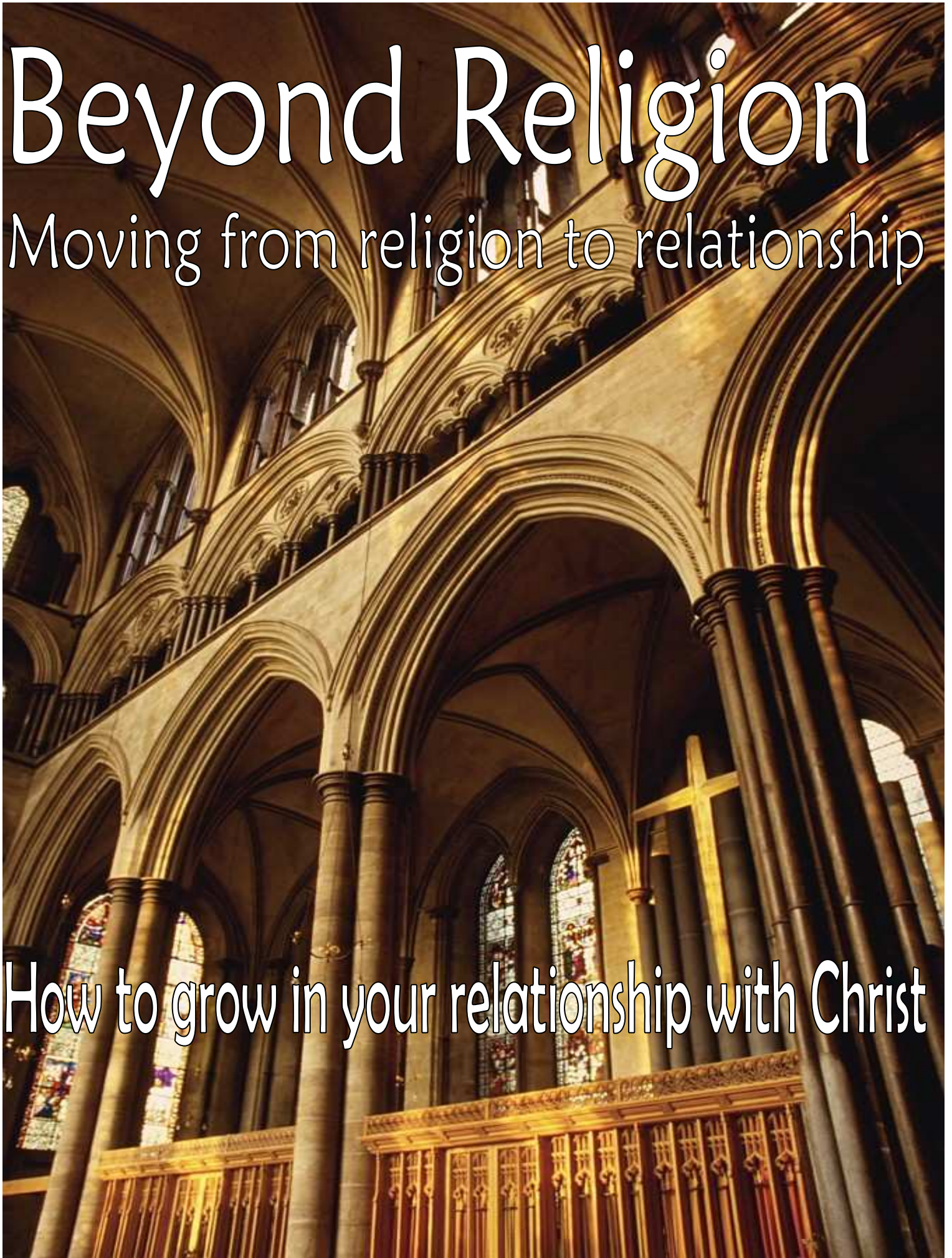


# Beyond Religion

Moving from religion to relationship

How to grow in your relationship with Christ



# Beyond Religion

## Moving from Religion to Relationship

September 2005

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# Introduction

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And He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

These are the words of Jesus as recorded in **Matthew 4:19**. It’s a simple statement - yet it is at the same time quite profound. Sometimes, what is *not* said is just as important as what *is* said. Let’s first notice what Jesus did not say. He didn’t say:

“Follow these **rules and regulations**, and I will make you fishers of men.”

“Learn these **doctrines**, and I will make you fishers of men.”

“Go to this **building** on Sundays and Wednesdays, and I will make you fishers of men.”

