

20 / The Church

MEMORY VERSES: [1 Corinthians 12:12-13](#)

BIBLE STUDY: [1 Corinthians 12:12-27](#)

Reading: A Living Organism

Core Truth

How does Jesus continue to make himself known?

Jesus continues to live out his life on earth through his corporate body, the church. The "body of Christ" is not just a figure of speech but conveys the reality that Christ lives through his people. Together God's people extend the life of Jesus to the world.

1. Identify key words or phrases in the question and answer above, and state their meaning in your own words.
2. Restate the core truth in your own words.
3. What questions or issues does the core truth raise for you?

Memory Verse Study Guide

1. *Putting it in context:* Examine [1 Corinthians 12:1-11](#). What is the subject matter that serves as the backdrop to the church as the body of Christ, and why is this an appropriate introduction?
2. The memory verses are [1 Corinthians 12:12-13](#). Copy these verses verbatim.
3. Paul surprisingly concludes [verse 12](#) with the phrase "so it is with Christ." What does this tell us about the relationship between Christ and his body, the church?
4. What are the two key points that Paul is making about the nature of a body in [verse 12](#)?
5. What is the means of entrance to the body of Christ?
6. What is Paul implying with the phrase "whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free"?

7. How have these verses spoken to you this week?



Inductive Bible Study Guide

Here Paul plays with the image of the church as the body of Christ. He describes body parts having a conversation with each other.

1. Read [1 Corinthians 12:12-27](#). How is the human body an appropriate comparison to the church?
2. In what terms is the body's diversity described?
3. What two harmful attitudes undermine the body's proper functioning (see [1 Corinthians 12:15, 16, 21](#))?

How do you see these in yourself?

in the church?

4. Paul seems to be saying that celebrating our diversity in Christ leads to unity. Why might this be?
5. Whom do you suppose Paul had in mind when referring to the "weaker" and "less honorable" in [verses 22-26](#)?

To what rhythm of relationship is Paul calling us?

6. What is the balance that we need to strike, according to [verse 27](#)?
7. What questions do you have about this passage?
8. What verse or verses have particularly impacted you? Rewrite key verses in your own words.



Reading: A Living Organism

The body of Christ is the fundamental biblical image for the church. In all, ninety-six word pictures have been identified in the New Testament that convey various aspects and angles of the place of the church in God's plan, but the one that dominates the New Testament and truly defines who we are is the image of the body of Christ. By this we understand the church to be a living organism.

What Is Christ's Relationship to the Church?

The apostle Paul ingeniously selected the image of the human body to convey the organic manner in which the church is to function. We can look at the human body from two standpoints. First, we see the body as a functional whole with all its part under the central coordination of the head. But on closer examination we notice that the whole is made up of diverse parts, each with a distinctive, unique function. The hands are for grasping, the eyes for seeing, the feet for walking and so on. The body is the prototype of unity in diversity.

Paul uses the human body analogy to convey Christ's relationship to the church in an arresting and even shocking fashion. Note the startling conclusion to [1 Corinthians 12:12](#): "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ." Is this the way we expect the verse to conclude? We expect Paul to write: "So it is with the church." In fact we tend to read right over Paul's actual words and supply the previous phrase. Paul must mean that the church is like a human body made up of diverse parts and coordinated under its head. But Paul is saying far more than that. For Paul "the body of Christ" is not just a metaphor or a helpful word picture, but it also points to the reality that Jesus dwells among his people and gives his life to them.

In other words the church is not a human organization that has contracted by common consent to keep alive the memory of a great historical figure. On the contrary, the church is a divine organism mystically fused to the living and reigning Christ, who continues to reveal himself in his people. Ray Stedman put it this way, "The life of Jesus is still being manifest among people, but now no longer through an individual physical body, limited to one place on earth, but through a complex, corporate body called the church."

Paul understood the church as a organism from the moment of his initial encounter with Christ. Saul, the firebrand and self-righteous protector of the Hebrew law, was on his way to Damascus, having received authority to arrest and bring Christians to Jerusalem, but his plans were dramatically altered. A blinding light filled the sky and engulfed his field of vision. Thrown to the ground, he heard a voice, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul replied, "Who are you, Lord?" The heavenly voice responded, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" ([Acts 9:4-6](#)). But wait! Saul was not persecuting Jesus but those who claimed to be his followers.

What does this incident tell us about the relationship between Jesus and his followers? Jesus indwells them. If you touch a Christian, you have touched Christ. Christians are a sacramental people. A sacrament is a means of grace, a symbol that mysteriously bears the presence of Christ and through which believers encounter Christ.

Thomas Oden summarizes Christ's relationship to the church.

Christianity is distinctive as a religious faith in that it understands itself to be living as a continuing community through the living Christ.... Its uniqueness lies in its particular relationship with its founder.... It is the resurrected presence of the living Lord that continues to be the sole basis of the present reality of the church. Jesus is not merely the one who founded the community and left it, but rather the one who is present to the community now and in each historical period as the vital essence of the church.

What Is the Church's Relationship to Christ?

The church is absolutely dependent on its head, Jesus Christ. Max Thurian captures both Christ's relationship to the church and our relationship to Christ: "Jesus does nothing independently of the church nor can the church do anything independently of Christ." The nature of the church's relationship to Christ is implicit in the phrase that Jesus is "head over everything for the church" ([Ephesians 1:22](#)).

The word *head* has two meanings in the Bible: "life source" and "ultimate authority." In our society *head* usually connotes authority, the one in charge, but in the original Greek *head* could equally mean "source" or "origin." The source of a river is called the headwaters. When you think of head as the life source, then Paul's use of head in [Ephesians 4:15](#) and [16](#) makes sense. "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

Whoever heard of a body growing into its head? Paul has exhorted the Ephesians to "become mature," to attain "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" and to "no longer be infants." Paul reminded the Ephesians that the only way to become spiritual adults is to recognize their absolute reliance on Jesus to supply their life and that his likeness is the goal toward which they are growing. So Jesus is the head into whom and from whom we grow.

Second, for Jesus to be head means that the church is under his direct authority. The church's relationship to Christ means accepting obediently and fulfilling faithfully the particular role that God has assigned to each of us through the Holy Spirit. The most basic confession of the church is "Jesus is Lord" ([1 Corinthians 12:3](#)), but this is far more than reciting a creed. Paul intends this truth to be a functional, operational reality.

Jesus as head of the church means that he arranges life in the body. Each member is directly connected to the head and therefore is able to receive signals from the head. Paul Stevens says this well,

There is a direct and living connection between the Head and every member of the body.... No church leader in the New Testament is ever called the head of a local body. That title is reserved for Jesus. The head does not tell the hand to tell the foot what to do. The head is directly connected to the foot. Therefore people find their ministries not by being directed by the leaders but by being motivated and equipped... by the Head himself.

The church functions as an organism when those who make up the body of Christ obediently seek to fulfill the role God has assigned to them. We return to the analogy of the human body to understand how the church can function as a living organism. The human body functions beautifully when each part operates according to its design. The central command post, the head, sends forth the signals through the nervous system, which activates the body parts. These body parts have no will of their own. The hands and feet, for example, function only in response to the head. If the hand could act independently of the head, there would be chaos in the body. When people in the body takes responsibility before the Head to know and exercise their assigned functions, the church becomes a living organism.

What Is Our Relationship to Each Other?

We need each other. According to Paul's body image, all the parts are interdependent and necessary for the health of the whole. Robert Banks says, "God has so designed things that the involvement of every person with his special contribution is necessary for the proper functioning of the community." The underlying message of [1 Corinthians 12](#) is that everyone is valuable. God in his wisdom designed us not as well-rounded, multitalented, thoroughly complete and independent people. He made it so that we need each other and that each of us brings something of value. We are not self-sufficient. As one person put it, "We don't have it all together, but together we have it all."

When we forget this, the body ceases to function according to its design. Paul identifies two devaluing attitudes that undercut the proper functioning of the body.

First, Paul mentions the attitude of *inferiority*, or low self-esteem, as detrimental to a healthy body. To capture this Paul personifies the body parts and puts them in conversation with each other. The extremities speak first: "If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not make it any less a part of the body." Then the senses compete with each other: "If the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body" ([1 Cor 12:15-16](#) NRSV).

The Corinthians suffered from the same malady we do today. They exalted some gifts higher than others. They placed gradations of value on gifts. The church today is sick in part because we have so exalted preaching that no other gift can match that level of importance. Hear this statement from Martin Luther as the legacy of the importance of the preacher in the body of Christ: "A Christian preacher is a minister of God who is set apart, yea, he is an angel of God, a very bishop sent by God, a savior of many people, a king and a prince in the Kingdom of Christ and among the people of God, a teacher, a light of the world. There is nothing more precious or nobler on earth and in this life than a true, faithful parson or preacher."

As soon as a hierarchy of gifts in the body is set up, two things happen:

We compare our gifts to others and declare ourselves deficient. We play the "if only" game: if only I could be like so-and-so, then I would have significance and value. When we secretly envy the gifts of others, we denigrate ourselves and the unique design God has placed in us. Instead the Lord would have us believe what Gordon Cosby writes:

Christ makes each of us something unlike any other creation fashioned by God—something wonderful, exciting, unique; something specifically needed in the total body of Christ. This uniqueness, this very self that is so hard to describe, this charismatic person is the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the primary gift we bring to the body, and without it the body is immeasurably impoverished.

We copy those we admire. Instead of being ourselves we mimic others and cease to be the unique creation we were made to be. This is illustrated through a story from Native American lore. An Indian brave found an egg that had been laid by an eagle. Unable to return the egg to the eagle's nest, he put the egg in the nest of a prairie chicken. In due time the little eaglet was hatched alongside the prairie chickens. This little eagle, thinking it was a prairie chicken, did what prairie chickens do: scratched the dirt for seeds and insects to eat, clucked and cackled, flew only a few feet off of the ground.

One day the eagle saw a magnificent bird flying overhead, floating with graceful majesty on the powerful currents. "What a beautiful bird," he said to his fellow prairie chickens. "What is it?" "That's an eagle," they replied, "the chief of the birds. But don't give it a second thought. You could never be like him." Not knowing he was an eagle, he imitated the prairie chickens and never soared to the heights he could have.

Copying is a sin against ourselves and against God. It was the Lord who designed us just the way we are so that we are needed in the body of Christ. "All these [gifts] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines" ([1 Corinthians 12:11](#)). To copy someone else is to be a pale imitation of yourself and to miss seeing the unique way God has designed you. You are needed as you are.

The second disruptive attitude is *devaluing other members of the body by superiority*. In [verse 21](#) Paul sees the upper parts of the body looking down on the lower: eye over hand, head over feet. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'" ([1 Corinthians 12:21](#)).

