for the world through Ministry.

In the Great Commission, Jesus says – *"Go and make disciples of all the nations"*. **Sharing God's love with others is God's purpose of MISSION**. God loves the whole world. He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross and rise again for the whole world. As followers of Jesus, He wants us to take His message of love to the whole world. There is no place too far, there is no one too isolated that God doesn't love them and want them to know Him. God sent someone to share His love with us. Now He wants us to go and share His love with someone else. God's third purpose for our lives is to tell others about Him through Mission.

After Jesus shares God's purpose of Mission, He then says – *"...baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"*. Baptism is an outward sign that shows we're connected with other believers as a part of God's family. **Living as God's family is God's purpose of FELLOWSHIP**. God didn't create us to live alone. When we believe and receive Jesus, God says that He adopts us and makes us His children with every other believer who has lived or will live as our brothers and sisters. God created us to belong to an enormous family that will live with Him and love each other, forever. Our job is to start

practicing that love right now. God's fourth purpose for our lives is to love and live as part of His family through Fellowship.

Finally, in The Great Commission, Jesus tells us – *"teach them to obey everything I have commanded you."* Teaching others and **Growing to be like Jesus is God's purpose of DISCIPLESHIP**. God says that when we become followers of Jesus, we are "born again" in His spirit. The Bible says it's as if we were newborn children. But God doesn't want us to stay little for long. God wants us to grow up into the perfect picture He has for our lives in Him. God wants us to grow to be like Jesus. We grow by obeying God's commands and allowing God to shape our lives through our obedience. Every time we obey, every time we live out one of God's commands and share it with someone else, we take a step closer to being like Jesus. In this life, we will never stop growing, there will always be something else we can learn, but God loves us and honors and rewards us every step along the way. God's fifth purpose is to grow and be like Jesus through Discipleship.

As important as knowing what God's purposes for our lives are, it's just as important to know how to put them into practice. God created us to live a balanced life. When our bodies are in balance it means we are healthy and growing. God created His purposes to work together.

**God wants me to BALANCE all of His purposes in my life**, so I can stay healthy and grow as a follower of Jesus. We balance God's purposes in our lives by spending some of our time living and sharing each one. God wants us to spend some of our time in worship, some of our time in fellowship, some of our time in discipleship, ministry, and mission. He doesn't want me to worship all the time, but never share His love with others. He doesn't want me to spend so much time serving others that I never spend any time hearing His word and becoming more like Him. We don't spend all of our time living out just one purpose or even a few of them, because that would mean leaving out the others. God created us to live out all of His purposes and, when we leave some out, our lives are out of balance and unhealthy.

We can show what a balanced, Purpose Driven Life looks like by thinking of all five purposes as five wedges that fit together to form a circle. Each wedge – worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and mission – is part of a whole life. The Bible says – *But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.* (Psalms 33:11) (NIV) God's purposes will last forever and they're meant to work together. When we leave out even one of the purposes, the circle is incomplete. It won't turn properly. It goes around for awhile, but then when it comes to the place where a part is missing; it becomes ragged and jarring. When all the purposes are in place, though, even if we're only doing a little of each at any one time, the circle is still complete and we're still living out the Purpose Driven Life that God created us to live.

Just like everything we learn from Him, God's purposes are meant to be shared, and **God wants me to SHARE His purposes with everyone**. The Bible says – *And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.* (Hebrews 13:16) (NIV) When Jesus gave us the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, He wasn't speaking to just a certain group of people. He was speaking to everyone who wants to live a life that pleases God. God's purposes are for the whole world, because God sent His Son Jesus for the whole world. God wants everyone to know the good plans that He has for their life. God wants us to share His purposes with everyone – with every believer, with everyone who questions what life is really all about. God plan is for every one of our lives to have meaning. God created us all to live a life of purpose.



### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Which one of God's five purposes for your life seems like it would be the easiest to live right now? Which one seems like it would be the hardest to live? Why?
2. What one thing could you do to make sure you balance God's purposes in your life?
3. Why would God want you to share His purposes with others?
4. Who is one person you know who has questions about their purpose in life?

### **PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES**

*Break up into smaller groups of two or three. Give each person the opportunity to work through each of the following activities.*

1. Practice sharing God's purposes with the people in your group.
  - Write or recite The Great Commandment and The Great Commission.
  - Underline or repeat the parts of the verses where we find God's five purposes.
  - Draw a circle and arrange the purposes to show a balanced, purpose-driven life

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

**Lesson 9**  
**God's Plan For My Life Is To Share His Purposes With A Person of Peace**

**OPENING**

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

**MEMORY VERSE**

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it – Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-38) (NIV)*

God always plans ahead.

Even before Jesus asked us to follow Him and share in His work, God was already preparing for that work to be completed. The Bible says – *we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* (EPH 2:10) (NIV) Before God sends us out to share our faith and make new disciples, He has already prepared hearts to hear and respond. And before He asks us to help plant churches and equip servant leaders, God has already prepared certain people to help His family grow very quickly. God has prepared people who have a reputation where they live, who are receptive when they hear God's Word, and who are willing to recommend us to others. These are people that God will use to gather their friends and families and neighbors, together, so that we can share the good news with a group of people at the same time, and if God is willing, many will come to faith. Jesus said this type of person is a "Person of Peace", and He said we should look for them whenever we share.

When Jesus sent out His disciples, He said – *Whenever you go into a house, greet the family right away with the words, 'May there be peace in this house.' If a peaceful person lives there, your greeting will be accepted. But if that's not the case, your greeting will be rejected.* (Luke 10:5-6) (The Message) A peaceful person or a "Person of Peace" is someone who God has already prepared to hear His word. Before you even meet them, God has been calling out to their hearts and they are ready to answer, "Yes." **God's plan for my life is to share His purposes with a PERSON OF PEACE**, because God uses a Person of Peace to quickly multiply His word and grow His family.

In the Bible, we learn the story of Jesus and the Woman at the Well. Jesus met a woman who was getting water from a well and He asked her for a drink. In a short conversation, Jesus revealed to the woman that even though they had just met, He knew all about her – He knew she had five husbands. He knew she was living with another man who was not her husband. Jesus offered her a new start, and a better life, and the woman believed Him and received it. She was excited, she immediately ran and gathered the whole town to come out and meet Jesus, her Savior – a man who had told her everything that she had ever done. The Woman at the Well was a Person of Peace.

The first characteristic we look for is that **A Person of Peace has a REPUTATION with those around them.** It's not necessarily a good reputation. It could be a bad one. A reputation just means that this person is well-known in their community. The Woman at the Well was undoubtedly well known. She had five husbands and was living with another man in a town that was not big enough to keep that kind of a secret. The wives of the town probably kept a close eye on her. The husbands probably wondered what all the excitement was about. Everyone probably talked about her at one point and few of them probably had anything good to say. A Person of Peace might be a restaurant owner, or a local politician, or maybe just someone who's popular with their family. A Person of Peace might be someone who people know more for their failure instead of their success. The important thing to remember is that God uses who He wants to use, and a Person of Peace will have a reputation.

The second characteristic we look for is that **A Person of Peace is RECEPTIVE to God's Word.** Receptive means this person is willing to hear what you have to say about spiritual matters. They don't have to believe right away, but they should show some evidence that God is working on their heart. The Woman at the Well started off being distant, she was skeptical and not sure who Jesus was or what He wanted. But when Jesus began to share God's truth with her, when He began to tell her how she could have a new life, the Woman at the Well definitely wanted to hear more. She was receptive to what Jesus had to say.

The third characteristic we look for is that **A Person of Peace will RECOMMEND you to others,** so you can share with them, as well. A person who is willing to recommend to others means they have a heart to obey and share what they learn with those around them – family, friends, neighbors, sometimes people they don't even know. When we begin to share spiritual matters and we see someone is receptive and responding to what God is doing in their heart, we should ask if they know anyone else who might like to hear. If we've found a Person of Peace, they'll be excited to bring others who need to hear. The Woman at the Well left Jesus and ran immediately to tell everyone she knew – and probably a lot of people that she didn't. She told them to come and meet this man, Jesus, who knew all about her life. The Bible says that many people in the village came to see Jesus and many believed. They came to see because of what the woman said, but they believed because of who Jesus was.

The Woman at the Well was a Person of Peace – she had a reputation; she was receptive; and she recommended Jesus to others. God had prepared her heart to be open to a better life, and Jesus was willing to share the truth with her. As followers of Jesus we need to do what Jesus did and be looking for a Person of Peace. The results in the Bible are amazing. From just a single conversation an entire village heard the good news and many of them became followers of Jesus. God wants us to do those same things today. God wants us to find a Person of Peace.

**To find a Person of Peace, I must be willing to PRAY to God and REACH OUT to those around me.** God loves to answer our prayers, especially those that ask Him to do what He has been planning all along. The Bible says – *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.* (1 John 5:14) (NIV) God has already been preparing the heart of a Person of Peace to be ready when we share. Prayer helps prepare our hearts for what God has been planning and make us sensitive to His will and His timing. And, as we pray, we need to reach out and meet new people and learn more about them by asking questions. Jesus never would have been able to share the truth with the Woman at the Well, if He wasn't first willing to begin a conversation. God had been preparing her heart, but Jesus needed to do His part. We need to do our part too. We need to find out what others care about, to hear their story, to ask about their life. We need to be willing to share our story and what we care about, as well. By praying and reaching out to those around us, we make ourselves available to God, so that He can reveal the Person of Peace and we can obey by living out His purposes and sharing them with others.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How did God work on your heart to prepare you before you heard the good news about Jesus? Do you think He's doing the same thing to other people's hearts, right now?
2. What will you do if a Person of Peace is willing to gather a group to hear more about Jesus? How would you share your faith?

### **PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES**

*Break up into smaller groups of two or three. Give each person the opportunity to work through each of the following activities.*

1. Plan a time to meet with another person in the group to pray and reach out to others in an effort to find a person of peace. Where would you go to do this? When would you go?

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

## **Lesson 10**

### **Jesus' Model for Worship**

#### **OPENING**

- 1. GREET one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.**
- 2. CHECK IN to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:**
  - a. MODEL – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. ASSIST – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. OBSERVE – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. MENTOR – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
- 3. PRAY for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.**
- 4. SHARE the lesson that follows...**

#### **MEMORY VERSE**

*I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. (Romans 12:1) (NIV)*

Let me ask you to think about your own church before we begin this session. Is your church healthy? What does that mean anyway—to be a healthy church? If your church is not doing very well, would you want to start a new church just like it? Would you want to plant an unhealthy church? Not intentionally, I hope! In these studies, we're going to get started examining five very important purposes of the church that helps it grow in healthy ways. In every spiritual movement underway in the world, one characteristic of the churches being started is that they are healthy!

To begin understanding how to plant healthy churches, we need to start by helping you develop an idea of the kind of church you want to start. To do this you will need to set an example for others to follow. And there is no better model for us to follow than Jesus Christ. The first part of Jesus' Great Commandment says, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*" (Matthew 22:37) (NIV). When we love God with everything we've got, the Bible calls that worship. In these studies, we'll spend time exploring what it means to really love God with our whole heart and our whole life by living the first of God's five purposes – the purpose of WORSHIP. We'll learn some practical ways to worship God and show our love to Him – things like praise and thanks, and giving, and saying "yes" to whatever He asks us to do. We'll learn how Jesus taught His disciples to worship God through prayer. We'll look at the very prayer Jesus taught His followers and learn how it's still a perfect model that we can use any time we want to talk to God. Remember, worship is just one of five purposes of a healthy church.

For an example of worship, we have no further place to look than Jesus Christ. Jesus lived His whole life as a model for us to follow. The way He prayed. How He treated others.

How He obeyed God no matter how much it cost. Everything He said and did had a purpose. Jesus said – *These words you hear are not My own; they belong to the Father who sent me* (John 14:24b) (NAS). He said – *I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.* (John 6:38) (NAS). Jesus honored God by perfectly living out God's purposes for His life. Jesus said to God the Father – *I have brought You glory on earth by completing the work You gave me to do.* Everything Jesus said and did was an example to His followers of how to live. Jesus was the perfect model of what it means to live a life that pleases God.

“Modeling” is one of the most important and powerful teaching tools that God has shown to us. To be a model is to be a sort of perfect image of what you hope something will become. Jesus said – *I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.* (John 13:15-17) (NIV) God gave us Jesus as model of how we should live our lives. But God wants us to be like Jesus and to live a life that's an example for others.

People who don't know Jesus or who don't know Jesus well won't know how to live a life that pleases God. That's why God showed the way by giving us Jesus to follow and live a life from which we can show Christ in us so that others can learn by example. The Bible says as followers of Jesus – *you are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, His very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light.* (1 Peter 2:9) (NLT) God says that when people don't know His way to live, it's like they're stumbling around in darkness. They need a light so they can see. Jesus said – *“I am the light the world”* because His life was a perfect example of how the whole world should live. But Jesus also said – *“You are the light of the world”* (Matthew 5:14a) (NIV), because God wants our life to be an example to the world, too.

So what do we show to others as a model and when? The answer is “everything” and “all the time.” As followers of Jesus, others are watching us to see how we act, to see what it means to be a disciple. So when we pray – we're showing others how to pray. When we love one another – we're showing others what our relationships should be like. And when we rely on the Bible to tell us how to live – we're showing others obedience to God's Word. We show how we serve others and share our faith. We show how to live out God's purposes. We show how to obey and teach. Every time we follow Jesus in any of these things we are an example to others, especially new believers. And, because every disciple should be a model of God's picture and plan, we're teaching new believers how they can follow our example and be shown as an example to others. The Bible says – *“Therefore, show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.”* (2 Corinthians 8:24) (NIV)

Each of these sessions is a model. We've shown you how to share our faith. We've shown you how to spend our time together as believers – how to greet and pray, how to check in, how to grow, and how to pray for one another. We've shown you that the Bible is the Word of God and tells us how we should live. We've show you how to obey. We've shown you how to teach. Every time you meet with your small group and learn how to Plant Churches and Equip Servant Leaders, think about what is being shown to you through these sessions. And, every time you take what you've learned out and begin to live it in your own life and share it with others, think about how you can show yourself to be just like Jesus to those around you.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Who is someone who shows themselves as an example of how you should live?
2. Who do you show yourself to as an example?

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

## Lesson 11

### Living a Life of Worship

#### OPENING

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

As a follower of Jesus our job is to keep our eyes on Him. When He moves, we move. Where He goes, we go. What He says, we do. It seems simple. But even for a disciple, it's easy to get distracted and focus on what we can see instead of what we believe. It's easy to become worried about pleasing others around us, instead of pleasing God. When Jesus first told His followers what it meant to live a life that pleased God, He made sure that they understood that what we say and what we do is meant to be a blessing to God not to win praises from others. Jesus said during His Sermon on the Mount – *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is heaven.*

*When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.*

*And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you pray, GO INTO YOUR INNER ROOM AND WHEN YOU HAVE SHUT YOUR DOOR, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. They will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.’ For if you forgive*



*men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.*

*And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.*

*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth where, moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Matthew 6:1-12) (NAS)*

In this passage, Jesus is giving His followers the secret to a right relationship with God. God wants us to be an example for others and show them how to live, but He doesn't want us performing for others. God isn't impressed when we do great, extravagant things for Him if it's only to get someone else's attention. He would rather have us do simple things – give simple gifts, offer simple prayers, sacrifice in simple ways – as long as we're doing it for Him. With God, it's less about what we do and more about why we do it. Again and again in His Word, God tells us that He cares more about what's on the inside than what's on the outside. God cares about our heart, and our heart is the key to WORSHIP. And worship is the first sign of a healthy church.

### **CLOSING**

- 1. APPLY the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.**
- 2. FELLOWSHIP with time for tea or snacks.**

## Lesson 12

### God's Purpose of Worship

#### OPENING

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

#### ***SMALL GROUP LEADER:***

*Before this segment, remind the small group the origin of God's Purpose of Ministry by reciting the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-38) and highlighting the phrase "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."*

In order to get ready for the next segment, I would like you read along with me or recite from memory Matthew 22:37-38, which has been called, the Great Commandment.

#### **MEMORY VERSE**

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it – Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-38) (NIV)*

Thank you. Now, we're ready to talk about worshipping God as those verses instruct us – with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. This is truly the essence of worship.

God created us because He loves us.

God loved us even before we were born, and He created us because He wanted a family. The Bible says – *Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure.* (Ephesians 1:4-5) (NLT) God tells us that His love is so big that even with all the ability He gives us to comprehend and reason, we will never fully understand it. God tells us that His love is so strong that there is nothing and no one that can separate us from it. God tells us that He loves us so much that He sent His own Son to die for us so that we can be

with Him forever. God loves us and these are just a few of the ways that He shows His love to us.

But how do we show our love to God? When we realize all that God has done for us, we can't help but love Him in return. God wants us to love Him back. And it pleases Him when we do everything we can to love Him in the same way that He loves us. We'll never be able to love God as much as He loves us. He's God and we're not. But, Jesus tells us in His Great Commandment that God wants us to love Him as much as we can – with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. **Loving God with everything I am is God's Purpose of WORSHIP.** And God gave us Worship so we could celebrate His love for us and show our love to Him.

When God describes how much He loves us and how much He wants us to love Him, He paints a picture of a love that is so high and so wide and so deep that we can hardly understand it. Our ways are not God's ways. That's why it's important for us to listen to how God Himself describes worship and how He wants us to love and please Him.

First, **God wants me to love Him with my whole HEART.** Our heart is very important to God. God says that when He wants to know about us – who we really are and what we really think – He looks at our heart. God says our heart is where we make all our deepest decisions; it's where we set the course of our life. Our heart is where we where we consider which way we will go and who we will follow. Our heart directs our life. That's why God says He wants us to love Him with our *whole* heart, because He knows if we do then we'll love Him with the real, passionate and thoughtful love that He desires.

**God wants my love for Him to be REAL.** God said – *These people say they are mine. They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away. And their worship of me amounts to nothing more than human laws learned by rote.* (Isaiah 29:13) (NLT) We don't show our love to a living God by saying words that have no meaning or by repeating the same actions over and over again. It's easy to say we love someone. And it's easy to go through the motions of showing respect. But God wants something deeper than that. He wants our hearts to be connected. He wants us to care about what He cares about, to value what He values, to love what He loves. God doesn't want us to worship Him out of habit, doing certain things in a certain order hoping for a certain result. God doesn't want a ritual from us. God wants a relationship with us. God wants us to love Him with all our heart.

**God wants my love for Him to be PASSIONATE.** The Bible says – *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?* (Psalms 42:2) (NIV) When you love someone you are constantly looking for a chance to be with them. God loves us passionately. He thinks about us. He seeks us out when we are lost. He finds us and invites us to spend eternity with Him in heaven. He's excited to spend time with us, to hear our hopes, our dreams, and our concerns. He wants us to be excited to spend time with Him, too. He hopes we'll look for opportunities to be with Him, to seek Him out, to hear what is on His heart. God's Word describes what our love for Him should be. It's as if we were searching for Him like He was cool water in a dry desert. His presence is not just something we want but something we need. God wants us to love Him with all our soul.

**God wants my love for Him to be THOUGHTFUL.** The Bible says – *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.* (Colossians 3:2) (NIV) God thought about us before the world even began and created us to be a part of His family. God thinks about us right now

and is working out the good plans that He has for our lives and the good works that He has already prepared. God thinks about our future and has a place waiting for us in heaven. When we love someone, we think about them all the time. We make plans to be with them. We prepare a place in our heart for them. God wants us to think about Him, to consider His ways, His character, and His love. The more we think about Him, the more we become like Him and do the things that please Him. God wants us to love Him with all our mind.

Not only does God want me to love Him with my whole heart, **God wants me to love Him with my whole LIFE**. When God describes His love for us, when He says He wants us to love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind, He's painting a picture of a love that's abundant, overflowing, and unlimited. It's that kind of all-consuming love He wants in return from us. He doesn't want worship to be a part of our life. He wants us to live our whole life in worship. God doesn't want us to put a limit on His love.

God doesn't want us to limit our love-relationship with Him to only certain places. God is everywhere – in the highest heavens and in every believer's heart. He promises to be with even the smallest group of His followers, no matter where they are in the world. God is everywhere, so **God wants me to worship Him EVERYWHERE**. Jesus said – *you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.*" (John 4:21b,24) (NIV)

God doesn't want us to limit our love-relationship with Him to only certain occasions or days of the week. God is eternal. He was here before the beginning of time and He will be here long after. God wants our love for Him to be like His love for us which stretches across time, so **God wants me to worship Him ALL THE TIME**. The Bible says – *Worship Him continually* (Psalms 105:4) (TEV); *Praise Him from sunrise to sunset* (Psalms 113:3) (LB); *I will thank the Lord at all times.* (Psalms 34:1a) (NIV)

God's picture of worship is so large, so encompassing, and so demanding if we were to obey Him we would spend our whole lives worshipping God. And that's exactly God's plan. God doesn't want Worship to be a part of our life. God wants us to spend our life in Worship. And, the only way we can spend our whole lives worshipping God is to worship God with our whole lives – what we think, what we say, what we do, who we are. We worship God with how we live our life. We worship God by living a life that pleases Him.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What does Jesus say is more important, doing things out of a genuine love for God or to get the attention and praise of others? What does Jesus say happens to those who are only concerned with what others think?
2. What is the difference between "showing off" for others and "showing as an example?"
3. What is one word that describes your love for God right now? Why?
4. Out of these words – "real", "passionate", or "thoughtful", which one seems like you might need to work on it the most? What is one thing you can do to help your love for God become more "real", "passionate", or "thoughtful"?
5. What are some ways that I could practice worshipping God "everywhere" and "all the time"?