“Live a **good life**, and I will make you fishers of men.”

“Join a **church**, and I will make you fishers of men.”

“Serve on a **church committee**, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Now, nothing is certainly wrong with any of those things. We ought to strive to obey God’s commands. We ought to learn Biblical truth. We ought to attend church regularly. We ought to live a holy life. We ought to belong to a church and minister in and through it. But that is not what it’s all about.

## What did Jesus say it’s all about?

We must be careful not to super-spiritualize what Jesus said here. When He told these men to ‘follow Him’, He was quite literally saying to them, ‘Get up and come with Me.’ or ‘Come travel with Me.’ In other words, He was calling them to come and spend time and develop a relationship with Him. This is critical in arriving at what Jesus says next. “If you come and build a relationship with me,” He says, “then you will become usable and I will use you to bring still others into relationship with Me.”

Notice how the ones who heard these words responded in **Matthew 4:20**.

**Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.**

There was no hesitation. No reservations. No discussion. No vote. No questions. No qualifiers. They simply left life as they knew it to embark on the greatest adventure they would ever experience—a personal relationship with Almighty God.

Do you want to be in the same place as those first disciples? They followed Jesus because they were drawn to Him! They weren’t thinking about following rules at that moment. They simply wanted to be with Jesus. Our goal as believers is to move forward in our relationship with Jesus - a relationship that centers on what we want to do for Jesus - as we simultaneously move away from any form of religious legalism that dwells on what we ought to do. When this happens, we will experience what those first followers experienced.

This course will explore four critical ways that we can grow in our relationship with Jesus—prayer, Bible study, worship, and ministry. Each of these will be examined to see how it will help develop your love for Jesus and increase your desire to follow Him completely.

# Prayer

Soon after Joe met Jane at church, their friendship led to romance. It didn't take long for the young couple to fall completely in love. In a matter of weeks, Joe asked Jane to marry him and she joyfully accepted. Their flawless wedding was yet another chapter in their story-book whirlwind romance.

The day after the wedding, a curious thing happened. Jane woke up, chatted with Joe for about five minutes and then abruptly left their house. Joe didn't see her again until the following night when she once again chatted with him for about 10 minutes (which was mostly comprised of Jane talking). This odd behavior went on for about three weeks with Jane spending only very brief pockets of time with her new husband. Finally, Jane's friend, Jean, couldn't hold her tongue any longer. She had observed her newlywed friend spending hardly any time with her husband and had become quite concerned.

"Jane," Jean said. "I'm concerned that you are hardly spending any time with Joe since your wedding. Is there something wrong?"

"Of course there's nothing wrong," responded a quite surprised Jane. "I am desperately in love with Joe and he with me."

"But why do you spend so little time with him," inquired Jean.

"I guess you're right," admitted Jane. "I could spend a little more time with Joe. But there's so much going on in my life right now. I'm just so busy. It's so hard to carve out time to be with him. Perhaps when my job slows down I will be able to spend a little more time with him."

Prayer

Bible Study

Worship

Ministry

**What is your response to Jane's statement that she is 'desperately in love' with Joe?**

**What do you think about Jane spending so little time with Joe?**

**How does this story relate to prayer?**

## WHY SHOULD I PRAY?

Perhaps what makes the above story so unbelievable is the notion that a new wife would not want to spend as much time as she can with her husband. Most newlyweds are so desperate for time together that they loathe to spend even an hour apart from each other. They could spend hours sitting together, holding hands and staring into each other's eyes. (By the way, shouldn't marriage stay like this?!?)

Turn to **John 21:1-8** to see how desperate one of the disciples was to be with Jesus.

**What is Peter's first impulse when he realizes who was calling to them?**

**What obstacle did he completely ignore?**

Can you picture that scene? Peter was so desperate to be with Jesus that he threw himself into the water and swam to shore to be with him. He could not wait for the boat to be rowed in. That would take far too long for the anxious fisherman.

**When was the last time you were this desperate for Jesus?**

**How often do you allow obstacles to interfere with your relationship with Jesus?**

Many of us might look at the story of Jane and Joe and be more concerned with *why* Jane spent so little time with Joe than the fact that she did. Our natural impulse would be the same as Jean's - what is wrong with their relationship?

Likewise, instead of asking the question, 'why should I pray?', perhaps we should ask, 'why wouldn't I *want* to pray?'. Why wouldn't I want to spend as much time as I can with Jesus Christ? If I truly love Him, wouldn't this be my natural desire?