Independence and self-reliance are enemies of community. Without vulnerability and an awareness of need there is no basis for community. Unfortunately it is often in the church that we find the façade of having it all together. Keith Miller writes of the average church, "Our churches are filled with people who outwardly look contented and at peace but inwardly are crying out for someone to love them... just as they are—confused, frustrated, often frightened, guilty, and often unable to communicate even within their own families. But the other people in the church look so happy and contented that one seldom has the courage to admit his own deep needs before such a self-sufficient group as the average church meeting appears to be." Vulnerability is a gift to the community that says, "I need you. I welcome you into my life. I want you to be a part of me."

Paul is telling us to value the gifts of one another. The actress Celeste Holm spoke for us all when she said, "We live by encouragement and we die without it; slowly, sadly, angrily." Yet we so often devalue others in the body because they don't think as we do or have the personal tastes we do. Practice this personal exercise: Picture those in the body toward whom your attitude is "I

have no need of you." As an act of repentance place these people before God and say, *I need you. I benefit because of you. You have gifts and a perspective that I don't have.*

Instead of inferiority or superiority, we need an attitude of interreliance. Interreliance means you are incomplete without me and I am incomplete without you. You need me and I need you. "We don't have it all together, but together we have it all." Or to use Paul's summary, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" ([1 Corinthians 12:27](#)).

Reading Study Guide

1. According to [1 Corinthians 12:12](#), what is the surprising reality conveyed in the phrase "so it is with Christ"?

What is Christ's relationship with the church?

2. The church's relationship to Christ is captured by the image of "life source" and "authority." Put in your own words what you understand the relationship to be.
life source

authority

3. How does the confession "Jesus is Lord" become an operational reality in the church?
4. Do a personal inventory. How have you devalued yourself through comparison or copying?
5. The attitude of superiority expresses itself by not valuing the contributions of others. Do an inventory of those in the body of Christ whom you discount, then thank God for them as people you need in your life to be complete.
6. What questions do you have about this reading?
7. Does the reading convict, challenge or comfort you? Why?

Going Deeper

Ogden, Greg. *The New Reformation: Returning the Ministry to the People of God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.

Action Page

Inviting Others to Join Us

What criteria should we use while making the decision to invite others to join us on the next leg of this discipleship journey? We should look for the same qualities in people that Jesus looked for in those he called to be among the original twelve.

Jesus did not seem to be in a hurry to issue his invitation. On the eve of his selection of the twelve, Jesus spent the night in prayer ([Luke 6:12-16](#)). Jesus knew that the entire future of his work rested upon the quality of those he chose. As Jesus was praying, what qualities was he seeking in those he chose?

Loyalty

Jesus made Peter a successful fisherman and then called him to leave his big catch to follow him ([Luke 5:1-11](#)). All Jesus had to say to the twelve was, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" ([Mark 1:17](#)), and they left their trade, families and familiar surroundings to be a part of the troupe. The apostles were appointed to their position only after they demonstrated their willingness to be sold out to him.

A disciple responds to the gracious call of Jesus Christ to follow him as Lord. John the Baptist said of Jesus, "He must increase but I must decrease" ([John 3:30](#) NRSV). We are seeking those who demonstrate a desire to place Jesus above all else in their lives. This is evidenced by a willingness to change in character and lifestyle, an openness to self-examination and a hunger to place themselves at Jesus' disposal in order to discover how their lives can count for him.

Teachability

Jesus chose the disciples for what they would become, not for what they were at the moment of summons. From a worldly standpoint the disciples did not have much to commend themselves. They were not influential people in key positions who could get the word to the "right" people. They did not have any authority, so they could not throw their weight around. None belonged to the Levitical priesthood, nor were they in high positions in the synagogue. They did not have any academic degrees nor worldly credentials that would make them credible to the populace. None had recognizable names worth printing on a letterhead. In fact, in the book of Acts they were described by the religious leaders as "unschooled, common men" ([Acts 4:13](#)).

We must therefore be careful not to be molded by a worldly agenda when it comes to forming our list of candidates. Neither natural leadership ability nor outgoing personality, neither a respected vocation nor advanced academic degrees, neither influential positions nor public notoriety were the criteria that Jesus used. Instead look for a hunger to know the Lord and a willingness to pay whatever price is necessary to become God's person.

In terms of character, the disciples left much to be desired. James and John were unpredictably impulsive, ready to call down fire from heaven on the first unbelieving town. They were

temperamental. They fought among themselves and jealously jockeyed for positions of greatness ([Mark 10:35-41](#)). They reflected the prejudice of their day, seeing women as second-class citizens ([John 4:27](#)). But Jesus noticed in them what they could become over a long period of investment. And these men placed themselves as clay in the potter's hand.

Selecting Future Discipling Partners

As you are looking toward the completion of your discipleship journey with your current partners, it is time to begin praying about who will join you on the next leg. The topic of "selecting future partners" is placed here so that you can assist one another. Allow the following questions to guide your process.

1. How are you feeling about making an investment in the next generation? Explain.
2. Put in your own words the qualities that Jesus was looking for in those whom he selected to be his disciples.
3. How can these criteria guide you in your selection?
4. The discipling dynamic is most effective when you sense a personal call or leading to give yourself to those whom the Lord especially places on your heart. Over the next few weeks as you pray, begin to record names of people who come to mind.

¹ Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ, Expanded Edition.

21 / Ministry Gifts

MEMORY VERSE: [1 Corinthians 12:7](#)

BIBLE STUDY: [1 Corinthians 12:1-11](#), [27-31](#); [Romans 12:3-8](#); [Ephesians 4:11-12](#); [1 Peter 4:10-11](#)

Reading: *You Are Gifted!*

Core Truth

How can we know what our part is in the body of Christ?

The Holy Spirit graciously gives ministry abilities, "spiritual gifts," so that every Christian can make a valued contribution to the health of the whole body. The church actually operates as the body of Christ when each person seeks to know and function in accord with their role assigned by God.

1. Identify key words or phrases in the question and answer above, and state their meaning in your own words.
2. Restate the core truth in your own words.
3. What questions or issues does the core truth raise for you?

Memory Verse Study Guide

[First Corinthians 12](#) is the classic New Testament passage on the subject of spiritual gifts and the church as the body of Christ. Paul begins this chapter by introducing his topic in the same pattern that he has throughout the book: "Now about spiritual gifts" ([v. 1](#)).

1. *Putting it in context:* What misunderstanding about what it means to be spiritual is Paul addressing in [1 Corinthians 12:1-3](#)?
2. The memory verse is [1 Corinthians 12:7](#). Copy the verse verbatim.
3. What is the extent of the distribution of spiritual gifts in the body?
4. What does the word *manifestation* tell us about spiritual gifts?
5. What is the purpose of spiritual gifts?

6. How has this verse spoken to you this week?



Inductive Bible Study Guide

Four New Testament passages discuss spiritual gifts for ministry. Some teachers look to the seven gifts identified in [Romans 12:6-8](#) as the "motivational" gifts. One of these seven motivations is seen as dominant for every believer. The gifts listed in [1 Corinthians 12](#) are then "manifestations" of these motivations, while the four gifts associated with equipping are "offices." I view the gifts that Paul lists as illustrative of the variety of ways that the Holy Spirit works through us. The four categories for the gifts are for descriptive purposes only, as a way to see the variety.

1. Read [1 Corinthians 12:1-11](#), [27-31](#); [Romans 12:3-8](#); [Ephesians 4:11-12](#); [1 Peter 4:10-11](#). Paul lists four synonyms for gifts. Write down your own definitions of these terms.

gifts ([1 Corinthians 12:4](#))

service ([1 Corinthians 12:5](#))

working ([1 Corinthians 12:6](#))

function ([Romans 12:4](#))

2. After reviewing these synonyms, write your own definition of a spiritual gift.
3. Identify the gifts that are listed in the passages and place them in one of the following categories. Under each gift write your own choice for a synonym.

support ([Ephesians 4:11](#)) speaking (use the tongue) sign service

4. Paul intertwines what we might humanly distinguish as supernatural (for example, healing) and natural (for example, administration) gifts. What does this teach us?

5. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Paul intended to give us an exhaustive or complete list of all the spiritual gifts. Explain.
6. What questions do these passages raise for you?
7. What verse or verses have particularly impacted you? Rewrite key verses in your own words.



Reading: You Are Gifted!

My first ministry position with college students ended on a high. The ministry in Pittsburgh had grown to three hundred students on Wednesday nights, a core of forty small-group leaders and weekly reports of students coming to Christ. From that position I blew like a whirlwind into a sleepy, declining church with the attitude "I can get this place up and humming." As I look back on my late twenties, my naive conviction was that the context in which one serves doesn't matter, because God can use a person anywhere. To the contrary, I found that context mattered a great deal. During that seven-year pastorate I felt like an eight-cylinder car running on two cylinders. The setting allowed for only a small range of my gifts to be used. I was constricted and lost motivation.

Sometimes we lose motivation because we don't feel competent to do the job or fulfill the role. The position calls for skills that are not natural to us, or we are asked to give our energy to something we don't care about. When my daughter was little, she had a toy sphere into which were cut various geometric shapes. Her objective was to slide a round cylinder through the circle on the sphere. But invariably I would find the cylinder wedged tightly in the square-shaped opening. Round pegs in square holes: they just don't fit. When this occurs we find our energy and motivation dissipating.

The body of Christ is designed in such a way that each of us has a valued role particularly suited for us, but the problem is that we don't always know what it is. It's no wonder that Paul begins his teaching on spiritual gifts in this manner: "Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant" ([1 Corinthians 12:1](#)). One of the reasons we get into positions for which we are not suited is that we are ignorant of our abilities.

Spiritual Gifts Explained

What is meant by *spiritual gifts*? In [1 Corinthians 12:4-7](#) Paul establishes a vocabulary for spiritual gifts that gives us an insight into what he means by this term. Before we examine Paul's glossary for spiritual gifts, we need to remove the cultural debris surrounding this phrase. The words *gifted* or *gift* are used in a different way in the Scriptures than they are in everyday speech. A gifted person is one who excels in a particular field. Carl Lewis is a gifted track star because he can run faster and jump farther than any other human being. A gifted student is one with above-average intelligence. We hear people say someone has a gift for fixing cars or making

cherry pies, or he or she has the gift of gab. The way we use *gifted* or *gift* generally falls into the category of natural talents that God, out of his bounty, gives to Christians and non-Christians alike; whereas spiritual gifts are possessed by Christians, with the purpose of building and strengthening fellow Christians and extending the influence of the church to an unbelieving world. Spiritual gifts are only for those indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Let's examine the synonyms used in our passage to build a picture of what we mean by spiritual gifts.