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

## Lesson 13

### How to Worship God

#### OPENING

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

God created the universe and everything in it. Before time began, He was, and long after time is finished, He will be. God is all-powerful, all-knowing and everywhere all at once. We don't need to try to impress Him with what we do for Him. We can't. God doesn't ask for our love to be loud and showy and full of ritual and repetition. God wants our love to be quiet and meaningful, passionate and sincere. That's why **Doing SIMPLE THINGS from MY HEART is how I worship God.** No one lived a life more pleasing to God than Jesus. Jesus lived a perfect life of worship. His life is a perfect model of how we can worship God in simple ways.

Jesus lived a life of praise and thanks. The Bible says – *Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth"* (Luke 10:21) (NIV). The Bible says – *Jesus took the bread in his hands and gave thanks to God.* (John 6:11) (CEV) Jesus showed us how to worship in simple ways by acknowledging who God is through praise and telling God how much our lives are blessed by Him through giving thanks. **I worship God when I PRAISE AND THANK HIM.** The Bible says – *Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.* (Psalm 106:1) (NLT)

Jesus sang songs to the Lord. The Bible never tells us what kind of voice Jesus had, but it does tell us that Jesus said – *"I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises."* (Hebrews 2:12) (NIV) Jesus showed us how to worship God through singing. Songs are a way to turn our attention to God, to praise Him and give Him thanks. **I worship God when I SING SONGS to Him** and tell others about who He is and the great things He has done. The Bible says – *I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving.* (Psalm 69:30) (NIV)

Jesus talked to God through prayer. Sometimes He prayed by Himself. The Bible says – *Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.* (Luke 5:16) (NIV) Sometimes He would pray with others. The Bible says – *Jesus took Peter, John, and James with him and went up*

*on a mountain to pray.* (Luke 9:28) (CEV) Jesus showed us how to worship God through prayer. And whether alone or with a group of believers, **I worship God when I SHARE MY HEART through PRAYER.** God wants us talk to Him about our thoughts and our hopes, our needs and our fears – anything and everything that’s on our hearts. God wants to hear from us – all the time. The Bible says – *be faithful in prayer* (Romans 12:12) (NIV); and *keep on praying* (1 Thessalonians 5:17) (NLT).

Jesus listened to God and meditated on His word. Jesus said – “*the things which I heard from [God], these I speak to the world.*” (John 8:26b) (NAS) Jesus said – *Your problem is that you don't know the Scriptures, and you don't know the power of God.* (Matthew 22:29) (NLT) Jesus taught us how to worship God by being quiet, opening our hearts, and listening to what God wants to tell us. **I worship God when I LISTEN TO HIM and THINK ABOUT HIS WORD.** The Bible says – *Study this Book of the Law continually. Meditate on it day and night so you may be sure to obey all that is written in it. Only then will you succeed.* (Joshua 1:8) (NLT) God said – “*If you listen to me and do what I tell you, I will be your God, you will be my people, and all will go well for you.*” (Jeremiah 7:23) (CEV.)

Jesus fasted. The Bible says – *For forty days Jesus was tested by the devil, and during that time he went without eating.* (Luke 4:2a) (CEV) Jesus taught us how to worship God by giving up things that please us in order to do the things that please Him. **I worship GOD when I FAST for Him.** God says a fast isn’t always about food. God says a fast is about making sure we care about what He cares about. It’s about taking our attention away from our own needs so we can concentrate on the needs of others. God said – *the kind of fasting I want calls you to free those who are wrongly imprisoned and to stop oppressing those who work for you. Treat them fairly and give them what they earn. I want you to share your food with the hungry and to welcome poor wanderers into your homes. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help.* (Isaiah 58:6-7) (NLT)

Jesus gave offerings to the Lord. Jesus said to pay what you owe, but – *Give God what belongs to God.* (Matthew 22:21) (CEV). Jesus is the Son of God and the “King of kings.” He doesn’t owe God offerings. He is God. But when Jesus was on earth, He gave offerings to God as an example for us of how we should give. Jesus taught us that worship can be as simple as giving back to God part of what He has given to us. Jesus also taught us to give to the poor and those in need. Everywhere Jesus went, He looked after the poor, and Jesus wants us to do that, too. **I worship God when I GIVE GIFTS to Him and to the poor.** As followers of Jesus, we give offerings to show our love and respect for God. The Bible says – *I want you to be leaders also in the spirit of cheerful giving... This is one way to prove that your love is real, that it goes beyond mere words.* (2 Corinthians 8:7b-8) (LB)

Jesus lived His whole life in obedience to God. He was obedient even when it cost Him everything He had. The Bible says – *Christ was humble. He obeyed God and even died on a cross.* (Philippians 2:8) (CEV) Jesus knew there is no greater way to show our love to God than to give our whole lives to Him, to say “yes” to Him no matter what He asks. Jesus showed us that **I worship God when I OBEY HIM no matter what it costs.** Everything else that we do to worship God and show Him how much we love Him can all be summed up in obeying Him. For God there is nothing more important and no greater proof of our love. Jesus said – *If anyone loves me, they will obey me. Then my Father will love them, and we will come to them and live in them.* (John 14:23) (CEV) Obedience is the best way we can worship God.

Jesus did all of these things – simple acts of worship – to model for us and give us an example of how we can show our love to God. Jesus showed us how to worship by giving God praise and thanks and by singing songs. He showed us how to worship by praying to God and quietly listening to what He says to us through His word. Jesus showed us how to fast and give offerings. Jesus also showed us that the greatest offering we can give, our greatest act of worship, is to give ourselves – our whole life – to God.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Which one of the ways Jesus showed us how to worship speaks to your heart right now?
2. Which one of these ways of worship seems like it would be the hardest for you? Why?
3. Why would obeying Him be the best way to show God how much we love Him?
4. What are some of the ways that you've already showed your love and worshipped God by obeying Him?

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.**
2. **FELLOWSHIP with time for tea or snacks.**



## **Lesson 14**

### **How To Pray**

#### **OPENING**

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

#### **MEMORY VERSE**

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it – Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-38) (NIV)*

God wants to talk to us. The Creator of the entire universe, the One who gives life to everything on earth, the everlasting God of eternity wants to have a conversation with us. We talk and He promises to listen. He talks and He expects us to hear and obey. God calls it Prayer. Prayer is one of the ways we show our love for God.

God loves us. He created us for a relationship, and He wants to hear from us – a lot. God tells us to pray all the time. The Bible says – *Never stop praying* (1 Thessalonians 5:17) (CEV). God tells us to pray about everything. The Bible says – *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.* (Philippians 4:6) (NLT) When we pray, God doesn't want us to try to impress Him or somebody else with what we say. Jesus said – *When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.* (Matthew 6:5) (NLT) God wants us to be real. He doesn't want us to be afraid He won't listen. Jesus said – *Don't recite the same prayer over and over as the heathen do, who think prayers are answered only by repeating them again and again.* (Matthew 6:7) (LB) God hears our prayers.

Jesus taught us how to pray the right way. Again, I need to point out that He showed us a model. Jesus said – *Pray like this: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven. Give us our food for today, and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.* (Matthew 6:9-13) (NLT) Jesus doesn't expect us to say those same words again and again. That wasn't

His point. Remember, Jesus said – *When you pray, don't talk on and on as people do who don't know God. They think God likes to hear long prayers. Don't be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask.* (Matthew 6:7-8) (CEV) Jesus didn't give us certain words to pray, He gave us a certain way to pray. Jesus showed us a model prayer as a pattern for how to pray in a way that pleases God.

There are six parts to Jesus' prayer.

The first part of the prayer is **PRAISE**. Jesus shows us how to start our prayers by showing our respect for God. Jesus prayed – *"Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored."* Prayer is a time of praising God for who He is. It's a time to thank Him for all that He's done for us. It pleases God when we praise and thank Him through prayer.

The second part of the prayer is for our **PURPOSE**. Jesus shows us how we should commit ourselves to doing God's will. Jesus prayed – *"May your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven."* God's will is perfect. It's never wrong, and it's always motivated by His love for us. The best thing we could hope for in our lives is for God's will – for our family, for other believers, for our work, for our neighbors, for our country, and for the whole world. When we pray, we should tell God we want His will everywhere in our lives. It pleases God when we pray for His purposes.

The third part of the prayer is for **PROVISION**. Jesus shows us how to pray for the things we need. Jesus prayed – *"Give us our food for today."* God is our Father and He loves us. He knows what we need even before we ask, and He wants to give it to us. But, He also wants us to come to Him to talk about it. Remember God loves to talk to us, so we should pray about everything we need – our spiritual needs, our relationship needs, our financial needs, our physical needs, even our need for wisdom, so we can know what to do. God wants to hear it all. God knows what we need. Jesus said – *Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs and He will give you all you need from day to day if you live for Him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.* (Matthew 6:32b-33) (NLT) God wants us to bring our needs to Him. The Bible says – *You do not have, because you do not ask God.* (James 4:2b) (NIV) And, when we do ask God for something we need, we should be confident, specific, and thankful. The Bible says – *Don't worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* (Philippians 4:6) (NIV) It pleases God when we pray for our needs.

The fourth part of the prayer is for **PARDON**. Jesus shows us how to ask God to forgive our sins. Remember sins are things we do our own way instead of God's way. That doesn't stop just because we're a follower of Jesus. Even though we try hard not to, we still do things our own way all the time! God says that He wants us to ask His forgiveness for those things. Jesus prayed – *forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.* (Matthew 6:12a) (NLT) When we pray for forgiveness, we should **ask** the Holy Spirit to show us what we've done wrong. The Bible says – *Examine me, O God, and know my mind; test me, and discover my thoughts. Find out if there is any evil in me...* Psalm 139:23-24 (GN) Then, when the Holy Spirit has shown us our sins, we should **confess** each one. The Bible says – *You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins. Confess them and give them up; then God will show mercy to you.* Proverbs 28:13 (GN) We should also **make peace** with others when necessary. Jesus said – *When you remember your brother has something against you... go at once and make peace with him, then come back and offer your gift to God.* (Matthew 5:23-24) (GN) And finally, we should **accept**, by faith, that God is

able and willing to forgive our sins. The Bible says – *If we confess our sins to God, he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away.* (1 John 1:9) (CEV) Remember, Jesus prayed – *forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.* In His perfect prayer, Jesus tied a couple of things together. First, he took the fact that God forgives us of our sins against Him. Then He tied that to our forgiving others of their sins against us. When we ask for forgiveness from God, we’ve got to be willing to give forgiveness to others. They’re linked! It pleases God when we pray for forgiveness.

The fifth part of the prayer is for **PEOPLE**. Jesus shows us how to pray for others. Jesus prayed – *as we have forgiven those who sinned against us.* The Bible says – *pray for everyone. Ask God to help and bless them all, and tell God how thankful you are for each of them.* (1 Timothy 2:1b) (NLT) God wants us to pray for people – for our family, our friends, our neighbors, our leaders, even our enemies. Jesus said – *Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.* (Luke 6:28) (NIV) It pleases God when we pray for people.

The sixth and final part of Jesus’ prayer is for **PROTECTION**. Jesus shows us how to pray for our spiritual safety. Jesus prayed – *don’t let us yield to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.* As followers of Jesus, we face spiritual battles every day. The Bible says – *we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms.* (Ephesians 6:12) (NLT) Satan wants to defeat us through temptation and fear. By praying for protection, we have the confidence to face every situation. The Bible says – *The Spirit who is in you is more powerful than the spirit who is in those who belong to the world.* (1 John 4:4) (GN) It pleases God when we pray for spiritual protection.

Jesus doesn’t expect us to pray using the same words He used, but He gave us an example of the things we should be praying about and a pattern of how we can pray. Our prayers should be filled with Praise, Purpose, and requests for Provision. We should pray for Pardon, other People, and God’s Protection. These are the kind of things God is pleased to hear. But the most important thing is to pray. The Bible says – *Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.* (Philippians 4:6) (NLT)

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What are some of the things you’d like to talk to God about? What are some of the things that you need that only God can provide?
2. What does God say about forgiving others? Why is it important to God? Is there anything you need to ask God to forgive in your life?
3. **ACTIVITY** – Let the group take a moment to pray a silent prayer asking God to forgive anything we’ve done against Him.

### **PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES**

*Break up into smaller groups of two or three. Give each Person the opportunity to work through each of the following activities.*

1. Practice praying the way Jesus taught us as a group. Have one person in the group begin a prayer. Then have each member add to the prayer by praying a simple sentence from one of the six parts of Jesus’ model prayer. (*For example – one person will pray a sentence of praise, the next person will pray a sentence on God’s purpose, the next person will pray for God’s provision, etc.*) Continue praying until you’ve

completed each of the six parts of the model and everyone has had a chance to pray at least once.

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

## Lesson 15

### Accountability For Fellowship

#### OPENING

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

#### MEMORY VERSE

*So in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*  
(Romans 12:5) (NIV)

One of the greatest blessings of being a part of God's family is the blessing of ACCOUNTABILITY. We may not immediately think of accountability as a blessing. Our first thought is probably of someone standing behind us, watching and judging everything we do, waiting for us to make a mistake. But that's not God's plan at all. God blesses us with accountability because He knows that it will help us live the best possible life and prepare us for the best possible eternity. Accountability just means that as part of God's family, I'm watching out for you and you're watching out for me.

Part of God's plan for the world is that one day He will hold all of us responsible for what we did and said during this life that He's given to us. The Bible says – *each of us will give an account of himself to God.* (Romans 14:12) (NIV) As humans, God will want to know what we did with His Son, Jesus. Did we accept Him or reject Him? As followers of Jesus, God will want to know what we did with what He gave us – our time, our talents, our opportunities, and our experience. God will ask us did we use what we have to live a life that pleases Him.

Jesus told a story about accountability. Jesus said: *"...a man went away and put his three servants in charge of all he owned. The man knew what each servant could do. So he handed five thousand coins to the first servant, two thousand to the second, and one thousand to the third. Then he left the country. ... Some time later the master of those servants returned. He called them in and asked what they had done with his money. The servant who had been given five thousand coins brought them in with the five thousand that he had earned. He said, "Sir, you gave me five thousand coins, and I have earned five thousand more." "Wonderful!" his master replied. "You are a good and faithful servant. I left you in charge of only a little,*

*but now I will put you in charge of much more. Come and share in my happiness!" Next, the servant who had been given two thousand coins came in and said, "Sir, you gave me two thousand coins, and I have earned two thousand more." "Wonderful!" his master replied. "You are a good and faithful servant. I left you in charge of only a little, but now I will put you in charge of much more. Come and share in my happiness!" The servant who had been given one thousand coins then came in and said, "Sir, I know that you are hard to get along with. You harvest what you don't plant and gather crops where you haven't scattered seed. I was frightened and went out and hid your money in the ground. Here is every single coin!" The master of the servant told him, "You are lazy and good-for-nothing! You know that I harvest what I don't plant and gather crops where I haven't scattered seed. You could have at least put my money in the bank, so that I could have earned interest on it." Then the master said, "Now your money will be taken away and given to the servant with ten thousand coins! Everyone who has something will be given more, and they will have more than enough. But everything will be taken from those who don't have anything. You are a worthless servant, and you will be thrown out into the dark where people will cry and grit their teeth in pain." (Matthew 25:14-30) (CEV)*

Jesus told us that story because He wants us to understand just how important it is to use what we've been given. The Bible says, one day God will hold all of us accountable. He wants us to be prepared for that day, so He made us part of His family. God wants us to practice being accountable to one another now, so we can be ready to be accountable to Him later.

The best way that we can keep each other accountable is to CHECK IN every time we meet. We want to make sure that every one of us in God's family is obeying His commands by living what we've learned in our own lives and sharing it with others. "Checking In" is not about judging each other. We don't do that. Jesus said – *Do not judge, so that you will not be judged.* (Matthew 7:1) (NAS) Instead we check in and hold each other accountable to make sure we're growing and becoming more like Jesus, to make sure we don't miss out on the rewards God has planned for our lives. We hold each other accountable to do two things – make sure we obey all that God commands us to do and make sure that we're faithful to pass on what we learn to others.

Jesus knows we will all stand before Him one day and give an account of how we've lived our life and what we've done with what we've been given. Jesus wants us to be ready. He gave us a family to help us check in and stay accountable in this life, so we can be ready to give a good account in the next one. Jesus wants to be sure we hear the words – *You are a good and faithful servant. I left you in charge of only a little, but now I will put you in charge of much more. Come and share in my happiness!* That's His perfect plan for every one of us. That's why God made us a part of His family and gave us the blessing of accountability.

## **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.**
2. **FELLOWSHIP with time for tea or snacks.**

## Lesson 16

### Stories of God's Family

#### OPENING

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

God's picture and plan for a family isn't always what we expect it to be. We think of our earthly family, our physical parents, our brothers and sisters in this life, as our closest relationships. But God says as followers of Jesus we have a new spiritual family. Our earthly family is temporary. Our spiritual family will last forever. Our earthly family is limited. Our spiritual family means that God is our Father and includes every disciple who ever lived as our brother or sister in Jesus. We owe our earthly family our respect, but we owe our spiritual family our loyalty and love. Jesus warns us not to neglect our earthly responsibilities, especially to our families. In fact, the Bible says – *If anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.* (1 Timothy 5:8) (NIV) Jesus wants to take care of our own, but Jesus also gives us a new way to look at family and a new set of family values.

*As they were walking along someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you no matter where you go." But Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but I, the Son of Man, have no home of my own, not even a place to lay my head." He said to another person, "Come, be my disciple." The man agreed, but he said, "Lord, first let me return home and bury my father." Jesus replied, "Let those who are spiritually dead care for their own dead. Your duty is to go and preach the coming of the Kingdom of God." Another said, "Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family." But Jesus told him, "Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57-62) (NLT)*

*Now great crowds were traveling with Him. So He turned and said to them: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, and even His own life – he cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:25-26) (HCSB)*

*Peter said, "We have left our homes and followed you." "Yes," Jesus replied, "and I assure you, everyone who has given up house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake*

*of the Kingdom of God, will be repaid many times over in this life, as well as receiving eternal life in the world to come." (Luke 18:18-30) (NLT)*

*In the Gospel that Mark wrote, it is written, Jesus' mother and brothers arrived at the house where he was teaching. They stood outside and sent word for him to come out and talk with them. There was a crowd around Jesus, and someone said, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." Jesus replied, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Then he looked at those around him and said, "These are my mother and brothers. Anyone who does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:31-35) (NLT)*

In these passages, Jesus tells us that family is not about who you were born to, but who you belong to. He tells us that if we're willing to leave our old lives behind, He promises the start of a new life with Him. Are we to intentionally abandon all responsibilities to the families with whom we live? Of course not. For instance, Jesus was against the "Corban" practice in His day of making a pious gift to the Temple so that parents in need were ignored. (Mark 7:11-13) The Lord wants us to respect our families, but not to the point of worship. Jesus said that we should love Him so much that by comparison we would hate not only our families, but ourselves. The hate that Jesus mentioned was not angry emotion, but about grasping a difficult choice. He warns us that we may have to give up some of the comforts of our earthly family, but then He warms us with the knowledge that we'll never give up more than we gain. At every turn, Jesus makes us re-think what it means to be a part of a family – His family – a family that is like the sand at the seashore or the stars in the sky; a family that will last forever. Anything less is a disgusting fake.

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.**
2. **FELLOWSHIP with time for tea or snacks.**



## Lesson 17

### God's Purpose of Fellowship

#### OPENING

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

#### **SMALL GROUP LEADER:**

*Before the next segment, remind the small group the origin of God's Purpose of Fellowship by writing or reciting the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and highlighting the phrase "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"*

#### MEMORY VERSE

*"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20) (NIV)*

The first characteristic of a healthy church we learned in a previous session is that we are to show others Jesus' example in Worship. In this session, we will introduce FELLOWSHIP as the second purpose of a healthy church. If you've ever visited a cold, uncaring church, you have only experienced the surface of the problem. A healthy church knows and understands more than get-togethers and social interaction. There's a side to fellowship that many Christians never realize is a joy and privilege. We can praise God that He wants us to be in His own family!

God never meant for us to go through this life alone. His plan has always been for us to be a part of a family – His family. In this session, we'll learn more about what it means to live as a part of God's family by living the second of God's purposes – the purpose of FELLOWSHIP. We'll learn how God gave us His family so that we can live out His perfect plan for our lives. We'll learn how God's family gives us strength and support when times get hard. We'll see how living as part of God's family in this life helps us get ready for living with all of God's family forever in heaven. We'll also learn how God's family comes together to make up what God calls "His Church." We'll learn what being a church is really all about, and we'll learn some of the things we can do as a church that help us stay healthy, and strong, and growing. Finally, we'll spend some time learning how we can grow closer as

God's family and His church by praying for one another. There's no better way to show our love for one another as a family, than to share one another's hurts and hopes in prayer.