'Wait a minute,' you might ask. 'Are you saying that because I don't spend more time with Jesus I don't really love Him?' Well that might be the case, and then again, it might not be. Because you are investing your time in this study course you are demonstrating a desire to grow in your relationship with Jesus, so it's probably not the case for you. But for many people who attend church, that might very well be the reason. 'Then why don't I spend more time with Him?' That's a good question. In his book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Donald Whitney offers four reasons we don't pray more.

1. **Lack of discipline.** Many people struggle mightily with discipline. If you want evidence of this, ask people how well they generally do with their new year's resolutions! To an extent, the foundation of a successful prayer life is built on discipline. Just as people must be disciplined to exercise at first until it becomes a natural part of their daily routine, many times we have to emphasize discipline in our prayer life until it is established.
2. **Doubt that anything will happen.** There may be times when a person really doesn't expect God to answer prayer. Perhaps they consider their need to be too great for God to answer. Perhaps they don't believe God really cares. So they fail to pray. Prayer and faith are inseparable. Without faith, your prayer life will be lacking. Without prayer, your faith may become anemic.
3. **Lack of sensing God's nearness.** There are times in every believer's life that God feels quite distant. Twice in **Psalm 22**, David asked God 'be not far from me'. While God never separates Himself

from His children, there are times when sin in our life or neglect in our relationship with Him make us *feel* that He is far off. In these times, prayer does not come easy.

4. **Little awareness of the real need.** Sometimes a situation in life will easily lead us to pray - a family illness or emergency for example. Then there is the rest of the time - when we are living on cruise control - when life is seemingly going ok and we don't sense a need to pray.

We could add a two more reasons to Whitney's four:

5. **Improper time management.** Life today seems to be getting busier and busier. Between work, family, church, hobbies, sports and a litany of other things, it seems like most of our days are full from the time our feet hit the floor in the morning to when our head hits the pillow again at night. However, we must be careful to not allow a busy schedule become an excuse for our not praying. For some, time could be managed more effectively to enable prayer. For others, activities might need to be prioritized better allowing for low-priority activities to be surrendered.
6. **Not knowing how to pray.** Put simply, many Christians aren't quite sure how to pray. Therefore, they find it incredibly frustrating when they try to pray and often fail to pray as a result.

**Which of these reasons for not praying (or is there a different reason?) can you most relate with?**

## LEARNING TO PRAY

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Here is a simple, but powerful, definition of prayer: *Prayer is talking with God.* When you stop and think about it, that's all that prayer really is. It's how we talk with, or communicate with, God. When you think of prayer in that way, it sure takes a lot of the mystery out of it!

But what should we say to Him? Where would we begin? While there is no set formula given to us in how to pray, there are some good suggestions to help you develop your prayer life. One that you might find useful is C.A.T.S.S. - a derivation of the more common A.C.T.S. Each of these letters stands for a different part of prayer:

**C**onfession

**A**doration

**T**hanksgiving

**S**upplication

**S**ilence

Let's look at each component one at a time.

### CONFESSION

Everyday a vicious battle wages between our flesh and the Spirit of God. Read **Romans 7:15-25** to gain a little more insight about this struggle.

**What is the solution to this dilemma?**

**According to Colossians 2:13-14, how many of our sins has Jesus forgiven?**

**How then does sin affect a Christian?**

As a Christian, you are completely and totally forgiven of all of your sins - past, present and future. When Jesus died on the cross He nailed them all on it! However, this of course doesn't mean that we won't continue to sin. That is the battle that Paul talked about in Romans. There are times when our flesh overcomes us and we give in to the temptation to sin. While this sin if forgiven, it is not harmless. It can effect our fellowship with Christ. It may cause us to move away from Him. It may cause Him to discipline us. So as we pray, one of the first things we ought to do is to confess these sins.

**What do you think it means to 'confess' your sins?**

Confession can be thought of as agreeing. When we confess our sins, we agree with God that we have wronged Him (a moving example of a prayer of confession is found in **Psalm 51** where David confesses his adultery with Bathsheba). As we spend time confessing our sins, we also give ourselves an opportunity to deal with them and put them behind us. Many Christians fail to appreciate God's forgiveness because they don't know how to forgive themselves!

**Why do you think it would be beneficial to begin prayer with confession?**

### ADORATION

Having confessed and dealt with sin in our life, the next step is to spend some time focusing on who God is. When we approach God in prayer, we must be careful to maintain balance in our attitude. On one hand, God desires an intimate relationship with Him. He desires for us to be close to Him. He wants us to be honest and sincere. However, at the same time, we are in the presence of Holy God. We should not take that lightly. Read **Psalm 145:1-3**.