There are different kinds of *gifts*, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of *service*, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of *working*, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the *manifestation* of the Spirit is given for the common good. ([1 Corinthians 12:4-7](#), emphasis added)

Each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same *function*. ([Romans 12:4](#))

The first thing we notice is a repeated word, *different*, which serves as the common characteristic of spiritual gifts. Variety is an expression of the one God who is three persons. The source of the gifts in [verse 4](#) is the Spirit, in [verse 5](#) the Lord Jesus, and in [verse 6](#) God the Father. Paul is saying that the variety of motivations in the church is an expression of the diversity within the Godhead. As our God is one being who is three persons, so the church is like the God it worships.

Different means distribution, diversity, allotment, apportionment. The Spirit is in charge of the distribution system. The emphasis is that God is the distributor of the gifts, and we are the receivers.

Now let's look at Paul's words for *gifts*.

1. "There are different kinds of *gifts*" ([v. 4](#), emphasis added). The Greek word here is a compound word meaning "grace-gift." Not only are we saved solely by grace, but given to us with our salvation package is a capacity and motivation to serve others in a way that is particular to us.

Deep within us is a basic need. We all have a desire to make a contribution, to make a difference, to be valued because we have left a positive imprint on others. The gifts are our observable contribution to the health of the body of Christ.

2. "There are different kinds of *service*" ([v. 5](#), emphasis added). The word *service* captures the spirit in which our gifts are offered to the body of Christ. Paul makes it clear that the purpose of the gifts is not to attract attention to ourselves but to build up the community. In [verse 7](#) Paul says that the gifts are "for the common good." As much as the gifts help us know our value, their purpose is to serve others.

In saying this Paul was addressing a problem in Corinth that can be found in any age. When the Corinthians came together as a group, the flashy gifts of speaking in tongues and healing took center stage. People were using the community as a platform for show-and-tell. Yet the nature of gifts is that God distributes them, but it is up to us to use them in the right spirit. Gifts can be and are abused when people turn them into a means of self-aggrandizement.

Service also has to do with the sphere in which your gifts are used. Do you function best in a large group, small group or one-on-one? The gift of teaching can be exercised in an auditorium, classroom, living room or face to face. To whom are you drawn in ministry: children, the elderly, women, men? Your call is where the compassion of Christ in you intersects with a need in the world. It is at that point of intersection that we find why God has made us.

3. "There are different kinds of *working*" ([v. 6](#), emphasis added). The word *working* comes from a Greek word whose root means "energy." Other translations give the idea of different kinds of "effects" or "different kinds of impacts." Each gift leaves its own imprint. If you have the gift of teaching, people should be transformed by the truth of the Word. If you have the gift of evangelism, people should be coming to know Christ. If you have the gift of mercy, then the sick and hurting should be comforted.

Using our gifts is like drinking from the well of refreshing waters of God's Spirit. Somewhere along the way, service got a bum rap. Many have been taught that true service must be sacrificial drudgery. Service is doing what we don't want to do. Ray Stedman has written, "Somewhere this idea found deep entrenchment in Christian circles that doing what God wants you to do is always unpleasant; that Christians must make choices between doing what they want to do and being happy, and doing what God wants them to do and being miserable." But when we operate within our giftedness, we are being carried along in a current of love that says, "You were made for this."

4. "Just as each of us has one body with many members,... these members do not all have the same *function*" ([Romans 12:4](#), emphasis added). From the word *function* we derive the English word "practice." In other places in Scripture the word is translated "good deeds," but here it refers to our way of acting, our particular way of doing things that feels comfortable to us. Members of the body can say, "I am a teacher, a prophet, an administrator, a server," because these roles describe who we are inside.

Putting this all together, spiritual gifts can be defined as follows: spiritual gifts are our ministry capacity or abilities given by the Spirit that express our unique motivation for building up the body of Christ.

What is our responsibility? To discover and use the gifts that God has given to us. The Lord is going to ask us to give an account one day for the stewardship and multiplication of the gifts we have been given. In the parable of the talents the Lord says that the one who was given five talents went out and multiplied them into five more. To this servant the Lord said, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" To the one who buried his talent the Lord said, "You wicked, lazy servant!" (see [Matthew 25:14-30](#)). It is not an easy process to unearth our gifts. It is a lifelong quest.

Burying Our Gifts

The primary reason we bury our gifts is fear. This fear comes in a number of forms.

Fear of failure or taking risk. Paul writes to Timothy, who was shrinking from the exercise of his gift of evangelism: "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands" ([2 Timothy 1:6](#)). Timothy's gift was dormant. When our gifts are not used, they atrophy like unused parts of the body. Why did Timothy not use his gift? He was afraid of taking the risk for fear of what might happen. Paul continues, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" ([v. 7](#)). The fear that locks you up inside yourself does not come from God. The spirit of God thrusts us out into new possibilities.

Fear of confronting pain. Some of us are frustrated because we seem not to know what our gifts are. When we try to get an accurate mirror image of ourselves, the reflection is distorted. For many people the reason for the distortion is that some painful past experience left a spiritual wound and shut off part of our inner world. There is a desire to embrace God's best, but there is an inner wall we can't seem to break through. Only when we get at the root of the problem will we break through what is holding us back.

Fear of commitment. Sometimes we claim ignorance of our gifts because it is safer. We know intuitively that to name our gifts makes us responsible for using them. Denying that we know what our gifts are gives us a reason not to use them, but as soon as we identify our gifts, we are accountable. Elizabeth O'Connor has written, "I would rather be committed to God in the abstract than be committed to him at the point of my gifts." We prefer life as a smorgasbord, where we can sample here and taste there. As soon as we name our gifts we have narrowed our choices. We have to give up straddling the fence and keeping our options open.

Those who have broken through the fear of failure, the fear of confronting personal pain and the fear of commitment have stepped into liberated joy. The energized and fulfilled people have discerned their ministry capacity and are applying themselves to a need they care about.

There is a story about Michelangelo pushing a huge piece of rock down a street. A curious neighbor sitting lazily on the porch of his house called to him. "Hey, Mike, why are you laboring so over an old piece of stone?" Michelangelo reportedly answered, "Because there is an angel in that rock that wants to come out."

You are invited to break free and join the treasure hunt. What discoveries await you!

Spiritual Gifts Categorized

Here is a descriptive way of categorizing the spiritual gifts listed in [1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-31](#); [Romans 12:6-8](#); [Ephesians 4:11-12](#) and [1 Peter 4:9-11](#). Picture them in four groups, as in the table below.

Paul's list of gifts are descriptive, not definitive. He was not giving an exhaustive list. His lists seem to have little concern for uniformity of terminology. The biblical lists give us a good starting point for identifying the shape that God's grace takes.

Spiritual Gifts Categories			
Support	Speaking	Signs	Service
apostle	teaching (Rom 12:7 ; 1 Cor 12:28)	healing (1 Cor 12:9)	faith (1 Cor 12:9)
prophet	encouragement (Rom 12:8)	miracles (1 Cor 12:10)	helps (1 Cor 12:28)
evangelist	wisdom (1 Cor 12:8)	tongues (1 Cor 12:10)	administration (1 Cor 12:28)
pastor-teacher (Eph 4:11)	knowledge (1 Cor 12:8)	interpretation of tongues (1 Cor 12:10)	service (Rom 12:7)
			giving (Rom 12:8)
			leadership (Rom 12:8)
			mercy (Rom 12:8)
			hospitality (1 Pet 4:9)
			distinguishing between spirits (1 Cor 12:10)

Support Gifts

Those who have support gifts have the responsibility to prepare the rest of the members of the body in the exercise of their ministry gifts ([Ephesians 4:11-13](#)). The one thing that apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers have in common is the use of the Word as their tool. Ray Stedman uses a life-support analogy for each of the support gifts to define their role in the health of the body. Apostles are the skeletal structure, for it is revelatory truth that serves as the body's frame; prophets are analogous to the nervous system, for messages are sent from the head through the nerves to activate the body parts; evangelists are like the digestive system that takes in nutrients, breaks them down and sends energy to keep the body alive; and pastor-teachers are like the circulatory system that distributes the food of the Word and cleans out the waste.

Apostle (missionary). One who exerts influence or authority over others to establish new local churches or to enhance the spread of Christianity into new areas. This gift is especially needed for foundational stages.

Prophet. One who discerns and expresses truth from God in order to exhort, edify and comfort the church or to convince nonbelievers of the truth.

Evangelist. One with a passion to tell the overwhelming grace of God and the overpowering love of a heavenly Father either individually or publicly so that people take the initial steps in Christian discipleship.

Pastor-teacher. One who has a particular concern for the long-term spiritual welfare of a flock and who teaches the Word of God as the primary means to feed, nurture and shepherd.

Speaking Gifts

The distinguishing characteristics of the speaking gifts is not at all profound. The primary part of the body used for those with speaking gifts is the tongue. The support gifts use the tongue as well, but they are united by their equipping role within the body and therefore are worthy of a separate descriptive category. The book of James reminds us that there must be careful governance on the tongue because of its capacity for abuse ([James 3](#)).

Teaching. The ability to acquire, organize and communicate God's truth effectively so that there is life transformation in Christ.

Encouragement. The capacity to motivate individuals or a group through comfort, challenge, exhortation or rebuke.

Wisdom. The capacity to apply insight from the Holy Spirit to specific needs.

Knowledge. Depending on your tradition, there are two very different definitions: *scholarship*—the capacity to research, systematize and accumulate facts to help upbuild the body; and *revelation*—the capacity to receive knowledge directly from God that was not passed on through human channels.

Sign Gifts

For two reasons it may appear unfortunate, at first glance, to separate the sign gifts into their own category. First, it may appear that these gifts are more "supernatural" than other gifts, like administration. Yet what is impressive in Paul's writing is that he commingles what we may consider the miraculous and nonmiraculous. This means that in his mind all the gifts of the Spirit, no matter how ordinary, function under the supernatural empowerment of the Spirit.

Secondly, by simply listing these gifts we are drawing attention to the fact that some schools of thought do not consider these gifts valid for today. This author has included them as normative for today for the following reasons: (1) Paul intersperses the natural and supernatural, thus erasing our categories. (2) Nowhere in the New Testament does it say that these gifts will cease once the apostolic era has ended. (3) The Holy Spirit continues the direct presence of Jesus in and through his people in accord with Jesus' promise of "greater things than these [shall you do], because I am going to the Father" ([John 14:12](#)).