God created us to be a part of His family. Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, part of the mission that Jesus gave to His followers was to baptize new believers. Baptism is God's way of showing that our lives are now part of something bigger. Baptism is an outward sign that we have made an inward change – we've died with Jesus to our old, self-centered life, and we are raised with Jesus to a brand-new, God-centered life full of hope for eternity. Baptism shows that we are connected to God forever through Jesus and connected to Jesus forever through His Holy Spirit. Baptism shows that in Jesus we are connected with every other believer that ever lived or ever will live. Baptism shows that we're fellowshiping with God's family. When we begin to live a life that is connected to all other believers through Jesus, when we help one another, when we encourage one another, when we love one another, when we hold one another accountable to live lives that please God – when we do those things, we are living as God's family. And, **Living as God's Family is God's Purpose of FELLOWSHIP**.

God's word shows there are three reasons why He wants us to live a life connected to other believers in fellowship – God wants us to have a family; God wants us to have a foundation; and God wants us to have a future.

### **Fellowship is God's Plan for a FAMILY.**

God's perfect plan for us is to have a new family in Jesus. The Bible says – *His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure.* (Ephesians 1:5) (NLT) God gave us an earthly family as a picture of the spiritual family He planned all along. As followers of Jesus, God is our Father, Jesus is our Brother, and all other believers are our brothers and sisters in Him. God gave us this new family because **God doesn't want us to live our lives ALONE**. God wants us to belong to something bigger than ourselves. The Bible says – *You are a member of God's very own family... and you belong in God's household with every other Christian.* (Ephesians 2:19) (LB) God gave us a new family because **God doesn't want us to live our lives APART**. God wants us to be connected, to feel loved and accepted, and to be needed. The Bible says – *We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.* (Romans 12:5) (NLT) God gave us a new family because **God doesn't want us to live SEPARATED FROM HIM**. God wants us to be near Him. Jesus said – *Where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them.* (Matthew 18:20) (GN) God gives us a new family through fellowship.

### **Fellowship is God's Plan for a FOUNDATION.**

God's perfect plan for us is to have a strong foundation in this life. The Bible says – *the foundation that God has laid is solid. On it is written, "The Lord knows who his people are.* (2 Timothy 2:19a) (CEV) God knows we'll always have trouble in this life because of sin. There will be hard times when the trials and temptations of this world are just too much for us to handle on our own. God gave us a family of His people for just those times. God designed His family to work together and to be much stronger as a whole than any one of us could ever be by ourselves.

Just having someone go with us through our hard times is a great blessing by itself, but God says that there are things we can do to help build an even stronger foundation of fellowship. **We build a stronger foundation together when we LOVE ONE ANOTHER.** The Bible tells us there are many ways we should treat others. The Bible says – *serve one another, pray for one another, be kind and compassionate to one another*, and most importantly – *love one another*. There are many, many more commands in God’s word of how we should treat each other, but all of them can be summed up with “love one another.” God wants everything we say and do to be based on love; and all of His commands are meant for us to build one another up, to make us better and stronger because we’ve been together.

**We build a stronger foundation together when we LIVE GOD’S PURPOSES.** The Bible says – *And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.* (Acts 2:42) (NAS) Sometimes God wants us to enjoy His purposes by ourselves. There are times when He wants our worship to be just between Him and us. There are times when we grow to be more like Jesus simply by spending time alone with God. But God intends for us to spend most of our lives living out His purposes with other members of His family. Worship becomes greater and takes on new meaning as a group. Other believers can help us see how we grow to be more like Christ. God created us to work as a body and to live out His purposes as a family. We are always better together.

**We build a stronger foundation together when we ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER.** The Bible says – *encourage one another and build each other up.* (1 Thessalonians 5:11a) (NIV). It’s hard to live the life that God’s planned for us – a life that pleases God – when we’re discouraged, so God gave us a family for when times are hard. Whether it’s a gentle touch, a simple prayer, or just a kind word, even little things can mean a lot. The Bible says – *An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.* (Proverbs 12:25) (NIV)

**We build a stronger foundation together when we KEEP ONE ANOTHER ACCOUNTABLE.** The Bible says – *people learn from one another just as iron sharpens iron.* (Proverbs 27:17) (GN) When we’re alone, it’s easy to get off track and miss out on all the good plans and purposes God has for our lives. The way we get back on God’s path and stay on God’s path is through accountability to other believers in our life. Accountability isn’t judgment. Accountability is when God’s family makes sure that we’re living the best life God has for us. God gives us a strong foundation through fellowship.

**Fellowship is God’s Plan for a FUTURE.**

God’s perfect plan is for His family to have a future. The Bible says – *God has reserved a priceless inheritance for His children. It is kept in heaven for you...* (1 Peter 1:4a) (NLT) Our family on earth will only last a lifetime, but God’s family lasts forever. We will spend eternity with our Heavenly Father, our Brother Jesus, and all our other brothers and sisters in Christ. God’s heart is that His family grow to include every single person on earth. The Bible says – *...He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent.* (2 Peter 3:9b) (NLT) God gave His family to the world as a glimpse of what life and love in heaven will be. When we love each other the way God commands, our love is the greatest invitation for the world to come to know Jesus and spend an eternity with Him. Jesus prayed to God the Father – *I want all of them to be one with each other, just as I am one with you and you are one with me. I also want them to be one with us. Then the people of*

*this world will believe that you sent me.* (John 17:21) (CEV) When we come together as a family the way God intended, people see a love that's irresistible and they want to know more. God gives us His family a future through fellowship.

God's perfect plan is that we live as a family, build a strong foundation in life, and have a future with Him forever in heaven. God gave us His purpose of fellowship so that we can live out His plan, together. God wants us to live out His purpose of fellowship together in what He calls His Church.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What are some of the things that surprised you about how Jesus talked about our families here on earth?
2. What does Jesus mean when He says we will be "repaid" many times over in this life for giving up wives and brothers and sisters and parents to follow Him?
3. Which is more true in your life right now? I'm glad God gave me His family so that I'm not alone. Or, I'm glad God gave me His family so that I can get through these hard times.
4. What is one way you can show your love for God's family so that others can see and feel excited about getting to know Jesus better?

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

**Lesson 18**  
**God's Family Living Together As God's Church**

**OPENING**

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

What is a church?

When most of us think of a church, we think about a building or a certain place to go, but the Bible says the church is “the family of God” and “the body of Christ.” These phrases don’t describe a place, they describe a people. These words describe followers of Jesus living as God’s family.

A church is not defined in the Bible, but you can think of a church as a family. Covenant and family are both biblical concepts, but the church as a family is used far more frequently. A **DEFINITION** of a healthy, growing church might be as simple as:

*A CHURCH IS... a spiritual family called to obey God’s commands and pursue His purposes on earth.*

Now, this definition doesn’t say anything about the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper because those are included when we do what Jesus commanded. Further, it doesn’t speak specifically to the Great Commission or many other vital aspects that are included in fulfilling the Lord’s purposes. When we’re together with other believers we are a “spiritual family,” and if we’re obeying and teaching all that Jesus told us to do, then God calls us a church. The church is as big as every believer that ever lived and ever will live, and the church is as small as the smallest gathering of followers of Jesus.

In that simple description, there are FOUR important things to think about that are absolutely necessary to make up the kind of fellowship that pleases God, a body of believers that He’s pleased to call His church.

To be a church, the first thing we must do is **RECOGNIZE GOD’S PRESENCE**. Remember Jesus said – *Where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them.*

(Matthew 18:20) (GN) Jesus promises His presence, but we have to live up to our responsibility to “come together” in His name. A church without Jesus is not a church – it has no value, no purpose, and no power. The church exists for Him, alone, and without Him, it is literally nothing. And when we come together, there is no need for summoning God through invocations, chants, or ritualistic prayers. Instead, in worship we can express the fact that He is already there in our midst. Just as we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit at salvation, so we have God’s presence as a free gift when His church assembles. Believers stand in awe at the way God initiates a love relationship with us individually, coming together to give glory to His majestic presence!

To be a church, the second thing we must do is **LIVE AS A SPIRITUAL FAMILY**. The Bible says – *you are all children of God through faith in Jesus*. (Galatians 3:26) (NLT) Jesus is the reason why we’re part of God’s family. We should always make an effort to invite those who don’t have a relationship with Jesus to join us, but we should always remember that while they can be part of a congregation, they are not a part of God’s church. This is why it’s so important to keep praying and inviting those who don’t know Jesus to become a part of God’s family. It is a decision that affects their eternity! However, it is not only that we are God’s family, but we are told to “...do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” (Galatians 6:10) (NIV) Living as God’s children makes us “church.”

The third thing we must do to be God’s healthy, growing church is **OBEY GOD’S COMMANDS**. Jesus said – *If you love me, you will obey what I command*. (John 14:15) (NIV) This may seem obvious, but there are groups who gather in the name of Jesus and call themselves a church and do not obey all that Jesus commanded. Jesus said a true follower is someone who obeys and teaches; someone who lives out God’s command from God’s Word and shares it with others. Those are the people that God calls His church.

The fourth thing that a church must do is **LIVE OUT GOD’S PURPOSES**. We’ve learned that God designed His purposes – worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and mission to give meaning and direction to our lives. God also designed His purposes to give meaning to our lives together. In fact God’s purposes were designed to work best when we’re together, and some of them – like fellowship – we cannot do alone.

God has a picture and a plan for His family. He wants His family to be as big as it possibly can be. God doesn’t want anyone left out. God’s plan is to grow His family through churches that are healthy and balanced, churches that start new churches every chance they get, churches that reproduce and multiply exponentially. To be a part of God’s plan and to live a life of fellowship that pleases Him, God wants us to have a picture and a plan just like His. God wants us to have a picture of what a healthy, balanced, reproducing church looks like, and God wants us to have a plan for how to get there. The Bible gives us our picture and our plan. And now that we’ve got a definition of what a church *is*, let’s also take a look at five separate characteristics that are **A DESCRIPTION of a healthy, growing church**.

The first thing that describes a healthy, growing church is that it’s **a family where EVERYONE PARTICIPATES**. The Bible says – *When you meet, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in an unknown language, while another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must be useful to all and build them up in the Lord*. (1 Corinthians 14:26b) (NLT) In this verse, God gives us a picture of a church where everybody plays a part. Whether it’s in worship,

prayer, encouraging one another, or reading and interpreting scripture, it's important that everybody gets a chance to participate. God made all of us, but He made all of us unique and different, so we would work well together. God prefers unity and not uniformity. God often describes His church as the "body of Christ." The Bible says in a body not everyone is an eye, not everyone is an ear – we are all different. But God uses these differences to make sure that the whole body is able to do the work it's supposed to do. When everyone participates it helps God's family grow, because no one is left out or left behind – we all grow together. When everyone is expected to be an active part of a group, it encourages everyone to have an active faith. When everyone has an active faith in a group of believers, they're more likely to have an active faith in the world. Nothing is more inviting to those who don't know Jesus than a group of believers with an active faith. The Bible says – *I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.* (Romans 1:8) (NIV) When everyone participates, God's family grows.

The second thing that describes a healthy, growing church is that it's **A family where OBEYING GOD'S WORD is everyone's goal.** The Bible says – *we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.* (1 John 21b-22) (NIV) As followers of Jesus our authority is God's Word – the Bible. God's Bible tells us everything we need to know to live a life that pleases God. By trusting God's commands, we are trusting God, who is perfect and never lies. If we put our trust in other people or ourselves to lead our life, no matter how good our intentions are, we will always fall short. God wants His Word to be our standard, our measure of what is right and wrong. God's Word never changes, but God wants us to change to become more like His Word. When we obey God's commands, it helps His family grow because we are constantly obeying and teaching others. We grow God's family by obeying, because when we obey we become a good role model to show others who Jesus is. Remember Jesus said – *let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* (Matthew 5:16) (NIV) We grow God's family by teaching others, because when we teach, those who God has already prepared to hear and receive have the opportunity to accept Jesus and follow Him. The Bible says – *faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.* (Romans 10:17) (NIV) When we obey God's Word, God's family grows in healthy ways.

The third thing that describes a healthy, growing church is that it's **A family that is LED BY ORDINARY PEOPLE.** The Bible says – *You have often heard me teach. Now I want you to tell these same things to followers who can be trusted to tell others.* (2 Timothy 2:2) (CEV) God's description of a leader is not someone with a special skill, or a particular gift, or a certain education. God's description of a leader always has to do with a person's character. A leader is someone who is willing to follow Jesus and share what they learn with others. Paul, who was a great church leader in the Bible, said it simply – *Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.* (1 Corinthians 11:1) (NIV) When churches are led by ordinary people, it helps God's family grow because God wants everyone to be a leader who serves others. We call this a servant leader. God wants everyone to understand His Word. God wants everyone to listen to His Holy Spirit. God wants everyone to share what they've learned with others. And God wants everyone to be a servant leader. Remember the instructions Jesus gave to all His followers. Jesus said – *go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* (Matthew 28:19a, 20a) (NIV) The thing that slows down the growth of God's family the most is the lack of servant leaders. When we start to see leadership the way God does, we realize that every believer not

only can be a leader but every believer should be a leader. Churches that are led by ordinary people help God's family grow.

The fourth thing that describes a healthy, growing church is that it is composed of small groups, providing a **family that is SMALL IN SIZE**. There is nothing wrong with large churches. God wants and uses all kinds and all sizes of churches. The important thing to remember is that if you are in a large church, you also need a small group with which you can meet regularly if you want a church experience that is all God wants it to be. This is so you can have the participation, accountability, and support that only a small group can provide.

The Bible says – *Greet the church that meets in their home.* (Romans 16:5) (NIV) The first churches were small enough to meet in someone's house. It doesn't seem to make sense that something small could make something big, but God wants His church to grow bigger and smaller at the same time. God wants His church to grow bigger because He wants more people in His family. God wants His church to grow smaller because God wants His church to build intimate relationships and accountability. Jesus was often around large crowds of His followers, but He spent most of His time with a smaller group of twelve disciples. There were other times when Jesus had an even smaller group of just three others – Peter, James, and John.

The way Jesus spent His time with others is a perfect picture of how we should spend our time with others in the church. When a whole large church gets together, it's a big crowd and there is a lot of excitement and a sense of celebration. But when it's time to go deeper and grow closer, we need to be a smaller church – usually no more than twelve or so. Then, when we want to grow very close and hold one another accountable, we need to be an even smaller church – no more than two or three at a time.

When churches are small in size or meet in small groups, it helps God's family grow, because a smaller church grows stronger in Christ more quickly. As a small church obeys God and grows stronger, its members will share their faith more passionately and the group will often attract new believers. That growing church can divide into small groups or start new churches with the new believers. Either way, God's family grows. A small size helps us make sure everyone stays involved. A small size helps us make sure that everyone is accountable. A small size helps us make sure that no one gets lost or left behind. Churches that are small in size help God's family grow.

The fifth and final thing that describes a healthy, growing church is that it's **A family that MEETS EVERYWHERE**. The Bible says – *(They met) day after day in the Temple Courts and from house to house.* (Acts 5:42) (NIV) God doesn't limit His presence to any particular place. Jesus said that God is a Spirit and we worship Him in spirit and in truth. When we come together as God's church we're not limited to meet in any particular place, either. The church is not a place or a building. The church is a people – God's family. Wherever God's family gets together, that's where the church is. When believers meet in normal meeting places where they live or work, it reduces the strain of stewardship needed for constructing buildings and is far more likely to rapidly multiply. When churches meet everywhere it helps grow God's family, because it takes away any worry about having a special place or a special building or even a special time to meet. The Bible says – *Greet the church that meets in their home.* (Romans 16:5) (NIV) All over the world, God's family meets as a church in offices and schools, in homes and under trees. God's people are never limited in where they can



come together, and when there are no limits to location – God’s church can be everywhere! Churches that meet everywhere help God’s family grow.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. When you think of a church, what are some of the images that come to your mind? Does anything from God’s word make you think differently about how God sees a church?
2. What is one thing you’ve noticed in our sessions together that we can work on to make our “church” healthier? Is everyone participating? Is our goal to obey God’s word? Do ordinary people get to lead? Are we small in size? Can we meet anywhere?

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.**
2. **FELLOWSHIP with time for tea or snacks.**

## Lesson 19

### Praying For One Another

#### OPENING

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

#### MEMORY VERSE

*So in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*  
(Romans 12:5) (NIV)

One of the things God wants us to do as His family is pray. Praying for one another is one of the most loving, intimate, and powerful connections we can have with another believer. Praying for one another is a way we can serve one another. Praying for one another is a way we can show how much we love one another. Praying for one another develops deep intimacy, because **We grow closer as God's family when we PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER.** Praying for one another is so important that God says that it should be a priority every time we come together. The Bible says – *Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people.* (Ephesians 6:18) (CEV)

God wants us to pray as a part of our time together because He knows our prayers for one another are full of blessing. They bless God. They bless others. And, they bless us. **Our prayers for one another BLESS GOD,** because they show Him that we are listening, want to obey, and love Him. The Bible says – *pray for one another.* (James 5:16) (NAS) Praying for one another is God's command, and when we pray and teach others to pray, we please God. **Our prayers BLESS OTHERS** because it reminds them how much God loves and cares for them and how much we love and care for them. Our prayers are a blessing because it reminds them that they are a part of God's family. Our prayers are a blessing for others because when we pray, especially for new believers and those that don't know Jesus, we show them how they can pray. The Bible says – *In everything set them an example by doing what is good...* (Titus 2:7a) (NIV) And finally, **Our prayers for one another BLESS US,** because our prayers focus our attention on the needs of others. Our prayers help us give our concern, our attention, and our love. And, when we give ourselves away, God says that it is a blessing. Jesus said – *It is more blessed to give than to receive.* (Acts 20:35b) (NIV)

Every prayer, even a simple one is a blessing to us, to others, and most importantly to God. The P.E.A.C.E. Plan uses A **P.E.A.C.E. Prayer**. Let's talk about the P.E.A.C.E. Plan for a moment. The P.E.A.C.E. Plan is a pattern designed to help every disciple minister to others in each one of the five different areas that God wants us to grow. Every disciple should live out a lifestyle of ministry in these five areas. Every small group and every church should also be involved locally (among their own kind of people and to other kinds of people) and among those who are the neediest whether they live nearby or far away. God calls every disciple and every church to be active in these areas of ministry. God gave His people the responsibility to care for these needs.

The P.E.A.C.E. Plan's first goal is to Plant Churches, because that deals with a person's **SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT** and their relationship to God. The P.E.A.C.E. Plan's second goal is Equip Servant Leaders, and that deals with a person's **SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT** and how they relate to others in their family, their friends, at work, and in their community. The third goal of the P.E.A.C.E. Plan is to Assist the Poor which deals with a person's **FINANCIAL DEVELOPMENT** and a godly view of financial resources and moral issues that affect standards of living. The fourth goal of the P.E.A.C.E. Plan is to Care for the Sick which deals with a person's **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT** making sure they are growing healthy and staying strong in their body. Finally, the fifth goal of the P.E.A.C.E. Plan is to Educate the Next Generation which focuses on a person's **EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT** which includes not only reading and writing but also skills that help a person become a life-long learner, always growing and getting stronger in their mind.

A P.E.A.C.E. Prayer asks God to bless someone in all five areas of the P.E.A.C.E. Plan. A P.E.A.C.E. Prayer asks for God's blessing over a person's whole life. It asks God to bless a person spiritually, socially, financially, physically, and educationally.