**What ideas about adoration can you draw from these verses?**

**Why do you think it is beneficial to spend time in adoration early in your prayer?**

### **THANKSGIVING**

Thanksgiving is closely tied with adoration. While adoration centers more on attributing God's infinite value based on who He is, thanksgiving focuses more on recognizing His value based on what He has done. Both of these are important for us to recognize. Think of this in terms of a marriage relationship. How would a wife feel if her husband never expressed thanks for what she did? How about if the husband never expressed his appreciation for what kind of person she was? When we think of it in those terms, it makes sense that we must pay attention to both areas. Read **Psalm 77:11-15** to see how Asaph connected thanksgiving and adoration.

**When you first thought of thanksgiving, you might have thought of being thankful for what God has done in your own life. We need to thank God for that. But what does Asaph thank God for?**

In addition, to thanking God for what He has done in your life and what He has done in general, it is also a good idea to thank Him for what He *will* do. Read **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** to see one future event that you can already thank God for.

**In what two ways can we benefit now from this promise (v. 13 and v. 17)?**

### **SUPPLICATION**

Supplication, or asking, is often the first (and only) thing that we do when it comes to prayer. Too often, God's children adopt a laundry list mentality when it comes to prayer - we go to Him and ask away. There is nothing wrong with taking our needs and requests to God. He wants us to do that, but it must be done with the right attitude. Spending time confessing sin and adoring and thanking God is a sure way to put yourself in that correct attitude. Read **Matthew 7:7-11** to learn more about supplication.

**What does Jesus instruct us to do?**

**What does Jesus say about the way that earthly fathers answer the requests of their sons?**

**How does this relate to God answering our requests?**

Do you think that this is a magical formula to guarantee you can have everything you want?

Should supplication be restricted just to your needs and wants?

### SILENCE

The final part of prayer may be the most difficult. To this point, the emphasis of prayer has been pretty much one-dimensional with us doing all of the talking. Remember the simple definition of prayer though - prayer is talking *with* God. This means that there is a place for Him to speak as we listen in prayer.

What do these passages teach us about the role of being silent in prayer - Psalm 4:4; Psalm 19:14; Psalm 46:10?

While it is a good idea to end your time of prayer by being still and listening for God to interact with you, do not make the mistake of thinking that this is the only time for us to listen in our time of prayer. That should be done the entire time as well. As you confess, you should listen for the Spirit to prompt you of other sins you need to confess. As you adore and thank God, listen for new ways to do this as well as considering whether you need to be more grateful of God. Even supplication should involve listening to God, especially as you consider the needs of others.

## **FOUR KEYS TO ENHANCING YOUR PRAYER LIFE**

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It seems that every believer goes through at least a period of time when their prayer life seems rather dry. It is during these periods that prayer becomes increasingly difficult and this is often when we get out of the habit of prayer. Here are four ways to enhance your prayer life to hopefully avoid or minimize these times and to keep your prayer life vibrant.

### PRAYER WILL NOT HAPPEN ACCIDENTALLY

For whatever reason, prayer is difficult. For most believers, it does not come naturally so prayer is a continual struggle. Yet, as we have seen, prayer is essential in growing in your relationship with Jesus. Paul offers the Colossian church some solid advice in **Colossians 4:2** that we can learn from as well.

What is Paul's main instruction concerning prayer?

What does devotion to prayer (or anything) require?

### **PRAY MORE THAN OFTEN**

Many of us would be thrilled if frequent prayer defined our lives. And that would be a good thing. But would that mean we have arrived? Actually it wouldn't. Read **1 Thessalonians 5:17** to learn more.

**What is the frequency that we are called to pray?**

**How can we pray constantly?**

We should be in a constant attitude of prayer throughout the day. We should be frequently prompted to talk with God about what we are thinking, feeling and experiencing. However, this does not negate our need to have scheduled times of prayer. Each day we should strive to set aside a period of time to spend with God. This is often called a 'quiet time' and should include prayer, bible study and worship. In order to maintain consistency amid a hectic life, many people choose to schedule their quiet time for the same time each day.

In addition though, you may want to spend brief moments with God throughout your day. Consider talking with God as you sit at a red light, during commercials as you watch television or as you exercise. You would be amazed to see how much time is available to pray if you look for it.