Miracles. The ability to perform supernatural acts of God that interrupt the natural laws of the universe in a way that brings glory to God and authenticates the authority of the servant of God.

Healing. The ability to intervene in a supernatural way through faith as an instrument of God for the curing of physical, emotional or spiritual illness.

Tongues and interpretation. The ability to supernaturally speak in a human or angelic language given for the purpose of extolling God or interceding for something for which you do not know how to pray.

Service Gifts

This final category is somewhat of a catchall and is a reminder to us of the spirit in which these gifts should be offered to the body. With the exception of leadership and administration, these gifts might be the least noticed. Those who exercise these gifts tend to have the lowest need for recognition. Yet their quiet faithfulness is the glue that holds the body together. They are the sinews and ligaments that make for fluid motion in the body.

Service. The ability to perform any task or responsibility with joy, benefiting others and meeting practical or material needs.

Helps. The ability to serve by aiding someone in their ministry, by performing duties that release another to pursue their main call.

Mercy. The ability to work joyfully with those whom the majority ignores.

Giver. The ability to give material goods or resources with joy, delighting in the benefit it will be to the recipient *Hospitality.* The ability to entertain guests in your home, with joy and affection.

Leadership faith. The ability to discern clearly God's dreams for a particular body of believers and to empower them to fulfill these dreams.

Administration. The ability to organize a group of people to accomplish goals.

Discernment (NRSV). The ability to judge or determine whether forces acting on a person are from God, Satan or the human spirit.

Steps in Spiritual Gift Discovery

There is no clear process of how to discover your spiritual gifts. To get a clear picture of yourself, you need to come at the discovery process from a number of angles.

Explore the possibilities. Be aware of the biblical definition of the different gifts so you can compare your behavior and motivation with their characteristics.

Discern your motivation. When you operate in accord with your gifts, you should feel that you are doing what you have been specifically designed by God to do, which will lead to inner satisfaction and fulfillment.

Seek feedback from the body. Those who know you best and have observed you are the best candidates for giving you their evaluation of your giftedness. Spiritual gifts have an effect on others and builds them up. Affirm others by sharing how their gifts have strengthened your walk in Christ.

Test the options. Often spiritual gift discovery means taking risks, trying new things. Face the fear that would bind you and try something that stretches you beyond where you have been before. Evaluate past areas of service and attempt to determine which were fulfilling and which were unsatisfactory.

Explore critical feelings. A clue to your giftedness may be indicated by what you criticize in others. Often there is an inner voice that says, "I can do that better than they can." This could be an indication of giftedness because you have identified something in another that you feel capable of doing yourself. It could also mean that you simply have a critical spirit and are in need of repentance.

Reading Study Guide

For the purpose of discipleship we will focus on steps one, two and three in the discovery process. Complete the following:

1. Fill out the Subjective Inventory of Gifts, and after reviewing your answers prayerfully make an estimation of what you believe your gift mix to be. A part of the group exercise can be sharing the insights received and patterns discovered from the subjective inventory.
2. Follow the directions under the heading "Affirming Our Spiritual Gifts."

Subjective Inventory of Gifts

On a piece of paper, complete the following statements as quickly as possible with your first impression.

1. In my work or church ministry I find myself most fulfilled when...
2. Others have told me I am most helpful when...
3. I am often asked to... (e.g., teach or clarify a difficult concept)
4. As a Christian, I most often picture myself as... (e.g., a coach)
5. I believe God has given me the responsibility of _____ in my congregation.
6. My biggest concern for this church is...
7. If I could be assured of not failing in ministry I would...

After reviewing my answers I think I have the gifts of... (list as many as you like)

Affirming Our Spiritual Gifts

1. List the names of the people in your group and next to them write down as many spiritual gifts as you have experienced through them.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
2. Choose a group member. Focus on that person and bombard him or her with the gifts you have identified on your chart. After everyone is finished, go to the next person. There should be no discussion at this point.
Gifts others have identified

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

The three gifts identified from the subjective inventory:

- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
3. Go around the group again and have each person react to the relationship between the gifts identified by the group and those discovered through the subjective evaluation.
 - . Do they coincide? What can you accept? What can't you relate to?
 - a. What new insights have you received?
 - b. Affirm what you see in each other and clarify the way you see the gifts functioning in a person's life.

Going Deeper

Bugbee, Bruce. *What You Do Best in the Body of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005. This is a helpful workbook that takes you through exercises to help you discover your gifts; it includes a temperament profile so that the ministry you choose will be consistent with the person God has designed.

2

² Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ, Expanded Edition.

22 / Spiritual Warfare

MEMORY VERSES: [Ephesians 6:14-18](#)

BIBLE STUDY: [Ephesians 6:10-20](#)

Reading: *Our Struggle Is Not Against Flesh and Blood*



Core Truth

What opposition can a disciple expect, and what resources are available to combat this opposition?

Disciples have an enemy, Satan, who will oppose every step of growth into the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. Disciples must arm themselves for spiritual battle against the ploys of the evil one by putting on the whole armor of God.

1. Identify key words or phrases in the question and answer above, and state their meaning in your own words.
2. Restate the core truth in your own words.
3. What questions or issues does the core truth raise for you?



Memory Verse Study Guide

Christians are to put on the armor of faith when they go and do battle with the forces of the enemy.

1. *Putting it in context:* Read [Ephesians 6:14-18](#), and list each part of the armor and its value as an offensive or defensive weapon.
2. The memory verses are [Ephesians 6:14-18](#). Copy the verses verbatim.
3. How do we put on the whole armor of God?
4. Which part of your equipment is lacking?
5. How have these verses spoken to you this week?



Inductive Bible Study Guide

1. Read [Ephesians 6:10-20](#). What are we commanded to do? Why?
2. What are the "schemes" of the devil?

To which particular "schemes" are you susceptible?

3. [Ephesians 6:12](#) portrays a struggle that is beyond flesh and blood. How would you describe this struggle in your own words?
4. What is your reaction to Paul's description of a battle against "rulers,... authorities,... powers of this dark world and... spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"? (Are you skeptical about the reality of evil personified? Explain.)
5. What is the objective of these evil forces?
6. What is your attitude toward the power of evil?
7. What place does prayer have in the battle?
8. What questions do you have about this passage?
9. What verse or verses have particularly impacted you? Rewrite key verses in your own words.



Reading: Our Struggle Is Not Against Flesh and Blood

How do we account for the heinous evil of ethnic cleansing carried out by the Serbians against the Muslims in Bosnia? How do we explain the number of pastors who have sacrificed their call to the temptation of sexual infidelity? How do we understand the disunity and dissension in many churches who are bringing shame on the name of the Christ they follow? How do we make sense of the rapid disintegration of marriages, where the divorce rate has escalated from 11

percent in the 1950s to over 50 percent today? How do we justify our own self-destructive behavior when we violate our own beliefs about what is right, decent and virtuous?

Scripture says we have an unseen enemy who will defeat us if he's not taken seriously. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" ([Ephesians 6:12](#)). If we seek human solutions to problems whose origin is supernatural evil, we will fail because we will not have correctly assessed the strength of the enemy. Education and support groups might help to a limited extent, but they are human solutions to spiritual problems.

In his autobiography, *A General's Life*, General Omar Bradley writes of his first meeting with the young William Westmoreland, who would later become commander of the American forces in Vietnam. At the time, Westmoreland was a cadet first captain in the West Point class of 1936. During the summer war games Westmoreland commanded a battalion defending a hill. He performed so poorly in this mock battle that the hill was overrun. Bradley, a major at the time, observed the exercise. He pulled the young field officer aside with this advice, "Mr. Westmoreland, look back at that hill. Look at it from the standpoint of the enemy. It is fundamental to put yourself in the position of the enemy."

We Have an Enemy

Paul asserts without embarrassment that standing behind the human face of sin, brokenness and evil are unseen spiritual forces. Paul says that there are powers in our dark world. *Powers* was a term used commonly in astrology for the alignment of the planets, which was thought to control human fate. Paul takes that familiar word and fills it with his own content. By describing these powers as evil Paul means that they are destructive, unscrupulous, ruthless and in pursuit of malicious designs. Peter wrote, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" ([1 Peter 5:8](#)).

Though Paul assumed the reality of a personified evil, we cannot. C. S. Lewis said that we make two opposite yet equally destructive errors regarding the devil. In his preface to *Screwtape Letters* Lewis writes, "One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them."

Regarding the first error, we disbelieve in the devil because in our scientific age the idea of a supernatural being who is the enemy of God is viewed as a product of primitive times. Now that we have come of age, we have a cause-effect explanation for everything. These notions seem foolish. Skeptical theologian Rudolf Bultmann expressed this attitude, "It is impossible to use electric lights and the wireless, and to avail ourselves of the modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time believe in the New Testament world of demons and spirits."

Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, took the opportunity to visit a tenured professor at a major university who had recently become a Christian. The conversation began in a strained, awkward fashion until this new believer admitted his nervousness about the conversation. "This may seem strange to you, but you are the first Christian academic I've ever talked with about my faith." Concerned that his questions were too fundamental, he was afraid to

ask them. One of the topics concerned the devil. "Before I became a Christian I thought a belief in Satan was a leftover from the Dark Ages—something you found today only on the lunatic fringe. But now as I look back on my own pre-Christian days, I sense that I was held in the grip of a power that tried to dominate my thoughts. Becoming a Christian meant being released from that stranglehold. In Christ I am now free to see things in a different way."

The second mistake that we make regarding Satan, Lewis says, is "to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest" in him. Some Christians are marked by excesses when they see demons as the cause of all problems. If one has an addiction to tobacco or sex, the reasoning goes, a demon of tobacco or sex has entered one's body and must be removed. Excessive interest can be a reason for not accepting responsibility for one's own sin. Comedian Flip Wilson's old line applies: "The devil made me do it."

In addition to disbelief and excessive interest, there is a third problem that may be more prevalent and damaging than the first two. We can say that we believe in the reality of a personified evil, but it has no practical effect in our lives. For example, when illness or depression occur, our means of handling them may be limited to medical or psychological services. Though we say there is an evil one, we operate out of the scientific worldview that asserts that all problems have a natural cause and therefore a natural solution. The truth is that transformation and change, the dislodging of sin and evil from our lives, is an act of the Holy Spirit displacing and confronting the powers of evil and sin. It is easy to be seduced into thinking that we can produce fruit in *our* efforts when in fact we are being called to enter into a realm of spiritual warfare that is not fought with human weapons.

We have an enemy, and the enemy engages us in battle. Paul writes, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood." The word *struggle* literally means "wrestle" and is taken from the world of athletic competition or hand-to-hand combat. Paul is indicating that the battle is now "up close and personal." Just as a wrestler needs to know the moves of the opponent in order to pin him, so we must know the moves of the one who wants to destroy us. We are to put on the whole armor of God that we may be able to stand against the devil's schemes.