**SMALL GROUP LEADER:**

*Show others how we can **pray for one another** by praying a prayer over a Person in your group. It is not important to follow the exact words below, but be sure to model a prayer which includes asking God's blessing and growth in each of the five areas of the P.E.A.C.E. Plan – spiritual, social, financial, physical, and educational.*

We've asked \_\_\_\_\_ and s/he's agreed to allow us to pray for him/her so we can see a P.E.A.C.E. Prayer modeled. It's not the exact words that are important, but listen to the spirit of the prayer and the areas of \_\_\_\_\_'s life that it asks God to bless. A P.E.A.C.E. Prayer can be as simple as this –

*Dear Jesus – We praise You, Lord, that You are in control of every area of our lives. We thank You, God, that You promise to hear our prayers. Lord, we want to lift up \_\_\_\_\_, who is part of Your family and ask this prayer on her behalf.*

*Jesus, we ask that You would bless \_\_\_\_\_'s spiritual health. We pray that she develops an even more deep, intimate, and loving relationship with You. We pray that You give her the strength and opportunity to live out all of Your purposes and the good plans You have for her life. We pray that she is a faithful disciple who obeys all You command her to do and teaches others to obey, as well. We pray that You would bless her and allow her to share her faith and win many new believers to faith in You. We ask that You bless her even more by*

*allowing her to plant churches that bring many new believers into Your family. And, we pray that those churches start new churches and that Your Name is glorified throughout the earth.*

*Jesus, we ask that You would bless \_\_\_\_\_'s social health – her relationships with other people. We pray that she is blessed with good relationships with her close family – her husband, her children, her parents, and her brothers and sisters. We pray that those relationships become deeper and more meaningful and are an even greater blessing in her life. We pray that You bless her relationships with the rest of her family and with her friends and neighbors and co-workers. We pray for her relationships with her employer and with the local authorities. We ask that You give her favor and influence wherever she goes. We pray that she is a light that draws people closer to You. We pray that You give her the wisdom and the opportunity to be a leader who serves others by obeying Your commands and teaching others, and we pray that she be given the privilege of teaching others how to lead.*

*Jesus, we ask that You would bless \_\_\_\_\_'s financial health. We pray that You meet all of her needs and the needs of her family. We pray that she finds favor at work and that she receives a generous wage. We pray that she is a faithful steward with all that You entrust to her and that she invest her time and talents wisely to bring a blessing to You and to receive Your reward. And, Lord, we would also pray for her to be aware of those who are suffering from the injustices that keep people oppressed. Help her to be active by herself or with others to bring justice that affect standards of living around her. We pray that You would help her become a good steward of what she has and an even more generous giver as she sees Your hand of provision every time she gives. We pray that You give her the strength to put You before anything else, including money and material things. We pray that You would give her the wisdom and opportunity to teach others Your truth about finances and what it takes to live a godly lifestyle.*

*Jesus, we ask that You would bless \_\_\_\_\_'s physical health. We pray that You would heal any illness and take away any pain, according to Your perfect will. We ask that You would give her a strong body, good health, and a long life to serve You. We pray for her emotions, that she be filled with joy and comfort and peace. We pray You would keep her family healthy and give them a long life together. We pray that You would give her the wisdom and opportunity to teach others Your truths and how to live healthy lives.*

*Jesus, we ask that You would bless \_\_\_\_\_'s educational health. We pray, Lord, that You would give her wisdom and knowledge and understanding in everything she does. We pray that You give her Your mind, the mind of Christ. We pray that You would renew her mind with the freshness of Your Word and keep Your Word close to her at all times. We pray, God, that she would have a lifetime of learning new things about You and the opportunity to share them with others.*

*Finally, Jesus, we ask that You bless her whole person. We pray and ask that You make \_\_\_\_\_ a messenger of peace, bringing the good news of who You are wherever she goes. We pray that she enjoys Your purposes and plans and Your family all of her life and throughout eternity. We pray all of these things in Your precious and powerful name – in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

## **PRAY**

*Break up into smaller groups of two or three. Give each Person the opportunity to work through each of the following activities.*

1. Practice praying A P.E.A.C.E. Prayer for one other person in your group. Be sure to:
  - a. Ask for God's blessing and growth in each of the five areas of the P.E.A.C.E. Plan – spiritual, social, financial, physical, and educational development.
  - b. Ask and pray for any specific needs in each of these areas.
  - c. Let each person pray for one other in your group until everyone has had a chance to pray for someone.

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.**
2. **FELLOWSHIP with time for tea or snacks.**

## Lesson 20

### Discipling As a Shadow Leader

#### OPENING

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

#### MEMORY VERSE

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 2:5) (NIV)

Living as a disciple is mainly about learning life patterns – things like prayer and praying for others, hearing God’s Word, serving those around us, and sharing the good things that Jesus is doing in our lives. Being a disciple is about trading in our way of doing things for God’s way of doing things and, as we learn God’s way, being willing to share it with somebody else. We’ve talked about how important it is to follow Jesus and to lead others as we go. Every time we put something we learn into practice, we’re a follower. Every time we share something we learn with someone else, we’re a leader. So far in these sessions we’ve helped you understand opportunities to practice being a follower and a leader. Now, we want to take some time to learn how to be even more effective when we practice servant leadership in a specific way. We want you to learn what it means to serve as a SHADOW LEADER.

A shadow leader serves others so that the spotlight does not shine upon them, but upon those they serve. Some leaders unfortunately, are self-centered. They want to do all the important work and do not think very highly of those who do less-important work. And maybe worst of all, a self-centered leader makes their followers depend on them instead of on God and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Self-centered leaders meet their own needs, but offer very little benefit for God’s kingdom or the growth of His family, the Church. God-centered shadow leaders, on the other hand, invest their time in others. They train a small part of the whole group and then expect the ones that they train to share their leadership and train others. Shadow leaders encourage their followers to think of themselves as “co-workers” under the direction of Jesus, instead of “subordinates” under the direction of the leader. Shadow leaders help train other leaders to be active hearers and doers of God’s Word who fulfill both requirements of obedience – to live and to share what they learn. Shadow leaders help followers of Jesus become interdependent with each other and dependent on God and His

Holy Spirit. The results of these behaviors are that God is glorified, effective leaders are trained, and God's family grows exponentially through the process.

We learn about shadow leaders in God's Word. Jesus showed us this kind of leadership during His ministry. It may be hard to imagine Jesus leading "in the shadows" while His disciples got the chance to practice leading, but soon after He called His disciples, Jesus sent them out with the authority to heal people in His name. He trusted them with some of the rights and responsibilities of the leadership He was given. Most of Jesus' leadership time was spent with only a small part of His followers – twelve disciples – and Jesus expected them to join in His work by sharing what they learned with the larger group. Jesus also spent time with an even smaller group of three disciples, Peter, James, and John, and gave them additional training that they would use to grow the church after He left. Jesus said – *The truth is, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.* (John 14:12) (NLT) Jesus showed us what it really means to be a shadow leader. He trusted His entire kingdom and the future of His family to a small group of followers led by the Holy Spirit.

Shadow leadership was also the model for the first churches. The Apostle Paul, who started many of the first churches, spent very little time in any one place. Instead, he would arrive in a village or town, share the good news and lead those who were willing into a relationship with Jesus. He would spend time sharing and showing others the basic life patterns of a follower of Jesus – how to share their faith, God's purposes, how to pray, and live as God's family, and study God's Word – all of the things that we're learning in these sessions. Paul would then believe God to provide new, local leaders to take care of the local church after he was gone. God always provides leaders when He starts a new church and Paul trained the local church to be shadow leaders and grow God's family by passing on what they had learned to others. Paul said – *You have often heard me teach. Now I want you to tell these same things to followers who can be trusted to tell others.* (2 Timothy 2:2) (CEV) To grow God's family as quickly and as healthy as God wants it to grow, we have to stop being selfish leaders and practice being shadow leaders.

What about in your own life? In the time between our Small Group training sessions is a great opportunity to practice shadow leadership by sharing what you've learned with others. Limit the number of people you share with at any one time to two or three others at most. This allows you to stay connected and accountable. Also, the people you share with might expect you to lead them in all kinds of areas, so, as you share, work hard to shift them from depending on you to depending on God and His Holy Spirit. A good way to do this is to tell them that you're a follower of Jesus just like they are--as you communicate God's commands. Show them how we all learn to depend on God through prayer, hearing His word, and fellowship with other believers. As a shadow leader, you'll meet with this smaller group at a different time than your normal group, but you can still use the same structure we use in these sessions – Greet and Pray, Check In, Pray for One Another, Share, Apply, and Fellowship.

Remember the main purpose is to be accountable before God – so only pass on a little bit at a time to those you are leading. But remember to do more than just tell them. Your accountability demands that you then make sure that the ones you lead are living and sharing what they learn before you pass on anything else that is new to them. If

possible, try to check in with some of the people who are being trained by the ones you are training to make sure that what you're teaching is being passed on accurately without being changed.

Finally, we've learned how leaders show themselves as an example like Jesus did, but as a shadow leader you'll go beyond just showing and begin to help new leaders as they show others what it means to be a follower of Jesus to others. If you wait until you have leaders to train them, it is already too late! So start right now. You can assist new leaders by encouraging them to become shadow leaders themselves, not only sharing what they've learned but also passing on leadership to others. Remember the best way to Plant Churches and Equip Servant Leaders is by encouraging these new leaders to help start new churches which are led by other new leaders. Being a shadow leader not only allows for a rapid, exponential growth of God's family and equips new leaders to serve in God's kingdom, but it helps us bring glory to God by taking the attention and focus of leadership off of us and putting it on God where it belongs.

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.



**Lesson 21**  
**God's Perfect Picture of Growth – The Story of The Vine**

**OPENING**

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- o How do people grow? Physically? Mentally? Financially? Socially? Spiritually?
- o Are there any areas in your life where you'd like to grow right now?

When God first imagined our lives, He saw in His mind a perfect picture of a perfect life – and then He created a perfect plan to help us get there. The life God imagined for us is so rich with meaning, so surrounded by love and family, and so full of joy and purpose that it's bigger than anything we could ever dream for ourselves. God creates each one of us with a unique personality and special gifts and talents. He gives every one a life full of experiences that develop our knowledge, understanding, and skills. No one will ever live a life just like ours. God created us to be one of a kind. But part of God's plan is that we don't begin our lives fully formed. God's perfect plan is that our lives are something we grow into with His help.

*[Jesus said] "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned for greater fruitfulness by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful apart from me.*

*"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who parts from me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you stay joined to me and my words remain in you, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted! My true disciples produce much fruit. This brings great glory to my Father.*

*"I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey me, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father and remain in his love. I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. And here is how to measure it--the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends.*

*"You are my friends if you obey me. I no longer call you servants, because a master doesn't confide in his servants. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. I command you to love each other."* (John 15:1-17) (NLT)

In this passage, Jesus paints a picture of His followers as the growing branches of a living vine and shares that God's perfect plan is for those branches to continue growing and to bear more and more fruit. Jesus is telling us that God wants us to live lives full of meaning – lives that please Him now and lives that He can reward later. God knows that it's not our nature to live that kind of life. He knows we have to grow into it. But Jesus says that God wants that growth so much for us He's willing to go to extreme measures to help us get there.

Surprisingly, Jesus doesn't tell us that we grow based on what we say and do. Instead, He says we grow because of who we're connected with and why. Jesus says that the key to living the lives that God created us to live is to stay connected with Him. And the key to staying connected with Jesus is obedience and love. It is out of that faithful love-based relationship that we want to obey Jesus. It's not out of a sense of duty or because we have a list of rituals to perform or we will get into trouble. After all, Jesus called us His friends! When we please God with all respect due to Him, it is from the perspective of a friend that you love and care enough to spend time with every day. The Bible says – *Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*" (1 John 4:7b-8) (NIV)

Jesus was a perfect picture of what it means to obey and love God the way He created us to live the lives that He created us to live. God's perfect plan for our lives is for us to be filled with His words and surrounded by His love. God's perfect purpose for our lives is for us to grow and become like His Son, Jesus.

## **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

## Lesson 22

### God's Purpose of Discipleship

#### OPENING

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

#### **SMALL GROUP LEADER:**

*Before the next segment, remind the small group where we get God's Purpose of Discipleship by reciting the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and emphasizing the phrase "...teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you."*

#### MEMORY VERSE

*"Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20) (NIV)*

God sent His Son Jesus to die for us, but God also sent Jesus to show us how to live. When we live a life like Jesus lived – a life of obedience to God and a life of sharing with others -- we please God and bless everyone around us. In this session, we'll discover more about what it means to grow to be like Jesus by living God's third purpose for our lives – the purpose of DISCIPLESHIP. We'll learn how God uses simple things like prayer, His family, and His word to help us become more like Jesus. And we'll learn practical ways to study God's Word.

God created us to become like Jesus.

Part of God's perfect plan for our lives is for us to obey everything that He commands us to do. God says – *"Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you that it may go well with you."* (Jeremiah 7:23) (NIV) God knows that we can't obey Him on our own. We've spent our whole lives doing things our own way instead of His way. We've lived self-centered lives instead of God-centered lives. So God sent His Son Jesus to live a perfect life of obedience to pay for our disobedience and to teach us how to obey. To obey all that Jesus commands us, the Bible says we've got to learn to leave our old, self-centered life behind and start the journey to our new, God-centered life.

We've got to become like Jesus. And **Growing to be like Jesus is God's purpose of DISCIPLESHIP.**

From the beginning, **God's perfect plan is for us to GROW TO BE LIKE JESUS.** God said – *“Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.”* (Genesis 1:26) (NAS) The Bible says – *[God] has always known who his chosen ones would be. He had decided to let them become like his own Son, so that his Son would be the first of many children.* (Romans 8:29) (CEV) God wants us to share His character and values. He wants us to care about what He cares about. He wants us to love what He loves. God knows that if we share His heart, we'll live a life that pleases Him. A life full of purpose and meaning. A life of serving and sharing with others. We'll become everything He created us to be. In our old life, when we sin, we break away from God's perfect image and we become flawed and corrupt. But when we ask Jesus to come and live in our hearts, the Bible says – God wipes away all of our sin and gives a brand new spiritual life. The Bible says that we are born again, a new spiritual child with a new chance to grow up to be who God created us to be.

As a brand new baby, it took us years before we learned to feed ourselves the food we need to stay alive, to be healthy, and to grow. As a brand new believer, we feed ourselves a different kind of food; the Bible calls it “spiritual food,” and **we grow to be like Jesus when we learn to FEED OURSELVES spiritual food.** Helping believers become self-feeding is an important key for God's people to learn. There are many Christian self-help tools that are very helpful, but God's Word must be the central focus of any sustained discipleship effort.

God doesn't want us to wait years before we learn how to feed ourselves this kind of food, however. God wants us to learn how to feed ourselves spiritual food right away. The Bible says – *By now you should have been teachers, but once again you need to be taught the simplest things about what God has said. You need milk instead of solid food. People who live on milk are like babies who don't really know what is right.* (Hebrews 5:12-13) (CEV) The spiritual food that God wants us to enjoy right now is spending time with Him in prayer, spending time with Him as a part of God's family, and spending time with Him learning and living His Word. God calls these activities our “spiritual food” because He wants us to remember that not only do we need these things in our lives to become strong and healthy – we need them to survive. God wants us to practice feeding ourselves “spiritual food” just as often as we eat earthly food, and to help us remember to make these things patterns in our new life, God gave us His Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit helps us become like Jesus when **we feed ourselves by spending time in PRAYER.** Our relationship with God is the most important thing in our lives. More than anything else, God wants an intimate relationship with us. The Holy Spirit uses the time we spend with God in prayer to build that love relationship. Jesus prayed all the time, and He showed us through prayer how we can share our heart with God and listen for God to share His heart with us. God's Holy Spirit works through prayer to reveal where God's heart and our heart are in different places. The Holy Spirit convinces and changes our heart to become more like God's. It's then up to us, with the Holy Spirit's help, to make sure that what we say, what we do, and what we think is consistent to what God is revealing about His heart.

The Holy Spirit also helps us become like Jesus when **we feed ourselves by spending time with GOD'S FAMILY.** The Holy Spirit uses God's family to encourage us and to keep us accountable. Remember, the Bible says – *His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ.* (Ephesians 1:5) (NLT)

God made Jesus the head of His family and gave us every other member of His family as our brothers and sisters in Jesus. God allows His Holy Spirit to work through His family to change us. We follow some as they follow Jesus. We lead others as we follow Jesus. To be a disciple means to follow and to lead and doing both helps us become like Jesus.

Finally, the Holy Spirit helps us become like Jesus when **we feed ourselves by spending time in GOD'S WORD**. The Holy Spirit uses God's Word and God's unchanging truth to help change our lives. Before we knew Jesus, we filled our lives with lies. We used to think things like "any religion will lead to God," or "I must do these rituals to be good enough to be accepted by God," or even "there is no God" or "if there is a God, He must not care about me." But now that the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts, He teaches us the truth from God's Word. In the Bible, God says – *"I alone am God. There is no other God"* (Isaiah 43:10b) (NLT) The Bible also says – *"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."* (John 3:16) (NIV) Every time we learn and live a new truth from God's Word, the Bible says we make our minds more like the mind of Jesus.

God wants us healthy and living the life He planned, so He gave us spiritual food – prayer, fellowship with His family, and His word – as a way to grow us to be like Jesus.

### **We grow to be like Jesus through TROUBLE and TEMPTATION.**

Growing can be painful, and becoming like Jesus means that sometimes we'll face hard times and difficult situations. In fact, Jesus said that we should expect them. Jesus said – *Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven...* (Matthew 5:11-12a) (NIV) Because there is sin in the world, God knew we would face troubles in this life. But all through His Word, God reminds us that there is a purpose behind every problem.

Our character is the one thing from this life that we can take with us into heaven. God wants us to build our character as strong as possible. Jesus says we are "blessed" when we face troubles, because He knows that **God uses troubles to BUILD OUR CHARACTER**. The Bible says – *...whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.* (James 1:2b-4) (NLT) God wants us to face our troubles with the confidence that He is using them for our good. His Bible tells us how to that.

God doesn't want us to worry; He's got a great plan for our life and troubles are only temporary. Remember God says – *I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* (Jeremiah 29:11) (NIV) And, since we know God's plans are good, we know our troubles can't last for long. The Bible says – *what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* (2 Corinthians 4:18b) (NIV)

God wants us to rejoice and give thanks because He's in control. God doesn't want us to celebrate our troubles, but He does want us to realize even in these hard times that He is at work bringing a good end out of a bad beginning. The Bible says – *we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* (Romans 8:28) (NIV)

God also wants us to be patient and persistent. God promises that He will never leave us, especially when things get hard. God also promises that He will never stop working in our lives until we are like His Son, Jesus. The Bible says – *God is the one who began this good work in you, and I am certain that he won't stop before it is complete on the day that Christ Jesus returns.* (Philippians 1:6) (CEV)

Followers of Jesus face temptation. Temptation is when the enemy uses our desire for something, even something good, to make us stop doing things God's way and go back to doing things our own way. Temptation has been around as long as man – it's how sin first came to this life, but God takes what our enemy meant for evil and uses it for good. **God uses temptation to DEVELOP OUR OBEDIENCE.** Every temptation is an opportunity to choose between God's way and some other way, so every temptation is a chance to obey God and grow to be more like Jesus. God tells us the way to fight temptation and obey Him.

God wants us to recognize that we're being tempted and then ask God for help. The Bible says – *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.* (1 Corinthians 10:13) (NIV) Our enemy always tempts us in the same way; and when we want to leave God's way and go another way, we know we're being tempted. We're not strong enough to fight temptation on our own, that's why God promises "a way out." Any time we feel tempted, we should ask God to live up to that promise. Many times God provides "a way out" from temptation through other believers, who encourage us and keep us accountable. Jesus said -- *Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.* (Matthew 26:41a) (NIV) and we should do this for one another. So, God wants us to fight the temptation and resist the enemy that brings it. The Bible says – *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* (James 4:7) (NIV) When we put everything into God's hand, we still have to realize that we have a part to play in avoiding temptation. But we can know and be grateful that God is using our troubles and temptations to make us more like Jesus.

Finally, we grow to be like Jesus as we begin to change **WHAT WE SAY, WHAT WE DO, and HOW WE THINK**. God's purpose of DISCIPLESHIP is not a one-time event. It's a life-long journey that we take one step at a time. Growing to be like Jesus is work, and God's plan is for both us and His Holy Spirit to have a part in that work. The Holy Spirit's part of the work is to teach us God's commands and change our hearts through prayer, God's family, God's Word, and even the difficult times in our lives. Our part of the work is to obey God by living out His commands and sharing what we learn with others. We live and share by changing what we say, what we do, and even how we think.

What we say is important to God. The Bible says – *The tongue has the power of life and death...* (Proverbs 18:21a) (NIV), and **God wants us to use our words to PLEASE HIM and BLESS OTHERS.** The Bible says – *speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.* (Ephesians 5:19a) (NIV), and *speak to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.* (1 Corinthians 14:3) (NIV) The Bible says – *speak the very words of God...* (1 Peter 4:11a) (NIV) When we obey God with what we say, we become like Jesus. The Bible says – *speaking the truth in love we will in all things grow up into... Christ.* (Ephesians 4:15) (NIV)

What we do is important to God. The Bible says – *Merely hearing God’s law is a waste of time if you don’t do what He commands.* (Romans 2:13a) (Message) **God wants us to use our actions to HONOR HIM and SERVE OTHERS.** The Bible says – *Do not forget to do good and share with others, for with such sacrifice God is pleased.* (Hebrews 13:16) (NIV) The Bible says – *Do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers.* (Galatians 6:16) (NIV). God even wants us to do good to our enemies. Jesus said – *love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.* (Luke 6:27b) (NIV) When we obey God in what we do, we become like Jesus. Jesus said – *I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.* (John 13:15, 17) (NIV)

And yes, even how we think is important to God. God says – *“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.”* (Isaiah 55:8) (NIV) **God wants us to change our thoughts and BEGIN TO THINK LIKE HIM.** Before we knew Him, we always thought of what was best for ourselves, but God wants us to think about Him and others around us. The Bible says – *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* (Romans 12:2a) (NIV) When we obey God in what we think, we become like Jesus. The Bible says – *give up your old way of life with all its bad habits. Let the Spirit change your way of thinking and make you into a new person. You were created to be like God...* (Ephesians 4:22b-24a) (NIV)

When we learn to feed ourselves spiritual food, we grow. When God takes us through troubles and temptations, we grow. As we change what we say, what we do, and how we think to become more like God, we grow. God created us to be like Jesus. And God grows us to be like Jesus through His purpose of Discipleship.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why do you think Jesus used the example of a vine and branches to describe our relationship with Him? How does Jesus say a branch grows to bear fruit?
2. Out of the three ways God wants us to learn to feed ourselves – spending time in prayer, spending time with God’s family, and spending time in God’s Word – which seems the most exciting to you? Which seems like it would be like the most work? Why?
3. What is one thing I can change in the way I speak, act, or think that would make me more like Jesus?