There are four basic strategies that the evil one uses against individuals, the church and the world. We must not think of the work of the evil one as purely personal. Christians have often failed to see that not only is Satan wanting to neutralize us individually, but his strategies relate to destroying the church of Christ and throwing a blanket of darkness over whole cultures.

What are the common strategies of the devil?

Temptation

When Jesus launched his public ministry, the first act of the Holy Spirit was to lead him into the wilderness to face "the tempter" ([Matthew 4:1](#)). A primary strategy of the evil one is to be a beguiling serpent whose method is to sow seeds of distrust and doubt about God, whether he has our best interest at heart. The primary tool in the devil's box is the wedge. When we go back to the Garden of Eden, Satan appears to Eve in the form of a serpent. God had promised the original couple abundance of life, the only restriction being not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of

good and evil. So what does the serpent do? He raises a question meant to create doubt about God's goodness: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" ([Genesis 3:1](#)).

Temptation is to sow disbelief that God's way is the most satisfying way for us to live. Though James tells us that temptation originates from within ([James 1:13-15](#)), Satan is there also fanning the flames of those desires, creating pictures in our minds and wooing us to do what is contrary to God's intent. The tempter promises satisfaction, but it is hollow and harmful.

Accusation

In [Revelation 12:10](#) Satan is called the "accuser of our brothers." Satan wants nothing more than to tear apart the church from within. Satan's ultimate goal is to attack the glory of God and strike a blow against God's Son. What better way to do that than to sow dissension within the people of God, who are to reflect the glory of God? If Satan can get God's people fighting among themselves, the battle is over. We must beware of how we talk about our leaders or other members of the body, for we could unwittingly become a wedge, causing disunity.

Another way we experience accusation is the inner voice of self-condemnation and despair. Christians often fail to discern the difference between the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the accusations of the evil one. How can we know the difference? In the results. Satan has the capacity to create in our minds a frighteningly accurate picture of our sins and weaknesses. His intent is to lead us into despair. But the conviction of the Holy Spirit is sweet release. Under it we see with incisive clarity the guilt and horror of our sin, but we are lead to the refreshing waters of God's mercy.

Deception

Satan masks himself as an angel of light. The Ephesian believers were acquainted with Satan's attempts to transform himself into a benevolent power. Ephesus was a center for magic and occult practices. The temple of Artemis contained a cultic zodiac that could supposedly manipulate the cosmic forces. When there was a great turning to Christ in the city, "Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly" ([Acts 19:18-19](#)).

Johanna Michaelsen tells the story of how she was sucked into the world of occult power through what appeared to be the good of psychic healing. Her story is titled *The Beautiful Side of Evil*. Satan exercises the power of healing and even attempts to co-opt the name of Jesus, but it is his way of taking hold. People innocently dabble in things such as astrology, graphology and palm reading, thinking that these things are harmless, but they are the evil one's point of entry. The lure of the occult is twofold. There is the desire for supernatural knowledge of the future and the desire for acquiring power to manipulate spiritual forces for our own benefit.

Satan doesn't come primarily through the occult. He is much more effective in throwing a blanket of darkness over an entire culture. Satan deceives whole people groups to buy in to worldviews that become dominant thought patterns and assumptions. The acceptance of

relativism, for instance, is an ingenious and insidious maneuver on the part of Satan. A recent poll reveals that 67 percent of Americans believed there is no such thing as absolute truth. People won't even search for a truth outside themselves because they don't think there is such a truth to be found.

Direct Attacks

When Satan gets bold he attacks directly. Our society is openly hostile toward Christians. Christian belief is characterized by the media as narrow and even lunatic. We are living in the rising tide of anti-Christianity. We must be aware that the one who is driving the passions and energizing the antagonism is none other than the enemy whose target is the Lord Jesus Christ. If he can't get at Jesus directly, he will do it through Jesus' people.

We face a formidable enemy, but don't lose heart. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" ([Ephesians 6:10](#)). As powerful as the evil one appears to be, we have the right Man on our side. The head of our army is the One who hung on the cross, unmasking and pronouncing judgment on the evil one and his minions. When Satan thought he had dealt the death blow to Jesus, God raised him from the dead, triumphing over the power of darkness. The power that raised Jesus is available to us. That is why Paul prayed for the Ephesians, "That the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know... his incomparably great power for us who believe,... which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead" ([Ephesians 1:18-20](#)).

Sunday's Coming

Tony Campolo dramatizes the power of the cross and resurrection through a Good Friday sermon. On this particular Good Friday Campolo was the sixth of seven preachers at a Good Friday service.

Campolo was hot. After preaching he sat down next to the seventh preacher of the day, leaned over and said, "Can you top that?" The man, his pastor, said, "Just you sit back and watch." For the next forty-five minutes this preacher worked the congregation into a lather, and it was all built around one line: "It's Friday. Sunday's a coming!"

He started off slowly and built to a crescendo. "It's Friday. Jesus is on the cross. He's dead. Gone. He's no more. But that's Friday. Sunday's a coming." He began to take off. "It's Friday. Mary's crying her eyes out. The disciples are running in every direction. No hope in the world. That's Friday. Sunday's a coming."

"Keep going," someone said.

"It's Friday. Pilate's washing his hands. The Pharisees are calling the shots. The Roman soldiers are strutting around. But that's Friday. Sunday's a coming!"

"Preach on, brother!"

"It's Friday. Satan's doing his little jig. He thinks he rules the world. Institutions are at his command, governments do his bidding, and businesses do his work. But that's because it's Friday. Sunday's a coming!"

He ended by yelling at the top of his lungs, "Friday!" And all 1500 people yelled back, "Sunday's a coming!"

Take heart. Sunday has come.

Reading Study Guide

1. What is your explanation for inordinate and heinous evil?
2. Explain why we don't fully appreciate the reality of the demonic.
3. The author identifies four strategies of the devil. Put each in your own words.
 - a. temptation
 - b. accusation
 - c. deception
 - d. direct attack
4. How can we best arm ourselves against each of these strategies?
5. Where are you most susceptible to Satan's attacks?
6. Where do you see the church being susceptible to Satan's strategies?
7. What are Satan's strategies regarding the culture in which we live?
8. What questions do you have about the reading?
9. Does the reading convict, challenge or comfort you? Why?

Going Deeper

Watson, David. "Spiritual Warfare." Chap. 8 in *Called and Committed: World-Changing Discipleship*. Wheaton, Ill.: Harold Shaw, 2000.

³ Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ, Expanded Edition.

23 / Walking in Obedience

MEMORY VERSES: [Ephesians 4:22-24](#)

BIBLE STUDY: [Ephesians 4:17-32](#)

Reading: *The Principle of Replacement*

Core Truth

How is a disciple transformed into the likeness of Christ?

Sinful behavior is the product of practiced patterns that become habits which sink their roots deep in us. Growing to Christlikeness involves a process of replacing old habits with God-pleasing ones.

1. Identify key words or phrases in the question and answer above, and state their meaning in your own words.
2. Restate the core truth your own words.
3. What questions or issues does the core truth raise for you?

Memory Verse Study Guide

Paul uses a number of images in his letters to describe the process of transformation. He speaks of being conformed to the image of Christ ([Romans 8:29](#)), the fruit of the Spirit versus the deeds of the flesh ([Galatians 5:16-26](#)), and not being conformed to this world but being transformed by the renewal of our minds ([Romans 12:2](#)). In our memory verses sanctification is pictured as taking off old, tattered garments and being redressed with clothing that is honoring to God.

1. *Putting it in context:* Read [Ephesians 4:17-32](#). How are [verses 22-24](#) a transition point from the description of our former manner of life ([vv. 17-21](#)) to the new ways of life that replace it ([vv. 25-32](#))?
2. The memory verses are [Ephesians 4:22-24](#). Copy the verses verbatim.
3. Whereas [Romans 12:2](#) speaks of the renewal of our minds, here Paul writes of the "attitude" of our minds ([v. 23](#)). To what is Paul referring?
4. What does Paul tell us to put off and put on?

5. How much is God responsible to change us, and how much are we responsible for our transformation?
6. How have these verses spoken to you this week?



Inductive Bible Study Guide

Read [Ephesians 4:17-32](#). Whereas [Ephesians 4:17-24](#) describes the need for and the principle of replacement of the old with the new, [Ephesians 4:25-32](#) illustrates the principle that transformation is never complete until the old way of life is replaced with habits empowered by and pleasing to the Lord.

1. One way of looking at sin is to think of it as addictive habits, not isolated, individual acts. Notice phrases in the passage that describe sin as settled habits.
2. In [verses 22](#) and [24](#) Paul does not say simply to put off the old nature but to put on a new nature in its place. Why can't we simply stop bad behavior?
3. Notice how Paul illustrates the principle of replacement using the phrases "put off" and "put on" in [verses 25-32](#). Record your observations below.

Put off Put on

4. What questions does this passage raise for you?
5. What verse or verses have particularly impacted you? Rewrite key verses in your own words.



Reading: The Principle of Replacement

In *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"*, the third book in the Chronicles of Narnia, C. S. Lewis tells the story of the transformation of the difficult little boy Eustace. Eustace is a passenger on

the *Dawn Treader*, which is sailing under the command of Prince Caspian. Being nasty, a complainer and generally obnoxious, Eustace alienates his fellow travelers. When the ship docks on an island, the passengers get out to explore. Eustace intentionally separates himself from the rest, sensing that he is not welcome. He soon comes face to face with a frightful, fire-breathing dragon. Much to Eustace's relief the dragon expires right in front of him, but after a dream-filled night Eustace awakes to find that he himself has become a green, scaly dragon. This was Lewis's way of saying that Eustace became on the outside what he was on the inside.

Eustace sobs when he realizes the meaning of the symbol. How can he rid himself of the scaly skin and be recognized and accepted by those he has estranged? Another night passes full of dreams, or so he thinks. In his dream he is approached by Aslan—a lion and the Christ figure in the story. Aslan takes Eustace to a bubbling well, shaped like a round bath with marble stairs descending into it. The water is deliciously inviting, but Aslan says that before Eustace can get into it he has to undress first. Eustace knows that this means he must remove his scaly surface like a snake sheds its skin. He strips off his skin as if peeling a banana. He steps out of the skin and walks over to the edge of the pool, only to see that his reflection still shows the same rough and wrinkled skin. Two more times he attempts to remove his outer coat with the same results. No matter how much he strips away, he does not change.

Then Aslan says, "You will have to let me undress you." Even though Eustace is afraid of Aslan's claws, he is desperate by now. Eustace lies on his back and allows Aslan to have his way.

The very first tear was so deep that I thought he had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling that stuff peel off. After he peeled off all the skin, I was as smooth and soft as a peeled switch. He caught hold of me and threw me into the water. At first it smarted, but then it became perfectly delicious. I'd turned into a boy again.... And after a bit the Lion took me out of the water and dressed me. New clothes and all.

God intends to make us into new persons who reflect his image. To do so he must remove the old skin that represents our old way of life and clothe us with new skin made in the likeness of him. The image of undressing and re-dressing serves as the frame for Paul's teaching. "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires... and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" ([Ephesians 4:22, 24](#)). Paul is saying that the Christian life is a lifelong process of taking off the soiled, tattered garments of our sinful nature and being dressed with a fresh set of clothes that will transform us into beings reflecting God's holiness and righteousness.

Transformation

Let's put the process of transformation in very practical terms. We are creatures of habit. Habits are practiced ways of thinking, feeling or acting. They become so much a part of us that they are second nature. For example, do you button your blouse or shirt from top to bottom or from bottom to top? So well ingrained are our habits that we can master complex behaviors and perform them without conscious thought. Do you remember when you first sat behind the wheel of a car? There were so many things to think about—put the key in the ignition, fasten the seat

belt, move the seat into position, keep your eye on the speedometer and the rearview and side mirrors—just for starters. Everything was a conscious effort. But thousands of hours later we can slip into the car in the darkness, find the slot for the key and buckle the seat belt without thinking.

Life is full of good and bad habits. We have habits of thinking, feeling and acting that both honor God and displease him. To follow Christ is to commit ourselves to putting off the old and putting on the new. The Lord desires to build God-pleasing habits into our character. The word "habits" is derived from the Latin word *habitus*. A priest wears a *habitus*, a piece of clothing that represents a commitment to a holy life. We too are to put on habits that are formed in practice so that godliness is a built-in instinct.

In [Ephesians 4:17-24](#) Paul focuses on four steps in the process of removing God-displeasing habits and putting on those habits that reflect God's character.

Know the Old Life from Which You Came

According to Paul Christians are to live in stark contrast to the dominant culture out of which we have come. In order for us to see the person we are to be, Paul in broad strokes paints the picture of a pagan culture in rebellion against its Creator. Paul's concern is contrast; he makes no effort to balance his description with noble qualities. He wants the believers to see that they are to live a life that stands out in bold relief. "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more" ([Ephesians 4:17-19](#)). Paul notes three stages of descent into darkness.

1. Wrong-headedness. Paul says that darkness begins with faulty thinking. Notice the three words in [verses 17](#) and [18](#)—*thinking*, *understanding* and *ignorance*. Paul says that our entry into darkness occurs with the decision to reject the proper starting point for all of life.

Paul uses three phrases to capture this wrong-headedness. He speaks of the "futility of their thinking." The word *futility* is related to idolatry. Paul is saying that rejecting the true God doesn't mean ceasing to have a god. If one's god is not the true God, then the Lord is exchanged for a lie. Second, "futility of... thinking" leads to being "darkened in... understanding." If we start with the wrong premise, it makes no difference how impeccable our logic might be, because we will always come to the wrong conclusion. Finally, Paul describes wrong-headedness as the "ignorance that is in them." This is not innocent ignorance but a willful ignorance that leaves us accountable to God. We are without excuse. God will hold us accountable for our ignorance because it is chosen blindness.

The result of this wrong-headedness is that we are "separated from the life of God." Not only are we cut off from the life source that made us, but we are also in rebellion against and at odds with our Maker.

What form does this take in our society? A sign of our wrong-headedness is a rejection of absolutes. We worship the god of relativism. The prevailing attitude is that we should be faithful to whatever is true *for us*. This is the cultural air we breathe.

2. *Hard-heartedness*. The descent into darkness moves from wrong-headedness to hard-heartedness. Paul says that our thinking is wrong because our heart is calcified. Wrong-headedness is "due to the hardening of their hearts" ([v. 18](#)). The word for "hardness" is derived from the idea of stone that becomes harder than marble. It comes from a medical term that refers to deposits of calcium between the joints that become harder than bone. They have lost all *sensitivity* ([v. 19](#)), a word meaning "ceasing to care," dulled to the point of making right and wrong indistinguishable.

3. *Permissiveness*. Paul writes that the Gentiles "have given themselves over to sensuality" ([v. 19](#)). The Greek word for "sensuality" means shamelessness. When a society can no longer be shocked or no longer has a healthy shame, it is at the point of Paul's description. The second phrase that captures permissiveness is to "indulge in every kind of impurity," that irresistible desire to have what we have no right to have.

Paul goes into a detailed description of pagan culture, for in order to practice godly habits, we must be able to recognize the soiled garments which must be removed.

Don't Underestimate the Grip of the Old Life

One of the reasons we fail in our attempts to change bad habits is that we don't respect the power of a habit to hold us. It's like removing a tree stump. We might say at first, "This isn't a big job. I'll have that out in an hour." We show up with our shovel and ax to cut the roots. Three hours later we are ready to give up because we have dug a five-foot trench around the tree and exposed the root system, which was far larger than we ever imagined. We have considerably underestimated the task.

Endurance and discipline are key elements in changing habits. Any new habit takes a minimum of three to six weeks to become part of our routine. Most of us get washed out long before that time. We must know the strength of the battle that is ahead so we can call on the Lord's grace for the change.

Practice the Principle of Replacement

Paul gives us an often overlooked but necessary step for changing a habit. Our usual approach to change is to stop a habit of thinking, feeling or acting: we reduce our food intake, we try to stop being critical, we try to stop drinking. We do fine for a while. We may even think, *I have this licked*. But then our will crumbles and the former behavior is back, stronger than ever. Jesus tells the story of the man who had a demon cast out of him. The demon finds no place to lodge, so it returns to the place from which it was cast, bringing seven more demons along ([Luke 11:24-26](#)). When you simply stop doing an old behavior without putting a God-pleasing one in its place, you create a vacuum that is filled by an even stronger version of the same problem.

Paul says that we must practice the principle of replacement. When we "put off" we must "put on" as well. The first step is to identify the habit of thinking, feeling or acting that needs to be put to death or nailed to the cross. Then we must make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves and admit to God, ourselves and other people the nature of the wrong. Then we must prepare ourselves to remove all defects of character. The Holy Spirit's transformation will not be complete until we practice the principle of replacement.

Keep in Mind God's Intention for You

God's intent is for you to reflect his image: "Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" ([v. 24](#)). Athletes often attain their goal by visualizing their success. A high jumper sees the bar and her body safely flying over it. It is the completion of the goal that motivates her toward what she is to become. We are to see ourselves with the defects of character removed from our lives as Jesus shines through so that we are what God intends us to be.

We must be patient with the process. Richard Lovelace gives us good insight into the process of sanctification: "God will proceed at a rate and follow a course which is ideally suited to the individual, raising successive issues over the years and making a point of the need for growth in one area after another. He seldom shows us all of our needs at once; we would be overwhelmed at the sight." In other words, there is no such thing as instant godliness. To live in a way that is contrary to society, we need to commit ourselves to a lifetime of change under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is God's tailor: he is ready to give us a new set of clothes and discard the old, threadbare wardrobe. But the old way of life dies a slow, bitter, bloody death. It does not want to give up its grip. Yet the new set of clothes are so much more becoming.

As in Eustace's story, it is the Lord who must be given the permission to dress us anew. We can't remove the scales ourselves. Our prayer should be, "Lord, do what it takes, reach as deep as you need, go after the wrong thinking, wrong feelings, wrong behaviors. Go straight to the heart with whatever pain it will take, because our desire is to be made over in the likeness of God."

Reading Study Guide

1. What point does C. S. Lewis illustrate through Eustace in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Dreader"*?
2. Does Paul's description of society in rebellion against God seem overstated to you? Why or why not?
3. What habits have you tried to dislodge? If you failed, what do you suppose was the reason for the failure?
4. How would you put each of these steps to enact the principle of replacement into effect?

- a. habit to be replaced
 - b. the biblical "instead of"
 - c. visualize what God intends you to be
5. What questions do you have about this reading?
6. Does the reading convict, challenge or comfort you? Why?

Going Deeper

Watson, David. "Cost of Discipleship." Chap. 11 in *Called and Committed: World-Changing Discipleship*. Wheaton, Ill.: Harold Shaw, 2000.

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⁴ Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ, Expanded Edition.

24 / Sharing the Wealth

MEMORY VERSE: [2 Timothy 2:2](#)

BIBLE STUDY: [1 Thessalonians 2:1-12](#)

Reading: *Paul's Strategy of Ministry*

Core Truth

What is our role in discipling others?

Discipling is the process of allowing God to use us to be a part of helping another disciple to grow. A sign of our maturity is the desire to pass on the "wealth" to the next generation.

1. Identify key words or phrases in the question and answer above, and state their meaning in your own words.
2. Restate the core truth in your own words.
3. What questions or issues does the core truth raise for you?

Memory Verse Study Guide

Second Timothy is a motivational letter from Paul to his son in the faith, Timothy. Paul is at the end of his earthly ministry and deeply concerned that the gospel be transmitted intact to the next generation. Timothy is urged to be that link.

1. *Putting it in context:* Read [2 Timothy 1:1-18](#). How does Paul's admonition to Timothy, "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" ([2:1](#)), address the fears that Paul identifies in [1 Timothy 1](#)?
2. The memory verse is [2 Timothy 2:2](#). Copy the verse verbatim.
3. What is the ministry strategy contained in this verse?
4. Timothy is to look for those who are "reliable." What qualities should you look for in a future discipling partner?

Does this mean that some Christians are not suitable for a discipling relationship? Why or

why not?

5. William Barclay has said that every Christian stands as a link between two generations. How do you feel about being in that link?
6. In what ways has this verse spoken to you this week?



Inductive Bible Study Guide

In the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians he commends them for many good qualities. He then goes on in the second chapter to describe the qualities that he exemplified as well as the methods he used to urge the Thessalonians to maturity.

1. Read [1 Thessalonians 2:1-12](#). Read [Acts 16:11-40](#) to see the treatment of Paul and Silas in Philippi, the community he visited just prior to going to Thessalonica ([Acts 17:1-10](#)). What impresses you about Paul and Silas?
2. What character qualities does Paul exhibit that are worthy of imitation?

Which of these challenge you in your discipleship?