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

## Lesson 23

### Studying God's Word

#### OPENING

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

#### MEMORY VERSE

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 2:5) (NIV)

God knows how we should live and He tells us.

God created us, and He knows there are things in this life that are good for us and other things that we need to avoid. He doesn't hide those things from us. He tells us. From the very beginning God has taught us how to live lives of purpose and fulfillment by telling us how to live lives that please Him. God teaches us by telling us. God says -- *"I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands..."* (Isaiah 17b-18a) (NIV) When God teaches us what to do or how to live, He calls that a command, and God goes to great lengths to make sure we know His commands. In the past, God has spoken His commands directly to people. He has spoken through angels. He has spoken through dreams, hand writing on a wall, a burning bush, and even through a donkey. God told His people again and again to make sure His commands are remembered and passed on so that everyone will know how to live a good life. God said -- *"Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered..."* (Exodus 17:14) (NIV) God said -- *"Write down all these instructions, for they represent the terms of my covenant with you..."* (Exodus 34:27) (NLT) The Bible says -- *God gave his Law to Jacob's descendants, the people of Israel. And he told our ancestors to teach their children, so that each new generation would know his Law and tell it to the next. Then they would trust God and obey his teachings, without forgetting anything God had done.* (Psalm 78:5-7) (CEV)

God's instructions for our lives are called by many names -- "commands," "Holy writings," "Scriptures," "the Bible," but all of them come from one place -- God's own heart. These words are His words. And, **LEARNING GOD'S WORD** teaches me how to live. The Bible says -- *...these commands and this teaching are a lamp to light the way ahead of you. The correction of discipline is the way to life.* (Proverbs 6:23) (NLT)



Jesus showed us by example how He learned and lived God's Word during His time on earth. Jesus relied on the Scriptures for His life's mission. Jesus read a passage of God's Word that told about one who would come to "tell good news to the poor," "to announce freedom for prisoners," and "to give sight to the blind." Then He told them that He was that one; the promised Messiah. He said – *"What you have just heard me read has come true today."* (Luke 4:21b) (CEV). Jesus relied on the Scriptures for His life's position. In His most famous sermon, Jesus said about God's Word – *"Everything written in it must happen. If you reject even the least important command in the Law and teach others to do the same, you will be the least important person in the kingdom of heaven. But if you obey and teach others its commands, you will have an important place in the kingdom."* (Matthew 5:18b-19) (CEV). And, when He was being tempted, Jesus relied on the Scriptures for His life's protection. Three times, the enemy tempted Jesus in the wilderness and each time He replied, *"The Scriptures say..."* (Luke 4:1-13) (CEV) and repeated part of God's Word as an answer. Jesus knew and obeyed God's Word. And Jesus taught us, if we want to be like Him, we have to learn and obey God's Word, too.

The first step of learning God's Word is **SUBMISSION** – **I must be willing to accept that whatever God tells me is the best thing for my life.** When we're told that God wants us to obey His word, our normal reaction is – "Okay. Let me hear what God's Word says and then I will decide to submit to it." But God wants us to live a different way. God wants us to make the decision to submit to His word first, not to decide whether to submit to it later. God wants us to resolve in our heart that our answer for Him will always be "yes," no matter what He asks. In our mind, saying "yes" makes perfect sense. God is perfect. He created us. He knows what's best. And He only acts towards us out of love. The answer is logical and obvious – "Of course, I will obey." But, in our heart, there is a struggle.

God gave us free will – a choice to follow Him or go our own way. The struggle comes, because, even though we know what God tells us is right, we're created to make our own decisions. Before we knew Jesus, we made the decision to do things our own way; but those decisions led us to more struggle and carried us away from God. The Bible says – *the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.* (Romans 8:7-8) (NIV) Because we follow Jesus, we can resolve the struggle by making our decision a decision to do what's right according to God. As followers of Jesus, we submit to God's Word.

The second step to learning God's Word is **OBSERVATION** – **I must be willing to listen to what God's Word has to say.** It seems obvious that we can't know God's Word until we hear it or read it, but many followers of Jesus spend countless hours of confusion and frustration trying to discern what God wants and wills for their lives without ever spending time reading and hearing what He has already said. When a group of religious leaders wanted to argue with Jesus over God's will in a matter, Jesus replied -- *"You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God."* (Matthew 22:29) (NIV)

There is a story of a man whose house was being surrounded by the waters of a flood. He cried out to God for help. Several neighbors and friends offered to carry him away to safety but His response was always – "God will provide." He refused all help and eventually drowned. The story ends when the man is in front of God and asks – "Why didn't you save me?" God replies, "Who do you think sent the people with the boats?" We often treat God and His word the same way. When we face a pressing matter, we call out to God for a quick

answer and a display of His great power, but we don't bother with the power of God's Word that He's already given us. God's Bible does us no good on a shelf. We have to hear God's Word and more than just hear, we have to listen and think – What does this word from God say? Who is God speaking to? What is He speaking about? When and where? Why and how? We have to seek God's heart as we hear God's Word. The Bible says – *I will listen to what God the LORD will say...* (Psalm 85:8a) (NIV)

God wants us to do more than just read or listen, God wants us to understand. The third step of learning God's Word is **INTERPRETATION** – **I must be willing to let God's Holy Spirit reveal what God's Word means.** God wants us to understand what He has to say, so God speaks through His Holy Spirit. Sometimes He speaks to us when we're alone – as we pray and think about His word. Sometimes God speaks as we talk about His word with other believers. Sometimes God speaks directly through His Word, maybe because what He means is so obvious or maybe because a part of God's Word helps us understand what another part means. Sometimes God speaks through what happens in our life. We've read His word and thought and prayed about it, discussed it, but it's still not clear. Then something happens to us, or we see or hear something, and suddenly we understand. God uses all of these ways to help us know what He means, but there are two things that we can do to understand God's Word even more. First, when we're together as God's family, we can talk about God's Word and make sure that everyone joins in the conversation. God doesn't give the whole picture or the whole understanding of His word to any one person. God created us to be together, to be a body, so He gives part of His understanding to each one of us expecting all of us to share what we know. We can't understand the fullness of what God's Word means unless we hear from the different parts of His body. That's why it's so important for everyone to participate when we discuss God's Word. The second way we understand God's Word even more is by asking Him. The Bible says – *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.* (James 1:5) (NIV) God wants us to understand His word. He wants us to think and meditate and keep reading about it. He wants us to come together as a family and talk about it. He wants us to ask Him what it means. He promises He will help us understand. The Bible says – *The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple. I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands.* (Psalm 119:130-131) (NIV)

The fourth step to learning God's Word is **APPLICATION** – **I must be willing to do what God's Word tells me to do.** God doesn't want us to just hear His words. He wants us to put them into practice in our own lives. The Bible says – *Obey God's message! Don't fool yourselves by just listening to it. If you hear the message and don't obey it, you are like people who stare at themselves in a mirror and forget what they look like as soon as they leave.* (James 1:22-24) (CEV) It's one thing to know what God's Word says and means. It's another thing to know how to live God's Word in our own lives. We learn how to live God's Word by asking questions. We can begin by asking, "If this is what God's Word says and means, then what does God want me to do about it? Is there some sin I should avoid? Is there a promise I can believe? Is there a prayer I can pray, or an example I can follow? Does God give me direct command to obey? Or, maybe there is some knowledge He wants me to learn? The Bible says – *Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live. The Scriptures train God's servants to do all kinds of good deeds.* (2 Timothy 3:16-17) (CEV) The key to application is action – doing the good things that God's Word tells us to do. We take action in our own lives by asking the question – "What can I do to live this part of God's Word?" And, we take action as part of God's family by asking – "What can we do to live

this part of God's Word? When God tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves, we need to then ask – "What is a practical way we can love our neighbors? Maybe I can bring them food when they're sick. Maybe I can pray for God to heal them." Remember, the most effective actions are practical, personal, and things you can measure. The most important thing is to act. The Bible says – *God will bless you in everything you do, if you listen and obey, and don't just hear and forget.* James 1:25b (CEV)

Finally, the best way to learn is to teach, so the fifth step to learning God's Word is **MULTIPLICATION** – **I must be willing to strengthen what I know of God's Word by sharing it with others.** In many ways, multiplication is just a second part of application, because true obedience means that I live what I know of God's Word in my own life and then I share what I know of God's Word with others. The Bible says – *You have often heard me teach. Now I want you to tell these same things to followers who can be trusted to tell others.* (2 Timothy 2:22) (CEV) When we share, the question is not just, "How do I live God's Word?" but "How do I live God's Word in a way that others will learn God's Word through my life?" Just like with application, the key to this step is action. We have to think about what we can personally do and ask, "How can I share this part of God's Word with others?" And then we have to think about what we can do together as God's family and ask, "How can we share this part of God's Word with others?" If one of the ways we apply God's command to love our neighbor is to care for them when they're sick, then one of the ways we can multiply what we know of God's Word is to invite someone else to share in this work. We learn by doing, and one of the best ways to teach God's Word is to invite someone to participate in God's work. Another important part of multiplication is accountability. Remember, God gives us His family to encourage us and keep us living God's way. As a family, we help each other learn by holding one another accountable to both live God's commands and share them with others. Jesus said – *whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.* (Matthew 5:19b) (NIV)

God's Word is alive. It's true. It's powerful. It changes lives. But, our goal is not to learn God's Word just for the sake of knowing it. As followers of Jesus, our goal is live God's Words so we can present to God a life that pleases Him. Learning God's Word teaches me how to live. Living and sharing God's Word allows me to live a life that pleases God.

Ultimately, God's Word helps each of us have a guide to a closer loving relationship with our Lord. With all the Bible teaches about obedience, don't lose sight of the fact that God extends His love toward each of us. We obey not out of fear, but out of love. We strive to please God every day of our lives by following Jesus. Yet, Jesus requires that we die to our selfish ways. In return, we can expect that relationship to change our character, our values, and our involvement in the world around us to the glory of God.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What sounds like the most challenging part of studying God's Word? Submitting to whatever it says? Learning it by myself and with others? Understanding what it means? Applying it in my life? Or, Sharing it with others?
2. What is the most exciting part of studying God's Word to you? Why?
3. Discuss the basis of discipleship being based on an obedient relationship with Jesus Christ and not on rituals or rules. What difference should that make in how we live?

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

## **Lesson 24**

### **Ministry Training**

#### **OPENING**

1. **GREET one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.**
2. **CHECK IN to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:**
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.**
4. **SHARE the lesson that follows...**

#### **MEMORY VERSE**

*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others. (1 Peter 4:10) (NIV)*

God wants us to pass along to others what we learn about Him. As we mentioned in a previous session, God doesn't want leaders to share in a way that makes others selfishly rely on them. God wants people to have their relationship with Him. That's why God gives us a pattern of training for ministry others that we call THE TRAINING CYCLE. The training cycle helps us minister to others so that others learn to rely on God and not wrongly depend on us. The Training Cycle is the way Shadow Leaders help move new believers from self-feeding discipleship to ministry as a lifestyle. There are four simple steps in the Training Cycle – MODEL, ASSIST, OBSERVE and MENTOR. These are the same four steps that Jesus used with His disciples during His ministry on earth. Let's take a look at each step and see how Jesus used the training cycle to prepare His followers to take over the responsibilities of God's family in a very short time.

The first step of the Training Cycle is **MODEL – that is to show others how to be leaders by modeling God's life patterns**. When Jesus first began to teach His disciples, He modeled God's ways by showing them to the disciples in His own life. What He said, what He did, even how He thought were examples for them of how to live their lives. As the disciples watched, Jesus healed the sick, forgave sins, and even raised the dead. Jesus said – *I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.* (John 13:15) (NIV) In order for a new believer to know how to live a life that pleases God, they have to see those patterns lived out in someone else's life – your life. It's your job as a leader to show them not only what it means to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind, but also to show them what it means to share that life pattern with others. As you model living, they'll learn how to live. And, as you model ministry, they'll learn how to ministry. New believers are going to watch everything you do – good and bad. From the first time you meet, use how you live and share God's ways as opportunities to train them how to live and minister. The

Bible says – *Always set a good example for others. Be sincere and serious when you teach.* (Titus 2:7) (CEV).

The second step of the Training Cycle is **ASSIST** – **that is to help others whenever they need it as they begin to lead.** When Jesus sent His disciples to live out God’s purposes and plans, He had shown them what to do, but sometimes they still needed help. One man brought His sick son to Jesus, and said – “*I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.*” (Matthew 17:16) (NIV) Jesus healed the boy and helped the disciples understand why they couldn’t. Jesus said – “*...you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.*” (Matthew 17:20) (NIV) When a follower needs help learning to lead, you should help them, but make sure that any help you give is based on God’s Word. A new believer will look to you for the answers, so be sure to share that how you live your life is based on God’s Word not something you’ve decided on your own. You’ll make mistakes, but God’s Word is never mistaken. They can watch you, but they should seek out God as the source for any good they see. Don’t say, “I think...,” or “In my opinion...,” because that turns the attention to you instead of God. Instead, say, “God’s Word says this is the right way” and then point them to scripture as the authority and answer to their question. Sometimes you won’t know the right answer. Just say “I don’t know,” and then offer to help them search it out. It’s much better to admit you don’t have all the answers than to make up an answer and have someone learn to rely on you instead of God.

After you MODEL and ASSIST, the third step of the Training Cycle is **OBSERVE** – **Observe your follower from a distance** and check in to make sure that they are training leaders properly. There were times when Jesus would give His followers a command and then leave them alone expecting them to continue the work. He would later check in to see how they were doing. One example is of a man Jesus healed in a place called the Ten Cities. The man wanted to follow Jesus, but Jesus said – “*No, go home to your friends, and tell them what wonderful things the Lord has done for you and how merciful he has been.*” (Mark 5:19) (NLT) Later Jesus went back to this same part of the country and a crowd was waiting for him. The man Jesus healed had been faithful and shared what he knew with others. Observing means you watch from a distance to make sure your followers are training others to be servant leaders by living and sharing what they’ve learned.

You’re also watching to make sure that the new believers your followers are leading are becoming leaders by learning to train others. As you help train followers to become leaders, it’s important to think in terms of generations. Are the spiritual “children” learning the same thing that their spiritual “parents” were taught? Are the patterns from God’s Word that you taught being passed on faithfully from one follower to the next? If so, that’s great.

The new church is planted and God’s family is discipling and ministering in a healthy way. If God’s Word is not being obeyed or faithfully passed on, then be sure to correct any mistakes as soon as you can. But remember to make sure that it is God’s Word that you are protecting and not your “way” of doing things. Some followers will train in a different way than their leaders. Some will use different styles or different methods. If God’s Word is faithfully being transferred then don’t worry if it’s not being done exactly as you would do it. God uses a variety of personalities and styles to share His word.

Finally, after you MODEL, ASSIST, and OBSERVE, the fourth step of the Training Cycle is **MENTOR** – **MENTOR your followers to become leaders** because their followers have

become leaders. After Jesus had spent a short time – just a few years – with His disciples, He knew that they were far enough along in their faith to trust them with God’s family. So He left. The Bible says – *After the Lord Jesus had said these things to the disciples, he was taken back up to heaven where he sat down at the right side of God. Then the disciples left and preached everywhere. The Lord was with them, and the miracles they worked proved that their message was true.* (Mark 16:19-20) (CEV)

To avoid dependency on us, we have to be willing to leave new leaders in God’s hands. This is the hardest step of the training cycle, because our tendency is to think that these relatively new believers are too young or immature to make it on their own. But God gives to every new believer the same salvation, the same Bible, and the same Holy Spirit He gives to us. God promises to provide for them and protect them in the same way He provides for and protects us. The Training Cycle doesn’t work if it’s not complete, and, if you continue to stay, your presence can actually slow down the growth of your new leaders. You must turn them over to God and trust that He is able to take care of them even after you’re gone. You’ll know that it is time to begin to MENTOR others when you see two things happen. First, your followers will be living and sharing God’s Word. Second, the ones they lead will be living and sharing God’s Word as they minister to others. If both of these things are happening, you’ll know that God’s Word is being spread and God’s family is growing. Then it’s time to MENTOR others and keep God’s family growing by beginning the training cycle somewhere else.

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

**Lesson 25**  
**Learning To Serve – Jesus Washes His Disciple’s Feet**

**OPENING**

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- Can you think of a time in your life when someone met your need? What happened? How did you feel? How did you feel about that person?
- Can you think of a time in your life when you ministered to someone else? What happened? How did you feel when you finished the work?

Jesus always challenges the way we think about things. Probably the biggest challenge to our way of thinking comes in the area of ministry. The world says that the weak always serve the strong, and that we only serve when we have to. But Jesus turned those ideas completely upside down. Jesus showed us that those who are truly strong always serve the weak. And, He showed us that our real reason for serving isn't because we have to but because of love.

*Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He now showed the disciples the full extent of his love. It was time for supper, and the Devil had already enticed Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to carry out his plan to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he had around him.*

*When he came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, why are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You don't understand now why I am doing it; someday you will." "No," Peter protested, "you will never wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "But if I don't wash you, you won't belong to me." Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!" Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you are clean, but that isn't true of everyone here." For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, "Not all of you are clean."*



*After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because it is true. And since I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. How true it is that a servant is not greater than the master. Nor are messengers more important than the one who sends them. You know these things--now do them! That is the path of blessing. (John 13:1-17) (NLT)*

In these passages, Jesus tells us that the real blessing in life isn't to be served but to serve. He tells us that we're a part of Him because we allow Him to serve us, and we are like Him because we learn to serve others. No one ever lived who deserved to be served more than Jesus did. He is the Son of God. He is the King of kings. He lived a perfect life and He saved us to be with Him for all eternity. We owe Him everything! But Jesus showed what it meant to be God's leader by serving the very ones who should have been serving Him. Jesus showed us that we only experience our greatest strength when we're willing to assume our lowest position.

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

## Lesson 26

### God's Purpose of Ministry

#### OPENING

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

#### **SMALL GROUP LEADER:**

*Before the next segment, remind the small group the origin of God's Purpose of Ministry by writing or reciting the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-38) and highlighting the phrase "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

#### MEMORY VERSE

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it – Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-38) (NIV)*

The best way to show our love is to serve.

One of the ways Jesus showed us how to live was by teaching us how to identify and meet the needs of others. Jesus lived His whole life as an example of what it means to serve God by assisting others. He created the entire universe but He was willing to give up everything including His own life to live out God's will and minister among us by giving us what we need the most. In this session, we'll discover more about what it means to grow God's family like Jesus by living God's fourth purpose for our lives – the purpose of MINISTRY. Ministry is for everyone and not just for those who lead churches. We often call church leaders by the name "ministers" but in truth, everyone in a healthy church must be involved in ministry. We'll learn how we can serve God better when we learn to meet the needs of others. We'll learn how God shapes us for ministry. Finally, we'll learn how Jesus taught His followers to lead by first teaching them how to minister to those in their own group and those whom they encounter.

When we truly love someone or even some thing, we give it our time, our talents, our heart... our whole selves. Whatever we love, we serve. And the more we love, the more we serve. God's Word tells us that there is an eternal connection between love and serving. And part of

His perfect plan for us is to love and serve. First, God wants us to live our love by serving Him. The Bible says – *The LORD your God commands you to love him and to serve him with all your heart and soul.* (Deuteronomy 11:13b) (CEV) Then, once we begin to love and serve God, He wants us to share our love by serving others. The Bible says – *...if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we have not seen?* (1 John 4:20) (NLT) The Bible says – *...serve one another in love.* (Galatians 5:13b) (NIV) God wants us to love and serve everyone. God wants us to love and serve the people in His family. The Bible says – *[God] will remember how you helped his people in the past and how you are still helping them.* (Hebrews 6:10b) (CEV) God also wants us to love and serve the people who aren't in His family. The Bible says – *Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone...* (Galatians 6:10a) (NLT) God loves the world, so He sends us to serve it.

And **Serving God by Serving Others is God's Purpose of MINISTRY**. Jesus said – *"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."* (Matthew 25:40b) (NIV)

We serve God when we **LEARN WHAT OTHERS NEED**.

Before we begin to follow Jesus, we spend most of our lives worried about our own needs. We worry about what we eat and where we sleep, what we wear and what we have. But God promises to provide His children with everything we need. Jesus said – *Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.* (Matthew 6:32b-33) (NLT) God wants us to stop looking only at ourselves and start looking around at other people. God wants us to stop worrying about our own needs and start meeting the needs of others.

There are five needs that we should look for when we start thinking about how we can serve others – spiritual needs, social needs, financial needs, physical needs, and educational needs.

**SPIRITUAL NEEDS** are the needs we have in our relationship with God. We all have spiritual needs, because we all have questions about our own life and we all need to know God better. The Bible says – *A man's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand his own way?* (Proverbs 20:24) (NIV) We serve someone's spiritual needs when we help them grow closer to God by helping them grow closer to Jesus. Some may need to meet Jesus for the very first time. Others may know Jesus but need to be encouraged by a prayer or a promise from God's Word. Whenever we share what we've learned from God's Word we're serving someone's spiritual needs and helping them grow closer to Jesus. For instance, Paul knew that the Christians in Rome had spiritual needs. He told them -- *"For I am yearning to see you, that I may impart and share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen and establish you; that is, that we may be mutually strengthened and encouraged and comforted by each other's faith, both yours and mine."* (Romans 1:11-12) (Amp) Whenever we share what we've learned from God's Word, we're serving someone's spiritual needs. The more we become like Jesus, the more our new life helps meet the needs of others in Jesus' name. And the Lord rewards us with a blessing us as well.

**SOCIAL NEEDS** are the needs we have in our relationships with others – the need for love and friendship, the need to share the joys and sorrows of life. The Bible says – *If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up.* (Ecclesiastes 4:10) (NIV) We can serve someone's social needs in many ways – by being a friend, by listening as someone shares their heart, by spending time with others in prayer.

But the best way we can minister to someone in this area is by helping them connect and grow closer to God's family. Inviting someone to your times of fellowship is a way to serve them. Including others when you worship or grow or serve or share are all ways to bring them closer to God through His family. The Bible says – *We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.* (Romans 12:5) (NLT)

In addition to spiritual and social needs, God wants us to look for **FINANCIAL NEEDS** when we think about how to serve others. The Bible says – *I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay.* (Psalm 70:5) (NIV) God wants to provide for those in need but often He chooses to provide through us, His family. Sometimes someone with a financial situation needs an immediate answer – a hot meal, clothes to wear, or a place to stay. As followers of Jesus, we should give these things when we can. But many times financial needs go deeper to the root cause of wrong choices, improper actions by others, or even victims of natural disasters. More than a simple meal or a bed for the night, these needs require a new way of living and a plan to get there. Ministering to someone who has a financial need is an opportunity for the world to see God's love and provision through His own family in the form of an individual church or networks of cooperating churches. At other times it is a matter of helping those in need realize they need to make significant godly choices as you point them to God's Word for resolve to make changes. Again, the emphasis is on avoiding dependence on you or any other short-term solutions, but resolving financial needs where God gets the glory. Whatever the need, God wants us to love and serve as Jesus would. The Bible says – *If you can help your neighbor now, don't say, "Come back tomorrow, and then I'll help you."* (Proverbs 3:28) (NLT)

Jesus spent much of His ministry loving and serving the sick, and God wants us to serve the **PHYSICAL NEEDS** of others. When Jesus sent out the disciples, He told them – *Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'* (Luke 10:9) (NIV) God wants us to minister to people who are hurting and sick. Sometimes we may serve through prayer and healing. Other times, it may be spending quiet moments and encouraging them as they get well. There are many sicknesses around the world that can be solved in simple ways, so part of how we can serve is by learning and sharing the knowledge and understanding available about disease. Regardless of the role of science or technology in the healing process, the minister walks with the sick crediting God for cures, consoling, or outcomes along the way. Whatever the method, God wants us to be involved as ministers, as caring servants who are accountable. This is not only a job for professional clergy. Jesus made it clear – when we serve the sick, we're serving Him. Jesus said – *"I was sick and you looked after me."* (Matthew 25:36b) (NIV)

Finally, God wants us to serve the **EDUCATIONAL NEEDS** of others. When someone lacks wisdom or understanding it hurts everyone. The Bible says – *A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.* (Proverbs 22:3) (NIV) Jesus was the greatest teacher who ever lived. He served the world by sharing eternal truths, wisdom and knowledge with everyone He met. His words changed minds and lives. Jesus wants us serve by sharing His life-changing words with the world. He doesn't want anyone to suffer because they don't know. We serve others' educational needs by sharing what we know – it may be how to read and write, it may be how to study God's Word; it may just be some wisdom from God's Word. You've already shared some of those things, so you've already been serving. Sometimes serving is as simple as praying and asking God to give someone what they need. The important thing is to love others enough to be willing to serve

them by sharing. The Bible says – *we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.* (Colossians 1:9b) (NIV)

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why would Jesus wash His disciples' feet?
2. What do you think Jesus meant when He said, "a servant is not greater than the master"?
3. Which one of these needs – Spiritual, Social, Financial, Physical, or Educational do you feel most passionate about? What is it about this need that interests you?
4. Who is one person that you know that has one of the needs we've studied? What is one thing that you could do to help them meet that need?

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.**
2. **FELLOWSHIP with time for tea or snacks.**

## Lesson 27

### How God Shapes Us for Ministry

#### OPENING

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

Once we learn the needs of those around us, we serve God by using **EVERYTHING HE GIVES US** to serve others.

From the very beginning God's perfect plan was for us to serve Him and serve others. The Bible says – *You were created in Christ Jesus for good works which He prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.* (Ephesians 2:10) (NAS) God created us and called us to meet the needs of others. He also gives us what we need to do the job. God's Word shows us that there are five ways God prepares us to do the work He created us to do.

- He gives us spiritual gifts;
- He gives us a heart to serve;
- He gives us talents and abilities;
- He gives us our own unique personality,
- and He gives us a life's worth of experiences.

God takes all of those things and blends them together perfectly to create exactly the right person to do exactly what needs to be done. He creates us. No one else has the same blend of gifts and heart, abilities, personality and experiences, because no one else is called to do exactly what God has created us to do. He made us to be one of a kind. Before we began to follow Jesus, we gave up on being the person God created us to be and gave in to being the person others expected us to be. But God loves and saved us through His own Son, and now He's giving us another chance to live out His perfect plan by serving.

The first way God prepares us to serve is to give us what the Bible calls **SPIRITUAL GIFTS**. The Bible tells us that God, Himself, chooses special gifts that He wants us to have and then gives them to us based on the work that He's prepared for us to do. There are many spiritual gifts – things like wisdom, which is how we understand God's heart; teaching, which is how we grow others through God's truth; and evangelism, which is sharing the good news of God's invitation – but these spiritual gifts are only given to followers of Jesus. And, just

like salvation, we can't earn them and we don't deserve them. They are just what we call them – gifts from God. The Bible tells us that God's Holy Spirit is the one responsible for distributing God's spiritual gifts to His family. He doesn't give the same gift to everyone, but He does give at least one gift to each and every follower of Jesus. God divides up His gifts and gives part of His Spirit to every one of His followers so that when we all come together we can serve in love. The Bible says – *The Spirit has given each of us a special way of serving others.* (1 Corinthians 12:7) (CEV)

The second way God equips us to serve Him and others is through our **HEART**. God is the one who creates us. He shapes us to have a passion for some things but not for others. Even before we are born, God knows the life and work that will make us complete, and He whispers the things that we will love into our heart to connect us to Him and the work that He wants us to do. As we accept and then follow Jesus, God's whisper grows louder and louder and our heart leads us closer and closer to Him. The Bible says – *...serve [the LORD] faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you.* (1 Samuel 12:24b) (NIV). God wants us to serve with our heart because that's where God has already written His dreams for our lives. As we grow closer and closer to God, He reveals more and more of the things that He has planned for us from the very beginning. Our desires become His desires. Our heart becomes like His heart. We begin to care about the things He cares about and do the things He would do. The more we learn about Him, the more we learn about our own heart. The Bible tells us – *Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.* (Psalm 37:4) (NIV)

The third way God equips us to serve is through our **ABILITIES**. God gives each of us talents and natural gifts when we are born. The Bible says – *God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well...* (Romans 12:6a) (NLT) We discover some of these talents and abilities right away, but often there are many more waiting to be found. Some people have abilities in farming or business – whatever they touch seems to grow. Some are good speakers. Others are good listeners. Some are gifted in music or art or building or sports. God gives everyone something they're good at, and God wants each of us to find out what that is and use it. Whenever we discover a God-given talent or ability, we have a choice. We can use it for our own benefit, or we can work and use it to serve God and others. God expects us to use what He gives us, but He gives us the choice of whether we'll spend what we are given on ourselves or invest it in the lives of others. When we use what God gives us to serve others, God says we're using His gifts the way He planned. The Bible says – *Each of you has been blessed with one of God's many wonderful gifts to be used in the service of others. So use your gift well.* (1 Peter 4:10) (CEV)

God gives us spiritual gifts; He whispers His desires for our lives into our hearts; He gives us talents and abilities and develops skills in our lives. God also gives us a **PERSONALITY** as a part of His perfect picture of who He wants us to be. There are many kinds of personalities, and God created them all so that we could accomplish the work that He called us to do. Some people always seem happy. Some are quiet and thoughtful. Some people are outgoing and enjoy making newcomers feel included in groups. Others show mercy and are empathetic while others are good at sizing up a problem and suggesting solutions. God gives us different personalities, but He does it for the same reason – to help believers do the work He prepared us to do.

Because we're constantly growing and changing, we respond to different types of personalities at different times and during different circumstances in our lives. Sometimes

we need a quiet word of comfort. Other times, we respond to an excited shout of encouragement. God has prepared just the right people with just the right personality to serve in just the right way at just the right time. That's one of the reasons He created such different personalities in the first place. God knows what we need and when we need the things that help us through our lives. That's the reason He gives us our personality and why it's so important to be ourselves. God made us exactly who we need to be. The Bible says – *There are different ways to serve the same Lord, and we can each do different things. Yet the same God works in all of us and helps us in everything we do.* (1 Corinthians 12:5-6) (CEV)

The fifth way that God equips us to serve is through our **EXPERIENCES**. Our season of existence is the most powerful tool that God uses to both prepare and perform the work that He created us to do. God has been working in our lives to prepare us before we were born right up until now. The Bible says – *God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing.* (Ephesians 2:10) (NCV) The picture God paints is of a life in motion. Everything that has occurred in our lives before now, God has either organized or allowed to prepare us for the service that He wants us to do right now. You are not an accident. And God is using the experiences that we're going through right now to prepare us for the good works that He has already planned for our future. He has allowed people to come into and go out of our lives. He has given us good times and watched over us through our troubles. God knows the trials and the pains that we go through and He allows them because He it is part of His plan to bring us closer to Him and help us serve others better. God is in control. He never wastes a hurt. He knows that when He brings us through any experience – especially a difficult one – we taste His love and learn to share that love with others. The Bible says – *[God] comforts us when we are in trouble, so that we can share that same comfort with others in trouble.* (2 Corinthians 1:4) (CEV)

God created us and gave us our own, unique blend of SPIRITUAL GIFTS, a passionate HEART, skills, talents and ABILITIES, a PERSONALITY, and a lifetime of EXPERIENCES all to prepare us to do the works that He planned for us even before we were born. He gives us all of these things to equip us for living out our life's purpose of serving. God's perfect plan is for us to use everything He gives us to live the life He planned for us to live and serve the way He created us to serve. But, just as He doesn't force us to love Him, God will never force us to use the gifts He gives. That's our choice. He blesses us by giving us our shape. We bless Him by using the way He shapes us to serve Him and others.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What are some of the talents and abilities that God has given you? What is one way that you could use one of these talents and abilities to serve someone else?
2. What do you think Jesus meant when He said, "a servant is not greater than the master"?

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.



## Lesson 28

### Becoming a Servant Leader

#### OPENING

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

#### MEMORY VERSE

*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others. (1 Peter 4:10) (NIV)*

When God looks at us He sees leaders. And, as followers of Jesus, we are called to be leaders of men and women. God's perfect picture of our lives is that we become the leaders that He created us to be. As followers of Jesus we share in His authority, the authority of the King of kings. The Bible says – *we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ* (Romans 8:17b) (NIV). In eternity, we will judge angels and the nations of the world. God's Word says – *Don't you know that God's people will judge the world... Don't you know that we will judge angels? And if that is so, we can surely judge everyday matters.* (1 Corinthians 6:2-3) (CEV) We are even the ones who God leaves in charge of His most precious possession – His own family. It's our privilege and our responsibility to lead others into a closer relationship with Him. The Bible says – *You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* (Matthew 5:14, 16b) (NIV)

All of these ways that God describes us – sharing Jesus' authority, being judges, being the light of the world – are varied facets of leadership. God wants all of His children to lead. But God's ways are not our ways. We think, to become a leader, we need to act like a leader. We need to be the boss. We need to be in control. But God's perfect plan is for us to be the kind of leader that Jesus was – a Servant Leader. **God teaches me how to LEAD by teaching me how to SERVE.** Jesus said – *The most important one of you should be like the least important, and your leader should be like a servant.* (Luke 22:26b) (CEV)

Becoming a Servant Leader is not something that's natural to us. Before we began to follow Jesus, we spent our lives doing things our own way. We didn't serve God and we didn't serve others. No matter what it seemed like we were doing on the outside, in our hearts we were serving ourselves. Becoming a Servant Leader, becoming God's perfect picture of who

He created us to be, means we have to be willing to follow His perfect plan to get there. We have to be willing to leave our old life – the life that we created for ourselves – and discover God’s new life – the life He planned for us all along. Becoming a Servant Leader means we’ll have to say “yes” when God wants to make some changes in our lives.

To become a Servant Leader, God wants me to change the way **I THINK**. The Bible says – *give up your old way of life with all its bad habits. Let the Spirit change your way of thinking and make you into a new person.* (Ephesians 4:22b-24) (CEV) It also says, *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.* (Romans 12:2) (NIV)

God wants me to think of serving **OTHERS** instead of focusing on **MYSELF**. In almost every situation our first thought is for ourselves. What’s best for me? What do I want to have happen? How does this affect me, my family, my work, my life? Our natural instinct is to take care of ourselves, to make sure that we have what we need and then, if we have time, to see about the needs of others. But Jesus said – *Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.* (John 15:13) (NIV) The key to being a Servant Leader is being willing to think less about what’s best for me and more about what’s best for those around me. They’re not often the same thing. To serve like Jesus means to sacrifice. And Jesus says that sacrifice is the best way to show our love. To be a Servant Leader, we have to be willing to “lay down” our own life, our comforts, our desires, our agendas, so that we can help “lift up” the lives of those around us. The Bible says -- *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.* (Philippians 2:3-4) (NKJV)

Another way God wants me to change is to think of serving as a **STEWARD** instead of **acting like an OWNER**. Everything belongs to God. But there are many times, even as followers of Jesus, when we forget that the things we have are really just on loan to us from God. We look at the things around us and forget that these are God’s things not our things, and so we do what we want with them. We see our jobs, and our families, and our health, and our lives, and we say these are things that are our possessions, things that we control. But, Jesus said – *No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other.* (Matthew 6:24a) (NLT) Jesus was talking about the choice we make between serving God or serving money, but the same idea applies to the choice between serving God or serving ourselves. We can’t do both. If we treat everything that God has loaned us as something we possess – if we act like we’re the owners – then we think about what’s best for us. We make our decisions based on what we want, and we serve ourselves. But, if we treat everything that we have as something that God has loaned to us – if we serve as stewards – then we think about what’s best for God. We make our decisions based on what He wants, and we serve Him. The Bible says -- *seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.* (Matthew 6:33) (NKJV) We become Servant Leaders when we serve as stewards instead of acting like owners.

Serving God and ministry to others is work. It means sacrifice. It means giving up our right to do what we want, when we want, and how we want to do it. It takes effort and time. But serving is also one of God’s greatest blessings – His perfect picture and plan for our lives. Serving brings us closer to others, but more importantly, serving brings us closer to God, and God wants me to think of **serving as an OPPORTUNITY** instead of an **OBLIGATION**.

Every time we have a chance to serve, we have a chance to become more like Jesus. God extends an invitation to those who will serve Him. And God's Word shows us that it has always been a position of great privilege and honor. That's why the Bible says – *Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing.* (Psalm 100:2) (NASB) Instead of seeing it as one more thing that we "have to do," God wants us to see serving as one more way He invites us into an even more intimate and loving relationship with Him. In God's way of thinking serving isn't a punishment, it's a reward. We become Servant Leaders when we see serving as an opportunity instead of an obligation.

Believing something in my mind doesn't mean much if I never do anything about it in my life. God wants me to change the way I think, but **To become a Servant Leader, God also wants me to change the way I LIVE.** The Bible says – *You have given up your old way of life with its habits. Each of you is now a new person and more like your Creator, and you will understand him better.* (Colossians 3:9b-10) (CEV) Here are four ways God's Word tells us that we can change our lives to start serving Him better.

First, **God wants me to change from being BUSY to being AVAILABLE.** In this life, there will always be too much to do. Between our family, our work, our friends, and our own interests, we could fill up every minute of every day with activities, and we often do. But to serve God the way Jesus did, we have to trade in our schedule for His. As followers of Jesus, God has a lot that He wants us to accomplish. The Bible says – *encourage and help each other... be thoughtful of your leaders... Try to get along with each other... warn anyone who isn't living right. Encourage anyone who feels left out, help all who are weak... be patient with everyone... be good to each other... Always be joyful... never stop praying. Whatever happens, keep thanking God because of Jesus Christ. This is what God wants you to do.* (1 Thessalonians 5:11b-18) (CEV)

God created and saved us to serve. But, how could we even begin to do the things God wants us to do if our lives are full? Jesus didn't live a busy or hurried life. He often took time to go and be alone with God and pray. He spent His life building intimate relationships and serving others. Jesus accomplished more in a few years of serving God than anyone in their whole life could before or after Him, because He was willing to make Himself available for whatever God was doing. Jesus was our perfect model. The Bible says *make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God.* (Romans 13:11) (Message) We become Servant Leaders when we change our lives from being busy to being available.

Next, **God wants me to change from being UNRELIABLE to being FAITHFUL.** When God gives us an opportunity to serve, He also gives us a choice to make. We can say "yes" to God and go to work, or we can say "not right now" and let it wait. In our old life, we could wait until we had the time, or the desire, or the resources we need to properly do a job. But as followers of Jesus, the Bible says – *If you wait for the perfect conditions, you will never get anything done.* (Ecclesiastes 11:4) (NLT) When God gives us an opportunity to serve, the time to start is now – right when God says to begin. As Servant Leaders, when we see a need, we don't wait – we start serving. There will always be excuses, reasons we can't serve now or why this kind of ministry isn't for us. When God asked Abraham to obey Him by sacrificing Isaac, the Bible says that Abraham did not hesitate, but – *Early the next morning [emphasis added] Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.* (Genesis 22:3) (NIV)

God also wants us to do the best with what we've got. When we see a chance to serve, God doesn't want us to spend our time deciding whether or not we have the right spiritual gifts, or the experience or the skills needed to do the job. This is His invitation to join His work. And when we commit to serve, God wants us to make sure we live up to our commitments – even when they're costly. That's what being faithful and accountability is really all about. Jesus was the greatest Servant Leader because Jesus was willing to be faithful and serve even though it cost Him the greatest price – His own life. The Bible says – *Who may stay in God's temple or live on the holy mountain of the LORD... they keep their promises no matter what the cost.* (Psalm 15:1a, 4b) (CEV) We become Servant Leaders when we change from being unreliable to being faithful.

**God also wants me to change from being PROUD to being HUMBLE.** Sometimes, even when we serve, we can lose sight of why we serve. We make ourselves available, we serve faithfully, but then we act like others should give us praise and thanks for doing the work God called us to do. God says we can't do both. We can't try to get the attention of others and the approval of God at the same time. The Bible says – *If I were still trying to please people, I would not be Christ's servant.* (Galatians 1:10b) (NLT) When we look for others to praise us, we do it because of pride. We go back to thinking of ourselves and not others, thinking like an owner and not a steward. A proud servant says – “I don't want to do that job,” because in their heart, they think, “That work is below me.” But Jesus showed us that no work is below a Servant Leader.

Remember, He was so humble that He was willing to wash the feet of His own followers. A proud servant worries about being seen by others and who gets the credit. A Servant Leader is humble and keeps doing the work no matter what. They let God be in charge of who is seen and who is not. Jesus warns us in the Bible -- *Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of people, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.* (Matthew 6:1) (HCSB) Many times in His serving, Jesus told the one He helped to be quiet and not tell anyone what He had done. Jesus knew that sometimes it's best to serve from the shadows and it's always best to serve with humility. The Bible says – *“God opposes everyone who is proud but he is kind to everyone who is humble.”* (James 4:6b) (CEV) We become Servant Leaders when we change from being proud to being humble.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What is the one area of my thinking where I struggle the most? Thinking of myself instead of others? Thinking as an owner instead of a steward? Or, thinking of serving as an obligation instead of an opportunity?
2. What is one thing I can do this week to start changing the way I think in that area?
3. What is the one area of my life where I struggle the most in my daily living? Being busy instead of available? Being unreliable instead of faithful? Being proud instead of humble?
4. What is one thing I can do this week to start changing the way I live in that area?

### **SEED PROJECT**

*A Seed Project is a local development effort aimed at one of the five development areas of the P.E.A.C.E. Plan – spiritual, social, financial, physical, or educational. A Seed Project should have high visibility in the community and allow as much local participation and leadership as possible. Street cleaning, community improvement such as planting flowers or*

*cleaning a neighborhood, painting a clinic or simple road repair are all examples of possible Seed Projects. Plan together what type of Seed Project your Small group to do for your community.*

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

## **Lesson 29**

### **Training For God's Mission**

#### **OPENING**

1. **GREET one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.**
2. **CHECK IN to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:**
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.**
4. **SHARE the lesson that follows...**

#### **MEMORY VERSE**

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

We've learned that the best way to live like Jesus is by learning to say "yes" to God no matter what He asks. We'll also discover three of the most important gifts that God ever gave us and learn how we can share them with others. Those gifts are faith, hope, and love.