3. What was Paul's method of instilling these qualities in the Thessalonians (notice [verses 7](#) and [11](#))?
4. How do these images instruct you in how to invest in others?
5. What questions do you have about this passage?
6. What verse or verses have particularly impacted you? Rewrite key verses in your own words.



Reading: Paul's Strategy of Ministry

Paul saw himself as one to be imitated. In so many words Paul said, "If you copy my life, then you are following Christ." To the Corinthians he could be so bold as to say, "I urge you to

imitate me" ([1 Corinthians 4:16](#)). A key element in teaching is modeling. What was there about Paul's life that was worth copying?

Paul's Model

From [1 Thessalonians 2:1-12](#) certain qualities stand out in Paul's life.

Paul exhibited courage in the Lord ([v. 2](#)). Paul proclaimed the gospel in spite of the opposition he received in Philippi ([Acts 16:11-40](#)). Paul and Silas were cast into jail because Paul had cast an evil spirit from a woman who could divine the future. They demonstrated trust in God's deliverance through prayer and singing hymns during a desperate situation. When their resources were spent, God made his resources available, even though they had "been insulted," probably a reference to the abuse of Paul's Roman citizenship.

Paul's message and motives were true ([v. 3](#)). His message was not based on error, even though his hearers thought it to be sheer delusion. To the Greeks his message of incarnation and resurrection was madness, a foolishness that did not accord with reality. The intimation was that Paul was a fraud, a wandering impostor and propagandist. But Paul claims the source of his message to be from God and the foolishness is really God's means of salvation.

The Greek word translated "impure motives" comes from an impurity related to sexual matters. Stories were circulated to discredit Paul—that Christians were involved in secret immoral practices such as drinking the body and blood of Christ and greeting each other with a holy kiss. Paul preached against the backdrop of the Greek mystery religions, where temple prostitution was part of their worship.

Further, Paul's conduct was *above board*. There was no intention to deceive or lead astray, but he was open and honest, convinced of the truth of his message. He was not a crafty person with an intention to deceive.

Paul spoke to please God, not people ([v. 4](#)). Paul lived with a sense of obligation because he had been entrusted with a message from God. He therefore had no right to change its content or blunt its thrust. Paul refused to be swayed by the need for human acceptance.

Paul was not out for personal gain ([v. 5](#)). Paul never tried to derive financial gain from his preaching. Paul worked as a tentmaker, so the accusation of greed could not be leveled at him.

Paul's Method

Paul's method was personal investment. The only way to make disciples is to get involved intimately in the lives of the people you are trying to influence. God got involved with us in Jesus Christ, and he uses us to the extent that we give ourselves to others personally. Let's look as the way Paul gave himself to the Thessalonians.

1. *"Like a mother caring for her little children"* ([v. 7](#)). Paul knew the people under his care, focused on their needs and carried them along a path of growth. He was gentle because his

disciples were like babies—tender and undeveloped. He is like a mother who acts in the role of a nurse to bring each child to health.

2. *"We... share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well"* ([v. 8](#)). Paul was not an untouchable authority figure who kept himself at a distance. He got involved in the lives of the Thessalonians to the extent that his humanity was showing. Paul gave his whole self. He shared his life with them. The people knew that their welfare had become his welfare. Discipling is a process of investing one's self in someone else for an extended period of time.

3. *"As a father deals with his children"* ([v. 11](#)). Again we see the emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual. No human being is the same, and no one is at the same point of growth and need. A father must foster the unique character of his children, and so must a discipler. A discipler encourages, comforts and urges his or her pupil toward more mature godliness.

Paul's Strategy of Ministry Versus the Church's

Paul's style is the opposite of what we often attempt in the church today. His ministry strategy could be prioritized in this way: disciples, fellowship, program. He didn't start with programs but let programs develop from the spontaneous context of discipling and disciples' fellowship with each other. He proclaimed the gospel; those who responded became the object of his investment and were formed into a community of believers. From this foundation his ministry grew.

The church's ministry today is often the opposite of Paul's. We have a different order of priorities that often looks like this: organization, program, disciples. We think that making disciples must be done through programs, defined here as a spectator-performer relationship. In other words, a few people plan the activities that are spoon-fed to the many. So often what occurs is that the bureaucrats (committees, session, boards, etc.) devise a system that people are herded through, and disciples are expected to be mass produced. But programs by their nature are task-centered and not people-centered. They cannot respond to the unique character of the individuals involved. Programs are the quick-fix approach to discipling.

Paul Focused on Individuals

In the opening line of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians he writes, "Paul, Silas and Timothy..." Paul's mention of two companions gives us insight into his strategy. He was very conscious of his responsibility to pass on the faith. He chose people to be with him so that faith could be imparted in the context of real life. And the investment in people's lives was over a long period. Paul was faithful to Christ. He knew the character of God and the content of the gospel, which he painstakingly transmitted to his people.

Coupled with this focus on individuals was the self-assurance that his life was worthy of copying. Because of this, Paul can sound arrogant. Without apology he says, "You became imitators of us and of the Lord" ([1 Thessalonians 1:6](#)). Also, "You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed" ([1 Thessalonians 2:10](#)). Paul's attitude was "I represent Christ, and you should follow in my footsteps." Paul knew he had

something to offer and did not drum up false humility to apologize for it. A discipler must feel he or she has something to give.

Paul's Vision for Future Generations

Paul did not select Timothy because he could help carry the luggage. He saw in Timothy the quality of faithfulness that would serve the future church. We gain an insight into Paul's long-range vision from [2 Timothy 2:1-2](#).

Paul transmitted his faith to Timothy before many witnesses. Timothy was trained in a public ministry, not as a member of a secret sect. Paul raised Timothy in the faith just as a father would his child, teaching him his trade. Paul addresses Timothy as his son in the faith.

Timothy is to continue to pass the faith on to reliable people. A faithful person is one who is loyal, faithful and dependable. Timothy stood as a link between the apostolic age and the next generation. William Barclay has said, "Every Christian must look on himself as a link between two generations."

Paul was not concerned to pass on structure, organization or program. The test of his ministry was whether disciples were being produced for future generations. Paul identifies his motivating passion when he says, "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me" ([Colossians 1:28-29](#)).

Reading Study Guide

1. As you examine Paul's model, what aspects of his character impress you?
2. Summarize Paul's method.
3. How does Paul's strategy of ministry contrast with the way we often operate in the church?
4. Paul puts himself forth as an intentional model. What was it he wanted others to imitate?

How can we follow his model?

5. Every Christian must look on him- or herself as a link between two generations. What must occur within you in order for this to be true?

6. What is your prayer as you look toward investing in others?
7. What questions do you have about the reading?
8. Does the reading convict, challenge or comfort you? Why?

Going Deeper

Coleman, Robert. *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1963.

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⁵ Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ, Expanded Edition.

BONUS SECTION.

25 / Money

MEMORY VERSE: [Matthew 6:24](#)

BIBLE STUDY: *Selected verses on the tithe*

Reading: "Living with Cheerful Abandon"

Core Truth

What attitude and practice should disciples have regarding money?

Disciples live with a healthy fear of the money god (mammon), knowing that it has the power to command devotion. A way to put limits on our greed and to laugh in the face of mammon is to begin our practice of giving with a minimum of a tithe of our resources to the Lord's work.

1. Identify key words or phrases in the question and answer above, and state their meaning in your own words.
2. Restate the core truth in your own words.
3. What questions or issues does the core truth raise for you?

Memory Verse Study Guide

Jesus was quite skeptical about the ability of humans to handle the allure of money. We tend to view money as simply a neutral means of exchange. It is the currency we use to transact business. Conversely, Jesus viewed money as having the power to secure devotion. The pursuit of "mammon," the money god, can lead to idolatry. Our memory verse places us on notice and issues a strong warning of this danger.

1. *Putting it in context:* Read [Matthew 6:19-34](#). How does the teaching before and after our memory verse, set up the choice that Jesus puts before us?
2. The memory verse is [Matthew 6:24](#). Copy the verse verbatim.
3. What is the choice that Jesus puts before us?
4. Why can't we serve two masters?

5. What is there about money that it has the power to become a god?
6. Where do you see evidence of money's drawing power in your own life? Where are you susceptible to money becoming a god?
7. Does the power of money to become a god frighten you? Why or why not?
8. How has this verse spoken to you this week?



Inductive Bible Study Guide

Though giving a tithe to the Lord is largely an Old Testament practice, mentioned only sparingly by Jesus in the New Testament ([Matthew 23:23-24](#)), it is still the foundational starting point to guide our obedience in giving. The tithe has never been set aside and, in fact, Jesus supports its continued practice, as long as the more important matters of justice, mercy and faithfulness take precedence. Therefore, this study will introduce us to the meaning and importance of the tithe in three key Old Testament passages.

1. Read [Leviticus 27:30-33](#). To what does the tithe apply and to whom does it belong?
2. Note the process for the selection of the animals to be tithed. Why do you suppose the Lord chose such a "mechanical" approach?
3. How might we fall into the practice of not giving our best to the Lord?
4. Read [Deuteronomy 14:22-29](#). What are the various uses for the tithe identified in these instructions of Moses?
5. Who are the Levites and why are they singled out for special provision?
6. Why might the "aliens, fatherless and widows" be selected as beneficiaries of the tithe?
7. Read [Malachi 3:7-12](#). The Lord through Malachi calls upon the people to return to him. In what way does the Lord require the people to "return"?

8. The Lord asked to be "tested." What does the Lord promise for those who tithe?
9. Find yourself in this text: Place a check in the box(es) that applies and explain.
- ☐ Robbed God: must honestly admit that I have withheld my giving
 - ☐ Ready to trust God: I am ready to tithe and in faith watch God provide
 - ☐ Am trusting God: living on the stretch in trust and have watched God come through



Reading: Giving with Cheerful Abandon

There is a stewardship principle built into God's economy: *You get back, what you give*. This phrase summarizes well the Apostle Paul's motivational message in [2 Corinthians 9:6-15](#).

Paul illustrates this principle through the practice of farming. "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously" ([2 Cor 9:6](#)). It is common knowledge among farmers that if you plant few seeds you will yield a meager crop; but if you sow seeds with abandon you will have a much greater chance of an abundant harvest.

The Scripture unashamedly appeals to personal reward as an incentive for living out the Christian life. Sow to your own joy. Out of sheer self interest, the best way to live is to give. Some purists might find this appeal to personal reward to be troubling. One commentator wrote, "Nowhere does Scripture propose the gaining of rewards as a motive for goodness." Many of us were taught this as children. However, Scripture consistently tells us to seek our own pleasure and how to find it. So, if you are at all concerned for your own happiness, give; if you care about your quality of life, give. Principle: *The extent you give will be the extent to which you get back*.