In earlier sessions, we learned God wants us to start new churches by being a follower and a leader, a learner and a teacher. We have also learned how to be an even more effective teacher by becoming a trainer – training those around us to Plant Churches and Equip Servant Leaders, so they can go out and train others around them. We learned the four steps of the Training Cycle – Model, Assist, Observe, and Mentor. In this session, we want to answer a few more questions about training that will help us become even better trainers and learn to grow God's family as large as possible, as quickly as possible.

As trainers, the first question we should ask is "**WHO DO WE TRAIN?**" Jesus had a picture and a plan for who He trained. Jesus always asked questions and listened to hear the hearts of those around Him. When Jesus shared, He watched carefully to make sure that His disciples lived out what they learned. To those that put into practice what He taught, He shared more things. Jesus was our model of a perfect trainer, and He taught us who to train.

And it is training that is at the heart of spiritual movements. When we train others to obey God's Word, it creates a chain reaction – a people movement. As each believer begins with new believers, and they in turn train others to obey God's Word, then people come to faith in Christ and the Holy Spirit puts within them a desire to congregate. And the church planting process just keeps going and going. This is the central emphasis for church planting training in missions.

**We start by training new believers.** Just like the first disciples, new believers have said “yes” to Jesus and decided to follow Him. Their hearts and their actions show they are ready for more. New believers are like rich soil where God plants the seeds to grow His family. Jesus said – *the good soil represents those who hear and accept God's message and produce a huge harvest – thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted.* (Mark 4:20) (NLT)

Next – **we train those who have heart but need skills.** Some believers don’t know how to grow God’s family by living and sharing God’s truth. They’re willing to work but they need someone to teach them how to start. Jesus was always looking for people like that. When He found a willing heart, Jesus would pass on what He knew. The Bible says – *Jesus looked closely at the man. He liked him and said, "There's one thing you still need to do..."* (Mark 10:21a) (CEV)

Finally, **we train those who are using what they’ve already been given.** Whether it was money or time, opportunities or authority, over and over again Jesus spoke about how important it was to use what we’ve been given. When we think about “who” to train, we want to do what Jesus did – watch who lives and shares what they’ve already got and then give them some more. Jesus said – *Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much.* (Luke 16:10a) (NIV)

For the question “**WHAT DO WE TRAIN?**” the simple answer is “**we train what we already know.**” Think about the things we’ve already learned from God’s Word. Jesus said – *Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* (Matthew 28:19-20) (NIV) Jesus said – *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind... and Love your neighbor as yourself.* (Matthew 22:37a, 38b) (NIV) These are words that we already know and truths we’ve already started to live and share.

We’ve learned how to love God through Worship, love others through Fellowship, grow to be more like Jesus through Discipleship, serve one another through Ministry, and now we’re learning how to share God’s love through Mission. We’ve learned how God wants us to grow and help others grow – spiritually, socially, financially, physically, and educationally.

We’ve already started practicing healthy life patterns like prayer, learning God’s Word, and living as a part of God’s family. We learned that being a follower of Jesus means living and sharing His commands. These sessions are just the beginning of what it means to be a disciple, but the things we’ve already learned and the way that we’ve learned them are things we can use to train others.

Another question is “**HOW DO WE TRAIN?**” **We train using God’s Word.** Jesus showed us that God’s Word is the foundation for our lives. Jesus said – *Anyone who hears and obeys these teachings of mine is like a wise person who built a house on solid rock* (Matthew 7:24a) (CEV) God’s Word speaks directly to our heart. It’s never wrong. It lasts forever. What we think and how we do things may last a lifetime, but God’s Word goes on and on and on. There is no more important or effective way to train than to share the same words that God shared with us. Also, **we train a little at a time.** Jesus never gave His followers everything at once. To hear at one time all that God has planned, all the changes

we have to make, all the things we have to learn – would be too much. When we train, we want to train like Jesus. We share a little, and then watch to see what happens. That’s why we “CHECK IN” every time we meet. We’re making sure that what we’re sharing is being lived and shared with others. **We train on purpose, too.** Jesus had a picture and a plan when He trained His disciples. Jesus knew He would be on earth a short time. He knew the kind of people His family would need when He left. Jesus trained on purpose and grew His followers into leaders. When we train others, we should have a picture in our mind of who God wants them to be and a plan to help them get there. We start by asking questions. A disciple is someone who follows. Are the ones we’re training living God’s Words in their own lives? A disciple is someone who is growing but also leading. Are the ones we’re training sharing what they’ve learned with others? Growing God’s family and shaping servant leaders doesn’t happen by accident. It happens on purpose.

When we ask, “**WHEN DO WE TRAIN?**” the answer is “**we train all the time.**” As a follower of Jesus, there are no classrooms, there is no set schedule. God wants us training the people around us every chance we get. The Bible says – *Do your planting in the morning and in the evening, too. You never know whether it will all grow or whether one planting will do better than the other.* (Ecclesiastes 11.6) (TEV). Riding the bus with another believer may be a time to share God’s truth about fellowship. Caring for a sick family in your church is an opportunity to serve and share God’s love. Every day, all through the day, we should open our eyes and ears and hearts to what’s happening all around us. To grow God’s family and shape servant leaders, we should be training all the time.

When we ask, “**WHERE DO WE TRAIN?**” the answer is “**we train everywhere.**” In our home, where we work, in our store, in our school – God wants us to share His truth and His love everywhere. Jesus told His followers – *You are the salt of the earth* (Matthew 5:13a) (NIV) and *You are the light of the world* (Matthew 5:14a) (NIV). Wherever we are, Jesus wants the people around us to taste the rich flavor of His love and grace. Wherever we are, Jesus wants us to share the warm glow of our faith and our new life in Him. Training everywhere means we train the people who are close to us – our family and our friends. It means we train the people in our community – our neighbors, our co-workers, and our relatives. But if your training remains just within your circle of influence, it would stay very small. Jesus means for believers to also reach beyond where it is easy. Sometimes we need to intentionally travel to train people around the world – anywhere and everywhere God allows us to go.

It may seem too big or too much to think about – the idea that we could be training anyone, anywhere, at anytime with something as important as the truth about God’s love. But remember how Jesus started – a few people... simple conversations... a little at a time... Think of one person, look for one opportunity, try to find one small thing to share. That’s where to begin! Don’t worry about starting too small. Remember, we make God happy when we’re faithful in the little things. Don’t worry about making mistakes. Remember, training others is just part of the way that God is training us.

## **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.**
2. **FELLOWSHIP with time for tea or snacks.**



**Lesson 30**  
**Sharing Without Limits – The Story of Jesus and the Cross**

**OPENING**

- 1. GREET one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.**
- 2. CHECK IN to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:**
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
- 3. PRAY for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.**
- 4. SHARE the lesson that follows...**

While Jesus was on earth, His mission was to share God's love with the whole world. Jesus completed His earthly mission on the cross. There was no better way to show God's love. Jesus obeyed no matter how much it cost. There was no greater way to share God's love. Jesus gave His own life to save ours.

*They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. It was the third hour when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. (Mark 15:16-27) (NIV)*

*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) (John 20:1-9) (NIV)*

*So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

*They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:6-11) (NIV)*

Jesus was leaving, but God wanted His love to continue. So Jesus shared His mission with us. Jesus said – *As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.* (John 20:21) (NIV). Jesus would no longer have a physical body on earth. Instead, He sent His Spirit – the Holy Spirit – to live inside the hearts of every one of His followers. These new believers became His new body. Jesus could take God's love to the whole world, because His new body grew bigger as His new family grew bigger. Every believer from the beginning of time until now and all the way until Jesus returns belongs to God's family and Jesus' body. The Bible says – *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.* (1 Corinthians 12:27) (NIV) Our work until Jesus returns is to continue the work that He started – introducing people to God and sharing His love with the world.

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

**Lesson 31**  
**God's Purpose of Mission**

**OPENING**

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

**SMALL GROUP LEADER:**

*Before the next segment, remind the Small group where we get God's Purpose of Mission by reciting the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and emphasizing the phrase "Go and make disciples of all the nations..."*

**MEMORY VERSE**

*"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20) (NIV)*

Who do you love the most—a family member? Your best friend? What person on this earth could you honestly say that you would be willing to die for them? Jesus loved more than anyone who ever lived, so Jesus shared more than anyone who ever lived. Jesus knew what it meant to truly love God and truly love others, so Jesus shared what he knew about love. Jesus knew what it meant to live a life that pleased God in areas like money, and health, and education, so Jesus shared what he knew about life. Whenever God gave Jesus a gift – whether it was wisdom, or knowledge, some kind of talent, or ability, or experience – Jesus shared it with those around Him. Whatever Jesus had, He was always willing to share.

He shared out of love. He shared without limits. Even when it meant giving everything that He was as a person – Jesus shared. In this session we'll learn more about what it means to share like Jesus by living God's fifth purpose for our lives – the purpose of MISSION. We'll learn how God has given all of us great gifts that He wants us to live in our own life and that He expects us to share them with our family and friends, our neighbors and community, and the rest of the world.

God gave us a mission in life – go everywhere in the world and make disciples of all the nations. The word "nations" is literally all the people groups in the world. There are about

6,000 people groups that still have never heard about God's plan of salvation that endures for all eternity. God's perfect picture of heaven is a place filled with a family so large it includes people from every nation, tribe, language, and tongue. God's perfect plan to is to grow His family and fill heaven with believers like us. God wants us, His children, to offer everyone, everywhere the same invitation He offered us – learn to follow Jesus and live with Him in love, forever. Jesus' last command is our lasting assignment – share God's love with the world. **Sharing God's Love is God's Purpose of MISSION**. Jesus said – “*Go and preach the good news to everyone in the world.*” (Mark 16:15) (CEV)

God's Word tells us that there are three reasons why God wants us to share His love. Sharing is God's plan to connect us with Him and with others; sharing is God's plan to correct us – to heal our hurts and the hurts of those around us; and sharing is God's plan to complete us by finishing the work that He's started in our lives and the work that He's doing in the world.

**Sharing is God's Plan to CONNECT**. Before we knew Jesus, we were far away from God. We lived our lives our own way instead of His way. We lived lives of sin. The Good News is that God never forgot about us. Even while we were far away from Him, even in the middle of our sin, He was thinking about us, and loving us, and planning for our return. Thousands of years ago, God loved us enough to send His Son to die for us. During our lives, God loved us enough to send someone to tell us the Good News. God never stops loving, so God never stops connecting.

First – **Sharing is how GOD connects with US**. As a follower of Jesus, God gives us the task of sharing His love with the world. That is our ongoing assignment from Jesus, Himself! But sharing God's love is not just a responsibility; it's also a reward. Jesus said – *I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* (Matthew 28:20b) (NIV) Jesus connected that promise with His command to go out and tell others about His love. Jesus linked His presence to our sharing. The Bible says when we share – we're co-workers with Jesus. We're working for Him, but we're also working with Him. The more time we spend sharing means the more time we spend with Jesus. The Bible says – *...how good it is to be near God! ...I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do.* (Psalm 73:28) (NLT)

Next – **Sharing is how WE connect with OTHERS**. Connecting comes from shared experiences and shared interests, but the greatest connections come from shared love. There is no greater love than to share Jesus. We can share many things – our culture, our food, our time, our money, what we know – all of them are valuable, but nothing is worth more than sharing Jesus. Jesus changes hearts. Jesus changes lives. Most of all, Jesus changes our eternity. Someone's decision about Jesus is more important than any other decision they make because no other decision lasts longer. When we love someone enough to share Jesus – no matter what the circumstances or challenges – we're showing them we love them with a love that lasts forever. That means loving enough to learn a language, cross barriers, eat strange food, or travel great distances. God uses that kind of love to connect our hearts with others in a way that nothing else can. Jesus said – *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* (John 13:34) (NIV)

Finally – **Sharing is how OTHERS connect with GOD**. God connects with us through Jesus' sacrificial gift on the cross. We connect with others by telling them what Jesus has done in our lives. They connect with God by inviting Jesus to come and live in their hearts forever. Sharing is a perfect circle of connection where everything is held together by God's love. When we share Jesus with others we help them connect with God. God uses our

sharing to help get things started, but then He invests through His Holy Spirit all the love He has to give. The ones who we share with are no longer connected only with us. They're now connected with Jesus, Himself. They enjoy all the rights and responsibilities of being a follower of Jesus that we do. The Bible says – *He called you to salvation when we told you the Good News; now you can share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (2 Thessalonians 2:14) (NLT) God to us. Us to others. Others to God. The Bible says – *God has done it all! He sent Christ to make peace between himself and us, and he has given us the work of making peace between himself and others.* (2 Corinthians 5:18) (CEV) God connects us through sharing.

After we share our faith, God wants us to keep sharing. God doesn't just "connect" our lives through sharing, He also "corrects" our lives through sharing. **Sharing is God's Plan to CORRECT.** The captain of a ship plots a course and sets out for a planned destination. But, things happen along the way – winds blow, waves push, storms come and go. A ship is literally in a fluid situation! A good captain keeps looking at his destination and keeps correcting the ship to stay on course. As a disciple, our life is like that ship. We have accepted Jesus into our hearts and asked Him to set the course of our lives. Our destination is to be with Him forever in heaven. But, along the way, troubles and trials, temptations, and our old ways of doing things all move us off course. We get distracted from our destination. That's why the Bible says – *work with fear and trembling to discover what it really means to be saved.* (Philippians 2:12b) (CEV) The work isn't over when we start to follow Jesus; in many ways it's just beginning. The good news is that God is working with us and for us. Jesus corrects our path and moves us around troubles and through temptations and trials. As we hear and obey His commands we learn to live a life that's more and more on course to our destination with Him. As we share what we learn with others, God uses us to help correct their course and keep them moving towards Him, as well. Here are three things that God wants us to share to keep us and others moving towards Jesus.

First – **God wants us to share His PERFECT PICTURE AND PLAN.** Jesus showed us God's perfect picture of who He wants us to be. God's purposes are God's perfect plan for how He wants us to live. After someone connects with God, they still need to know how to live this new life. Before, they steered their lives wherever they wanted to go. Now, God wants to direct their lives. God tells us to share as a way to help correct their path and point them towards His destination. We share Jesus, because He's our goal and the hope and direction for our lives. We share God's purposes, because without a plan nothing good is ever accomplished. Sharing Jesus and God's plan means we share the very basics of being a disciple – to be a follower and a leader, a learner and a teacher, to obey and to share all of Jesus' commands. Sharing God's perfect picture and plan gives a new believer a destination in life and a basic course for how to get there.

Next – **God wants us to share His PURPOSES.** God's purposes are worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and mission. We shared that God's purposes are God's plan for our lives. Now God wants us to share what those purposes are and how to live them. Loving God with everything we are becomes how we live out God's purpose of worship. Living as God's family is how we live out God's purpose of fellowship. Growing to be like Jesus, serving God by serving others, and sharing God's love are how we live out God's purposes of discipleship, ministry, and mission. It's easy for growing believers to fill their hearts, their minds, and their lives with ideas and activities that seem important here and now but have no value in eternity. Sharing God's purposes helps a believer see the meaning of their new lives

and helps correct their course from things that seem worthwhile but aren't, to things that are valuable and always will be.

Finally – **God wants us to share His PRACTICES**. There are things that God teaches us in life – wise ways of living that He reveals through His Word, through prayer, through the lives of others, and through our own experience. God teaches us practical ways to show our love to Him and to others. He teaches us wisdom in how to handle our money, our health, and our education. As we learn and develop in these areas – spiritually, socially, financially, physically, and educationally (the five areas of the P.E.A.C.E. Plan) – God wants us to pass on what we know. Everyone needs to know about Jesus and God's purposes, so when we share God's picture and plan and purposes, we share the same truths with everyone. But different people have different practical needs. One person might need financial help – like how to operate a business that helps others and honors God. Someone else might need to develop spiritual skills – how to set a daily time for prayer and hearing God's Word. When we share God's practices, God wants us to first look at the specific needs of that person, family, or community. Then He wants us to share what we know based on what they need. Sometimes we'll share something we already know – skills and experience God has already developed in our lives. Other times, God will reveal a need we've never experienced. That's an opportunity from God to learn more and then pass it on. God wants us to share His practices, and God wants us to practice what we share.

God “connects” us through sharing. He “corrects” us through sharing. God also “completes” us through sharing. **Sharing is God's Plan to make us COMPLETE**. God knows we're not perfect. We don't love Him and others as we should. We haven't grown fully to be like Jesus. We don't fill our lives with serving and sharing. But Jesus said – *You are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.* (Matthew 5:48) (NLT) God's idea of perfect and our idea of perfect are different things. We look at perfect as something we are or we're not. God looks at perfect as somewhere we're headed. God sees what we need in our lives and shares His truth to fill in what's missing. God's plan to make us perfect means He wants us to go from being separated from Him to someone who grows His family; from being self-centered to being a servant leader; from poverty to being a generous producer; from being weak and diseased to being a strong healer; and from lacking knowledge to being a wise teacher. When God sees a need, He shares. And when He sees us share what He gives us, He shares more with us. **God uses sharing to COMPLETE US**.

**God also uses sharing to COMPLETE HIS FAMILY**. God wants everyone to have a chance to join His family and live with Him in love forever. The Bible says – *[God] doesn't want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent.* (2 Peter 3:9b) (NLT) In order to complete His family, God sends us, His children, to share His love with the world. God never forces anyone to accept His love, but He wants everyone to hear His invitation. God's perfect plan for heaven is a place filled with His family; a family from every nation of the world. The Bible foretells an amazing future -- *I saw a large crowd with more people than could be counted. They were from every race, tribe, nation, and language, and they stood before [God's] throne.* (Revelation 7:9) (CEV) God uses sharing to complete us. God uses sharing to complete His family.

**God also uses sharing to complete HIS STORY**. God's story of man begins in a garden where there was no sin and life would go on forever. The first man rejected God's love and brought trials and trouble and death that God never intended. God's story of man ends with a time of judgment where those who reject God are separated from Him for eternity while

those who love Him will go on to live with Him forever. Between the beginning and end is the story of Jesus, God's gift of love that He shared with the world. Jesus is the story God wants us to share with the world. And when we share it with everyone who needs to hear, God says then His story will be complete. The Bible says – *When the good news about the kingdom has been preached all over the world and told to all the nations, the end will come.* (Matthew 24:14) (CEV) God is working to complete us – to fill in what's missing from our lives. God is working to complete His family – to give everyone a chance to live in love with Him forever. And, God is working to complete His story – to finish all of human history with the return of His Son. God completes all of those things when we share His love.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What was Jesus' last command to His followers before He ascended to heaven? What does that command mean to His followers today?
2. Are there people from another language group or different ethnicity or caste who live near you and do not know the truth about Jesus?
3. Where are they located and how can you get to them?
4. How can your Small group establish a house church among them?
5. When will you do it?

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

## **Lesson 32**

### **Obedience**

#### **OPENING**

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

Obedying God is the best way we can live as a disciple, because when we obey God, we live in perfect fellowship with Him. We enjoy His love, His protection, His provision, and His rewards. The Bible says – *He will give us whatever we ask, because we obey him and do what pleases him.* (1 John 3:22) (CEV) When we obey God, we grow closer to Him and closer to others, because obedience is connected to love. The Bible says – *how can we be sure that we belong to him? By obeying his commandments.* (1 John 2:3) (NLT) Jesus said – *If you love me, you will obey what I command.* (John 14:15) (NIV) Obeying God is also the best way we can share as a disciple, because when we obey, we're sharing like Jesus. Jesus was effective at sharing God's love because the people around Him saw how He lived God's love in His own life. Jesus' life was different and the people around Him wanted to know why.

Jesus faced the same temptations and the same desire to do things His own way as everyone else, but Jesus never sinned. Jesus always obeyed God's commands. Jesus told His Father – *"Not my will, but yours be done."* (Luke 22:42) (NIV) Jesus always said "yes" to God, no matter what the question, no matter what the consequence. Jesus obeyed even when it meant death, and God rewarded His obedience by rewarding Jesus' followers with eternal life. The Bible says – *[because of the] obedience of the one man, the many were made righteous.* (Romans 5:19) (NIV) Jesus' obedience gave Him influence with those around Him. People watched what Jesus did and listened to what He had to say. When Jesus shared God's love, those who heard responded and thousands grew closer to God. Today, God still rewards obedience with influence. As we obey God, He allows us to share in more powerful ways. In fact, **SAYING "YES" TO GOD** is the best way to share like Jesus.

Saying "yes" to God means we say "yes" to His perfect picture and plan for our lives. When God looks at us, He sees the picture of who He created us to be, someone like His Son, Jesus. The Bible says – *God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son.* (Romans 8:29a) (NLT) God's plan for us is to become like Jesus by obeying His Word and



living out His purposes. The Bible says – *as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more.* (2 Corinthians 3:18b) (NLT) **God's perfect plan for my life is based on OBEDIENCE**, because saying "yes" to God is how we stay connected to Him. Jesus said – *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.* (John 15:10) (NIV)

Because of Jesus' obedience, we have an opportunity to obey and be with God forever. But God doesn't create us "obedient." Instead He gives us the choice to become obedient as we become more and more like His Son. Obedience is saying "yes" to God even when everything inside is telling us to say "no." Obedience is a series of decisions. It is something we learn. It is something we grow into. Obedience is something God has to teach us. And, **God teaches me to obey Him as I PRACTICE OBEYING OTHERS**. God gives us authorities on earth. They tell us what to do and where to go. They are responsible to God to keep us safe. Our authorities on earth will always be flawed, because they face the same struggle to do things their own way that we all do. But Jesus showed us through His life, how God's plan of obedience means we obey God by obeying those who God puts in charge of us.