Please don't misunderstand. This is not at all promoting the pursuit of financial reward as an end in itself, as some "health and wealth" preachers would. Their teaching is that the size of one's faith is equal to the growth of one's financial capacity. The more faith you have the more material rewards you will attain. One such preacher told how his faith had grown from believing that God could provide an inexpensive car, to paying cash for a Cadillac, to where he could believe God for a Rolls Royce, which was given to him as a gift. The Scripture does not teach that faith equals riches. In fact, you could make a case from the New Testament that faith will actually lead to hardship, but that is another lesson.

An implication of the principle of sowing and reaping is that some people struggle financially because they have not yet learned to give. We read in [Proverbs 11:24](#), "One man gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want."

The Plan

A first step to getting one's financial house in order is develop the practice of giving. Bill Hybels proposes a simple plan for sound financial management: (1) pay God; (2) pay yourself (save); (3) pay your bills.

Hybels begins his discussion of motive by honoring the individual choice that each person must make regarding their financial resources. "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give" ([2 Cor. 9:7](#)). In other words, we should each pause and thoughtfully consider before God what should be our practice for financial giving. This implies planned giving, versus a haphazard approach. We should not come to the end of the month and then say to ourselves, "What do I have left over to give?" We don't wait until the offering plate is passed down the aisle, then to pull out our check book or wallet to see what we can afford to throw in. At the conclusion of this article you will be given a process that you can go through to evaluate and plan your giving with forethought.

Paul undergirds the principle—*you get back what you give*—with the appropriate mindset. Let's turn our attention to the attitude that will lead us to financial freedom. Before Paul asserts the positive, he identifies two attitudes that must be rejected if we are to find our way to joy.

First, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, *not reluctantly*." Literally, this word means "to give without grief or regret." Do not mourn the loss of money. If there is a phenomenon called "buyer's remorse," then there may be "giver's remorse" as well.

Why might we be reluctant to give? In order to give we might have to cut back on our wants. Giving and greed cannot coexist. Giving means that there are things I might want that I won't be able to have. Greed is the insatiable desire for more. Greed is fueled by the spirit of the age; it is the air that we breathe. In a myriad of ways every day we are told, "We are what we have." This is why Jesus called money, mammon, the money god. Money is not just a neutral means of exchange, it has the power to inspire devotion. Charlie Sheen, the Oscar winning actor, captured this truth in the common vernacular, when he honestly said, "Money is energy, man."

The way to loose the grip of greed is to give. In his book *Money, Sex, and Power*, Richard Foster tells us how to dethrone money, "The powers that energize money cannot abide that most unnatural of acts, giving. Money is made for taking, for bargaining, for manipulating, but not for giving. This is exactly why giving has such an ability to defeat the powers of money."

In addition to greed being a reason for reluctance to give, we are also stymied by fear. Money becomes a god when we find our security in what we accumulate. John D. Rockefeller was asked, "How much is enough?" His answer: "A little bit more." Enough is never enough if anxiety is the underlying tension and we seek our security in how much we have. I am not arguing here against prudent planning. Remember our formula: (1) pay God; (2) pay yourself (save); (3) pay your bills. There is a difference between prudent planning for the contingencies of life and being obsessed and driven by anxiety over what might be. The only way to financial freedom, even if you are following the above principles, is to find our security in the Lord. The only protection we have against the future is the God who rules the future. Stock markets rise and fall, only Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

We are reluctant to give because we bow before the twin gods of greed and security.

Paul identifies a second attitude that can keep us from financial freedom.

"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly *nor under compulsion*" ([2 Cor 9:7](#)). Under compulsion means "to give out of necessity, duty or under pressure."

We can be compelled to give out of guilt. Appeals to give in order to absolve of a guilty conscience are commonplace. For example, we are told that we wealthy Westerners absent-mindedly misplace about \$100 a year, which is more in per capita income of many third world countries. I was at gathering where the speaker asked us to look at the manufacturer's label inside our shirt collar. Where was it made? We were then told that we live well off of meagerly paid sweat workers who produce in expensive goods. Message: Give because you are an exploitive Western consumer. The trouble with manipulating giving out of guilt is that it does not cultivate a spirit of generosity.

Another motivation that derives from compulsion is to give in order to look good in comparison to others. This was the sin of the infamous Ananias and Sapphira recorded in the fifth chapter of the book of Acts. When they saw the generosity of others they too wanted to have their faces on the Givers Hall of Fame. Ananias and Sapphira had sold a piece of property and gave part of the proceeds to the apostles to be given to those in need. Their sin was deception. They acted as if they had given the whole amount. They wanted to look more generous than they were. Peter made it crystal clear that there were not *under compulsion* to give any more than their faith permitted. They could give whatever they were led to give from the sale. It was their deception of false generosity that led to the judgment of God upon them.

Neither reluctance nor compulsion are motives that are honoring to God. What is the attitude that leads to financial freedom? "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly nor under compulsion, *for God loves a cheerful giver*" ([2 Cor 9:7](#)). The word translated "cheerful" in the original Greek has the meaning "hilarious." God loves a "hilarious" giver. This implies that the most joyful moment in our worship services should be when the offering plate is passed. We give not out of reluctance or any sense of "have-to," just out of the overflow of joy that we can be a conduit of the Lord's generosity.

But what is the wellspring from which cheerfulness comes? How do we get the attitude that is the foundation for financial freedom? There is only one thing that produces hilarity in life. Gratitude. The words "grace," "gift" and "thanksgiving" dominate Paul's thought in the rest of our text. Read [2 Corinthians 9:8-15](#) and circle these words and note the spirit of generosity and abundance that marks Paul's thought. Paul concludes this section with, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" ([2 Cor 9:15](#)).

Of what gift is Paul speaking here? The gift of His Son Jesus Christ. Cheerful givers are those whose hearts have been overwhelmed and captured by undeserved grace. There is no greater feeling in the world than gratitude.

Dr. Lewis Smedes, like only he can do, put into words the feelings of gratitude. Doris, Lewis's wife, had found him lying on the floor, as he wrote, "looking quite dead." He lay in the hospital for a couple of days, tilting heavily in death's direction, lungs filled with blood clots as if they were buckshot. On the fourth day, his physician of Norwegian extraction leaned over his bed and

congratulated him on surviving the twenty-to-one odds that medical statistics had stacked up against him.

Lewis responded matter-of-factly, "Oh yeah? That's terrific, doctor."

In retrospect, he said, his heart was not awash with gratitude, for until the doctor informed him, it never occurred to him that he might die. He closed his eyes and went back to sleep.

But here is what happened two nights later in Smedes' own words, "In the moody hush that settles on a hospital room at two o'clock in the morning, alone, with no drugs inside of me to set me up for it—I was seized with a frenzy of gratitude. Possessed! My arms rose straight up by themselves, a hundred-pound weight could not have held them at my side. My hands open, my fingers spread, waving, twisting, while I blessed the Lord for the almost unbearable goodness of being alive on this good earth in this good body at this present time."

"I was flying outside of myself, high, held in weightless lightness, as if my earthly existence need no ground to rest in, but was hung in space with only love to keep it aloft."

"It was then I learned that gratitude is the best feeling I would ever have, the ultimate joy of living. It was better than sex, better than winning the lottery, better than watching your daughter graduate from college, better and deeper than any other feeling... I am sure that nothing in life can ever match the feeling of being held in being by a gracious energy percolating from the abyss where beats the loving heart of God."

Once gratitude gets a hold of us, rooted in undeserved grace, giving will not be an issue ever again.

Steps to Freedom

Here's a very practical picture of the steps to financial freedom.

Step 1—Give Cheerfully

All giving begins with attitude, not the amount. Giving has nothing to do with how much you have. There is no correlation in God's economy between means and munificence. The first step to financial freedom is to ask the Lord to show you how outrageously lavish is his grace toward you.

Step 2—Give Regularly, Not Haphazardly

Giving that is honoring to God has a thoughtful faith goal that is translated into a plan. What can you believe God for this year? Giving is not just reactive or sporadic, but done with forethought. Plan your giving in the same way that you would an addition to your house.

Step 3—Give Your First Fruits

Pay God. Pay yourself (save). Pay your bills. It was the practice in the Old Testament that people gave the first fruits of the harvest or the best of their flock to the Lord. Make the first checks you write each month to further the Lord's work.

Step 4—Give When It's Tight

Giving is an act of faith in the ability of God to provide, whatever the circumstances. The beauty of stepping out in faith in regards our money is that it gives the Lord an opportunity to demonstrate his faithfulness to us in very tangible ways. How often do we get to see the Lord's hand clearly at work? When we trust God even in the lean times, and watch him provide, we have clear evidence that he is real.

Step 5—Give Sacrificially

C. S. Lewis has said it best: "I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot because our charitable expenditures exclude them."

Step 6—Give a Tithe

There is no more exact guideline for obedience than to give a tenth of our income to the Lord's work. Write down your annual or monthly income and multiply by 10%. Here is your goal and starting point. Build from there.

Step 7—Give in Faith

Giving should always contain the element of the risk of faith. In the realm of stewardship, this is called making a "faith promise." In other words, the goal of giving is set to the level that the Lord must provide in faith. You reach at least a little beyond where you know the resources will come from. For those who have been practicing tithing for some time, the edge of adventure may have been lost. Giving has simply become a financial transaction. Consider what it would be to move beyond the routine, to a place of cheerful adventure.

Giving that is honoring to God is motivated by gratitude. Cheerfulness and the awareness of undeserved grace are inseparable. When we know what we have been given, we give. And then the cycle repeats itself. We get back, what we give.

Reading Study Guide

1. Put in your own words the key principle of this reading: *You get back what you give.*

2. Paul tells us to not give "reluctantly" nor "under compulsion." Where do you see evidence of *reluctance* or *compulsion* in your own motives?
3. According to the reading, what is gratitude? What is gratitude's connection to cheerful giving?
4. Since being a "cheerful giver" is the motivation that is honoring to God, on a scale of 1-5, 1 being *grim* and 5 being *hilarious*, how would you rate yourself and why?
5. Look at the steps for financial freedom. State where you are in regards to each:
Step 1—Give Cheerfully

Step 2—Give Regularly, Not Haphazardly

Step 3—Give Your First Fruits

Step 4—Give When It's Tight

Step 5—Give Sacrificially

Step 6—Give a Tithe

Step 7—Give in Faith
6. What is one commitment that you are being led by God to make in order to be a more faithful steward of the Lord's resources?
7. What questions do you have about the reading?
8. Does this reading convict, challenge or comfort you? Why?

Going Deeper

Sider, Ronald J. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005.

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⁶ Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ, Expanded Edition.