First, **God wants me to obey my PARENTS**. Jesus obeyed His parents. The Bible says – *[Jesus] went down with [his parents] and came to Nazareth and He continued in subjection to them... and Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men.* (Luke 2:51a, 52) (NAS) God gives us to our parents, or someone like parents, to begin teaching us how to obey. Jesus' parents weren't perfect, but God placed Jesus under their authority so that He could learn what it meant to obey. Jesus practiced obeying His earthly parents, so He could learn how to always obey His Heavenly Father. God rewards us when we obey our parents. God said – *"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."* (Exodus 20:12) (NIV) But even when the reward seems a long way away, God still wants us to obey. The Bible says – *Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right.* (Ephesians 6:1) (NAS)

God wants us to obey others He puts in authority over us – **God wants me to obey MY EMPLOYERS and MY GOVERNMENT**. Jesus obeyed the rulers of His time. When the religious leaders of the day wanted to know what Jesus thought about paying taxes to an oppressive government, Jesus said – *Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.* (Matthew 22:21b) (NIV) Jesus understood that earthly authority is just a temporary picture of eternal authority, so Jesus taught us to obey even flawed leaders now so we can understand how to obey the Perfect Leader, later. The Bible says – *Everyone must submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist are instituted by God.* (Romans 13:1) (HCSB)

There is one instance that God tells us in His Word and Jesus showed us in His work that we can disobey our authority in this life and still live a life that pleases God. There may be times when our earthly authorities give us an order that causes us to disobey God. Jesus' actions and God's Word tells us that **If I have to choose between obeying GOD and obeying SOMEONE ELSE, God wants me to ALWAYS OBEY HIM**. The leaders of Jesus' time demanded that He honor their traditions and not heal the sick on a certain day of the week. But God had given Jesus the command to heal the sick, so Jesus was forced to choose between obeying men and obeying God. Jesus chose to obey God. God is the authority over all authorities. Jesus is the King of all kings. Whenever God tells us to do something, His

word is more important than any command from anyone else. The Bible says – *We must obey God rather than men!* (Acts 5:29) (NIV)

We've learned "why" God wants us to obey – obedience is part of His perfect plan and obedience shows our love for Him. We've learned "who" God wants us to obey – we practice obeying God by learning how to obey others. Now let's see what God word has to say about "how" God wants us to obey. Obedience isn't something we can just do on the outside. Obedience is too difficult, too costly, and too dangerous for that. The kind of obedience God wants has to come from deep inside of us – from our heart. Because only obedience that deep will allow us to obey God the way He expects to be obeyed. God wants our obedience to be a reflection of our love for Him. **When God gives a command, He expects me to obey IMMEDIATELY and COMPLETELY.**

When I obey God, He wants me to obey immediately, and "**immediately**" means **WHENEVER GOD SAYS**. God is a God of order. He has prepared and planned events thousands of years before they happen. The Bible says – *you are created in Christ Jesus for good works which he prepared beforehand that you should walk in them.* (Ephesians 2:10) (NIV) When God gives you a command, He isn't just moving you where He wants you to be, He's moving hearts and minds, people and resources from all over His creation to arrive at a precise place on earth, at an exact moment in history, for His perfect purposes and plans. The Bible says – *we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose...* (Romans 8:28a) (NLT) When we make God wait until we're "ready," or we're "comfortable," or we feel like we "understand the decision," then we're telling God that our plans are more important than His plans. God wants us to obey as soon as He has told us what to do. God's timing is perfect, so God wants us to obey Him immediately.

When I obey God, He wants me to obey completely, and "**Completely**" means **WHATEVER GOD WANTS**. God loves us with everything that He is. He never holds back His love from us. God loves us so much that He created us. And then when we wouldn't obey, He sent His own perfect Son Jesus to give His life as the price for our disobedience. God asks us to love Him in the same way in return. God wants us to love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength. God wants us to love Him with everything we are. God wants us to love Him completely. The way we show our complete love for God is through our complete obedience. Jesus said – *If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.* (John 14:23) (NIV) The Bible says – *if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him.* (1 John 2:5a) (NIV). The Bible says – *This is love for God: to obey his commands.* (1 John 5:3) (NIV) God created a perfect bond between our love for Him and our obedience to Him. God wants us to love Him completely, so God wants us to obey Him completely.

Obedience brings us close to God and keeps us close to God. And, when we're close, God shapes us into who He created us to be. He also allows us to share with others in a more powerful way. We will never be as perfect in our obedience as Jesus was. But when we're obedient, God knows that we're listening to His voice and that we're sharing His heart. He can trust us with greater influence, because He knows that we're living His love. Every time we obey God, even in simple of things, we become more like Jesus and we take a step closer to Him. God sees it and rewards us by making us more effective when we lead and more influential when we share. Jesus said – *whoever hears my commands and obeys them, he is*

*the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. (John 14:21) (NIV)*

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why is obeying God the best way to show that I love Him?
2. Is there anyone God has allowed as an authority in my life that I find difficult to obey? What is one way I can practice obeying God, by obeying this person / this authority?
3. Is there something I know God wants me to do that I haven't done yet? How can I practice obeying God immediately in this matter? How can I practice obeying Him completely?

### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

## Lesson 32

### Faith, Hope and Love

#### OPENING

1. **GREET** one another and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to give each person insight as to how they can apply the lesson and teach it to others.
2. **CHECK IN** to see if each person was able to apply the lesson from the previous week and to teach it to others. If they have started and are leading another Small group then also ask the questions below:
  - a. **MODEL** – What have you modeled from this lesson to those in your Small group?
  - b. **ASSIST** – Who from your own Group can you involve in the leadership of the group this week? How can you help them lead effectively?
  - c. **OBSERVE** – How can you evaluate and provide necessary guidance to those who are beginning to lead in your group?
  - d. **MENTOR** – Who are the members of your Small group now ready to lead a group on their own? When can you meet with them to offer advice, mentor them and answer any questions they might have?
3. **PRAY** for one another and for any unsaved friends and family members.
4. **SHARE** the lesson that follows...

#### MEMORY VERSE

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

We live in a world where it seems there is never enough. Never enough food, so people go hungry. Never enough money, so people are poor. Never enough doctors, and teachers, and pastors; so people are sick, and uneducated, and lost without God. Before we knew God, we were focused on ourselves – what we needed, what is best for us. But, as followers of Jesus our mission is to share everything with everyone – to share God’s love with the world. How can we even start something so impossibly big? How can we go on once we’ve started? How can just a few of us make a difference? God knew we would feel this way. It’s how the first disciples felt after Jesus ascended into heaven. They were excited about the work, but overwhelmed at its size. God knew what they needed and shared what they were missing. God sent His Holy Spirit, to lead them and guide them, and God gave them gifts to do the work He called them to do. God does the same thing for us today. God shares His Holy Spirit, and He gives us three special gifts – **God shares FAITH, HOPE, and LOVE to help us on our mission.**

God knows we can’t do the work He calls us to do based on how we think and what we see. The people are too many, the need is too much, and the opposition is too great. But God wants His work completed, so **God gives us the gift of FAITH to help us ACCOMPLISH THE IMPOSSIBLE.** Faith is our foundation, a solid rock that never fails. Faith is what we trust in, what we believe in, what we know. Faith is God’s gift to let go of what we have and take hold of what He’s planned. At night, our eyes can’t see the sun, but we know in our hearts it will be here in the morning. We can’t see it, but we know that it’s there. God says faith is just like that. The Bible says – *...faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.* (Hebrews 11:1) (NIV)

God gives us the freedom to have faith in anything we choose – possessions... power... pride... But God says there is only way to a great life – one way to live and share all the amazing and incredible things He has planned. We know in our hearts we've failed and will fail again, no one can hold on to power; money comes and goes. That's why **God wants me to have faith in HIM, HIS WORD, and HIS FAMILY**. These are the only things that will last forever. God is all powerful, all knowing, and everywhere. God never lies. God's family will last forever. God says if we want Him to build us a great life – to build bigger, and better, and higher than ever before, God needs us to have the foundation of a great faith. We have to believe God is who He says He is and God does what He says He will do. The Bible says – *...without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.* (Hebrews 11:6) (NIV)

Without faith, our lives become small. In our hearts, we know God has something better for us, but we don't have the courage to try and find it. Without faith, God has nothing to work with. The Bible says – *[Jesus] did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.* (Matthew 13:58) (NIV) The good news is that God doesn't need or even expect a lot of faith. God will work with whatever we've got. **It only takes a LITTLE FAITH for God to do GREAT THINGS**. The Bible says – *If you had faith no larger than a mustard seed, you could tell this mountain to move... and it would.* (Matthew 17:20) (CEV) But God wants to do more than great things for us; God wants to do impossible things through us. To do the greatest things God has planned for our lives, our faith has to grow.

Sometimes our faith grows little by little – we trust God as He consistently meets our needs. Sometimes our faith grows in great leaps – we believe God because of a miracle in our lives. Our faith grows in different amounts at different times, but it always grows because of the same thing – our relationship with God. God starts the process with a promise. God tells us some great thing He will do in or through our lives. Then we believe God is who He says He is and will do what He says He will do, and we act on that belief. We have to act. The Bible says – *faith without works is dead.* (James 2:26) (NKJV) We can't do what God promises. God has to step in and finish the work. But God won't step in to finish something we haven't stepped out to do. When we act, we give God the opportunity to live up to His promise. He always does, and we learn to trust Him more. That's how God grows our faith. **To GROW MY FAITH, I need to TRUST GOD, LISTEN TO WHAT HE SAYS, and ACT ON WHAT I KNOW**. The Bible says – *Trust in the LORD with all your heart.* (Proverbs 3:5a) (NIV) Faith is how God accomplishes the impossible.

God knows we can't do the work He calls us to do relying on our own strength. We want to quit when we suffer. We get distracted when we succeed. To live God's best life – to live God's love and share it with the world – we have to keep moving, away from the life we've created and towards the life God has planned. Once we've started following Jesus and walking in faith, God doesn't want us to stop or go back to where we've been, so **God gives us the gift of HOPE to help us KEEP GOING**. Hope is the promise of good things in the future. Hope is the expectation God will reward what we've done. Hope is a light that never stops shining. In the day, hope reminds us where we're headed. In the dark, hope assures us we're not alone. The Bible says – *There is surely a future hope for you ...your hope will not be cut off.* (Proverbs 23:18) (NIV)

**God wants me to have hope in TROUBLES and in TRIUMPHS**. When times are hard and we're beaten down, it's easy to think our work is over; that God has abandoned us and

we're all alone. God gives us hope in times of trouble to renew us, to keep us going, and to help us endure. The Bible says – *those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.* (Isaiah 40:31) (NIV) When times are good and we reach our goals, it's easy to think our work is over, that God is satisfied, and we're on our own. But, no matter how good things are or how much we achieve, it's small in comparison to what God has planned. God gives us hope in times of triumph to help keep everything in perspective. The Bible says – *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."* (1 Corinthians 2:9) (NLT) **God wants me to have hope in TROUBLES and in TRIUMPHS.**

Without hope, our lives become stuck and stale. We don't want the pain of what we left behind, but we don't have the heart to move on and move forward. Without hope, we stay where we are. We waste away. The Bible says – *Hope deferred makes the heart sick.* (Proverbs 13:12a) (NIV) God wants us to keep living and sharing His commands. God wants us to keep moving towards Him and bringing others with us. God grows our hope to keep us moving. When we listen to what God says – we hear His word and all the great plans He has for our future – our hope grows and we keep moving. When we think of who God is – we remember the good things He's done in our lives and in the lives of others – our hope grows and we keep moving. **To GROW MY HOPE, I need to HEAR GOD'S PROMISES and REMEMBER GOD'S PERSONALITY.** The Bible says – *...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.* (Romans 15:4) (NIV) We start in faith, but hope is God's gift to keep us going.

God knows we can't do the work He calls us to do by relying on what's in our own heart. We want to care about others as we should – but we don't. We want to feel deeply and be self-less – but we aren't. We want to say "yes" to God and do whatever He asks – but we can't. On our own, our hearts don't have what they need to make a difference in this life, so **God gives us the gift of LOVE to help us CHANGE THE WORLD.** Love is our chance at a new beginning. Love is giving all we are, then searching for ways to give more. Love is a burning fire in our heart. Love keeps us awake thinking of ways to please God. Love opens our eyes and urges our hearts to help others. The Bible says – *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.* (1 John 3:16) (CEV)

During these sessions, we've learned a lot about being a follower of Jesus. Perhaps when you began this series you thought we might present a step-by-step plan on every detail that you need to plant churches. Instead, we hope that you, instead, have become a planter of churches for life. That is why there is so much emphasis on your ability to follow Jesus. There's no way that in a few sessions we could prepare you for every situation that you will face. But as a small group participant, it is important that you become the planter of churches and share that perspective with those you win and disciple among the people where you will work.

We've learned God's picture and plan for our lives, God's purposes and God's practices. We've learned to live and to share. But, God says without His love in our hearts all that we've learned means nothing. The Bible says – *What if I could speak all languages of humans and of angels? If I did not love others, I would be nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. What if I could prophesy and understand all secrets and all knowledge? And what if I had faith that moved mountains? I would be nothing, unless I loved others.*

*What if I gave away all that I owned and let myself be burned alive? I would gain nothing, unless I loved others. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3) (CEV)*

God tells us to be patient, and kind, and humble, and gentle. He orders us to put others first and forgive them for what they do. God commands us to hate evil and love good. There are so many things God wants us to do, so many things to remember, so many ways to fail or forget. It's impossible to know and do everything we should as a follower of Jesus, so God's love works in us to do all of those things. The Bible says – *The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."* (Galatians 5:14) (NIV) and *...love is the fulfillment of the law.* (Romans 13:10b) (NIV) **When I love, I obey ALL OF GOD'S COMMANDS.** The Bible says – *Love is kind and patient, never jealous, boastful, proud, or rude. Love isn't selfish or quick tempered. It doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do. Love rejoices in the truth, but not in evil. Love is always supportive, loyal, hopeful, and trusting. Love never fails!* (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a) (CEV)

Many of the things we've shared will only last for this lifetime. In heaven, we won't need a picture of Jesus because everyone will see Him face to face. We won't need to work to become more like Him, because we'll be made perfect with Him. Everyone will live according to God's ways – there'll be no more selfishness, poverty, sickness, or lack of knowledge. All followers of Jesus we'll know and love the true and living God. But those who leave this life without knowing Jesus will be separated from His love, forever. That's why the time to share is now. The Bible says – *Everyone who prophesies will stop, and unknown languages will no longer be spoken. All that we know will be forgotten. We don't know everything, and our prophecies are not complete. But what is perfect will someday appear, and what isn't perfect will then disappear. When we were children, we thought and reasoned as children do. But when we grew up, we quit our childish ways. Now all we can see of God is like a cloudy picture in a mirror. Later we will see him face to face. We don't know everything, but then we will, just as God completely understands us.* (1 Corinthians 13:8b-12) (CEV)

Love lasts forever, so our best life is spent growing our love. **To GROW MY LOVE, I have to SPEND TIME LOVING OTHERS.** The Bible says – *...if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete...* (1 John 4:12b) (NIV) We love one another when we introduce someone to Jesus and help them become a part of God's family. We love, so we Plant Churches. We love one another when we help someone become like Jesus. We love, so we Equip Servant Leaders. Love gives what we learn and share meaning, makes up for what we don't know and can't do. Love sets our priorities. It keeps us going. It helps us finish well. Everything in this life will pass away, but God and His family and His love will last forever. The Bible says – *For now there are faith, hope, and love. But of these three, the greatest is love.* (1 Corinthians 13:13) (CEV)

We've shared what it means to be a follower of Jesus – to obey and to teach, to follow and to lead, to live and to share. Whatever God has shared with us, we have shared with you. We've shared out of love. Now is the time for you to go out and share God's love with others.

You have everything you need.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What is one impossible thing I believe God may want me/us to do? What is one way I can start to grow my faith to prepare for that challenge?
2. What is one promise God has already fulfilled over the course of these sessions? An answered prayer? A chance to share? The strength to live one of God's commands? What does this teach us about God's character? What does it do for my hope?
3. Who is one person I know that needs to experience God's love? What is one way I could practice sharing God's love this week?

## **PRAY**

*Gather the entire Small group for a CELEBRATION / COMMISSIONING PRAYER.*

*Dear Jesus –*

*We praise You because You are the Creator of all things in heaven and on earth. We praise You as our Creator – the One who perfectly formed our bodies, our minds, and our hearts. We praise You that You love the world so much that You were willing to give Your perfect life for ours. We praise You for sharing Your mission to reach the world with that Good News.*

*Jesus, we thank You that You prepared these hearts to receive Your love that we shared. We thank You that they received Your Word in faith and have accepted Your invitation to live in love with You forever. We thank You that You chose this place to grow Your family and allow us to help You plant a new church. We thank You that You chose these people to not only be Your church, but to be prepared as servant leaders – to become followers of You, Jesus, and leaders of others.*

*We pray that You will give them everything they need to grow and multiply. We ask You to remind them of all that we have lived and shared together and continue to give them the courage and the opportunity to live and share it with others.*

*We pray that Your purposes are lived and shared – worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and mission. We pray that Your practices are lived and shared – helping others develop into reproducing disciples, servant leaders, generous producers, strong healers, and wise teachers. We pray that You will help this new church and these new leaders obey all of Your commands by loving You and others and living and sharing everything they learn of Your ways.*

*We pray that even now You will be preparing the hearts of family and friends, neighbors, co-workers and relatives, the whole community, the whole country, and the whole world. Wherever You choose to send these disciples, Lord, we pray that they will find open minds and open hearts and have the courage to share Your love. Lord, we pray these same things for ourselves.*

*Jesus, we ask for Your pardon for everything that we have failed to remember or been unable to share. We ask for Your Holy Spirit to continue to lead and guide this new church after our time together is complete. We pray that You will protect them and us while we are apart and that You will give us another chance to be together as Your family, soon.*

*Jesus we pray that You will give them a great faith – one that allows them to accomplish the impossible. We pray that You give them an enduring hope – one that keeps them going in trouble and in triumph. And, we pray, Jesus, that this church and these servant-leaders have hearts overflowing with Your love – a love that is changing the world.*



*We pray all of these things because we believe You are God and we know that You hear and answer our prayers.*

*We pray in Your name, Jesus, the Name that is above all names. Amen.*

#### **CELEBRATION / COMMISSIONING SERVICE**

*The Small group needs to send out members to start other new small groups composed of new disciples. Those who are doing such ministry need to be recognized and supported through the prayers and encouragement of the church to which they belong. A time of dedication such as this is an incredibly moving worship experience. Testimonies can be shared, scripture read, and descriptions of the work can be shared. The needs of those preparing for the work can be shared, if appropriate. Or the commissioning can be done as the church at Antioch did in Acts 13:1-3, when they commissioned Saul and Barnabas for their first missionary journey. Be sure to make it a celebration and send them out gladly.*

#### **CLOSING**

1. **APPLY** the lesson for each individual. Each person should share with the group a concrete way they can put the lesson to work in their own life. They should also name at least one other person with whom they can share what they have learned. This could be another disciple or a non-Christian.
2. **FELLOWSHIP** with time for tea or snacks.

## **When You Meet Together**

1. Pray to thank the Lord for His presence and ask for His guidance.
2. Possibly share a meal together and simply visit together.
3. If it is the first time for one or more individuals to attend, give them an opportunity to share where they are in their spiritual journey.
4. Possibly sing in worship.
5. Spend time checking up with one another on the application of the previous Bible study and whether each person was able to pass on insights to someone outside the group (either a fellow disciple or an unbeliever).
  - a. If one or more individuals failed to implement what was studied or to pass it on to someone else, repeat the previous content. Determine if the failure was due to lack of understanding, lack of opportunity, or intentional. If it was intentional, address it as a spiritual issue.
  - b. If everyone practiced and passed on what was covered, rejoice together and spend some time sharing testimonies about the experience.
6. Spend time examining Scripture together. Use a passage of Scripture and read a verse or two at a time and discuss them. Have each person consider if the verse raises a question for them (represented by a question mark), sheds light on another passage or something in their own life (represented by a candlestick) or strikes them as something that requires action on their part or pierces their heart (represented by an arrow). After reading a verse or two, the reader can ask, "Does anyone have a question mark, candle or arrow from these verses?" Discussion then follows. After all the issues have been pursued, you can continue to the next verse(s). This can even be used as an evangelistic Bible study.
7. Spend time determining what application point is suitable for each individual and seeing if they have an idea about who they would like to share one or more of the points with before the group meets again. Consider using 2 Tim. 3:16-17 as an outline for application points: Is there something to learn or to correct in one's understanding? Is there something to begin doing or to stop or refrain from doing?
8. Spend some time sharing prayer requests, pausing to pray after each request, giving anyone who feels led a time to pray. Remember to pray for lost acquaintances, leaders, your community, world situations or unreached people groups, etc. in addition to personal needs of members or relatives.
9. Spend some more time in conversation, just enjoying each other's company!