### **REMEMBER THE POWER OF PRAYER**

We could all learn a lesson from George Mueller. When Mueller was 25 years old, he and his new wife gave up his meager salary as pastor in a small church in England when he learned that the salary was paid by renting church pews. From that time on, he resolved to live his life by faith. Mueller is perhaps best-known for his work with orphans. From the 1830s to the end of the century, Mueller's orphanages would minister to hundreds of children at one time, but he never told anyone what his financial needs were - instead relying on God and his fervent prayer life to see the needs met. Many prayers were said over empty plates only to have food arrive at the last moment. Mueller started 117 schools that educated over 120,000 children in this manner.

**According to James 5:16, what can prayer accomplish?**

**What is the condition?**

### **REMEMBER THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER**

The inner-most area of the Old Testament Tabernacle was called the Holy of Holies or 'holy place'. This was where God's presence was represented. Only one person - the high priest - could enter into the Holy of Holies and only on one day during the year. Although he had permission, he did so with great care and most likely nervousness. Read **Hebrews 10:19-22** to see how Christ has changed all of this.

## Prayer

How can we enter the holy place (God's presence during prayer) according to verse 19?

How close can we draw to God according to verse 22?

What assurance do we have that we can enter God's presence?

This passage should help remind us of the purpose of prayer - it is to help us develop genuine intimacy with God.

# Bible Study

Like many dating couples, Joe and Jane had several obstacles to overcome in their relationship—most of which were overcome with time and understanding. However, their most difficult challenge was not so easily conquered. During the bulk of Joe and Jane’s courtship, they lived in different cities. Relationships are difficult - long distance relationships are even harder.

Since Joe and Jane did not spend nearly as much time together as they would have liked, they tried their best to make up for it through lengthy phone conversations and daily (and sometimes hourly) emails. While they both desperately missed each other and wanted to be together, Joe and Jane surprisingly handled these numerous emails in much, much different ways.

As soon as Jane received an email from Joe, she would open it and read it as fast as she could. Then she would go back to the beginning and read it more slowly, drinking in every word and phrase. She found herself wondering exactly what Joe meant when he used certain words. She enjoyed imagining what he was thinking and feeling as he wrote the email. If time allowed, she might go back and read her favorite parts of the email for a third, fourth or even fifth time. When time would no longer allow her to read anymore, she would save the email anticipating reading it more later.

Joe, on the other hand, took a much different approach to reading Jane’s emails. He would read Jane’s love letter to him once and then he would delete the message and go on about his day. Joe enjoyed receiving emails from Jane and he wanted to read them and enjoy them, but in his mind, he didn’t see much need to save or re-read a letter he had already read once.

Prayer  
**Bible Study**  
Worship  
Ministry

**What is your reaction to how Joe and Jane read these love letters?**

**How does this story relate to Bible study?**

## **WHY SHOULD I STUDY THE BIBLE?**

In the context of a romantic relationship, most people would find it odd that Joe would not want to savor Jane’s emails more. In fact, many people would see Joe as being very ‘mechanical’ in his behavior. Some might even question the sincerity of his love for Jane. “Here’s a man,” they might say, “who is apart from the woman he loves and when he hears from her, he is only interested enough to read her letter once? If he really loved her, he would act the same way as Jane.”

We must allow for the differences of people. Joe might be madly in love with Jane and he just shows that a little differently. But each of us understands on some level that a deep, burning desire to connect with a person - whether that is spending time together, or through phone calls or letters and emails - is a hallmark of a passionate, intimate relationship. Connecting means learning everything you can about the other person - completely understanding that man or woman who is the love of your life.

## Bible Study

Let's step over into the realm of Bible study. If what we just looked at makes so much sense in the world of romance, why doesn't it sink-in for so many of us when it comes to reading and studying our Bible? Why do so many Christians approach the Bible - often called God's love letter to us - as Joe approached Jane's emails? Why are so many Christians content to occasionally and superficially read their Bible instead of diving into it?

### What do you think?

**Psalm 19:7-14** is a beautiful description of the Bible. As you read this passage, look for the benefits of reading and studying God's Word (remember that you can think of the Bible as God's love letter to you).

### What are the benefits?

- (v. 7) \_\_\_\_\_
- (v. 7) \_\_\_\_\_
- (v. 8) \_\_\_\_\_
- (v. 8) \_\_\_\_\_
- (v. 11) \_\_\_\_\_
- (v. 13) \_\_\_\_\_

Some people criticize the Bible because to them it is an antiquated book that has no relevance today. What does verse 9 have to say about that belief?

What do you think is meant by the 'meditations of my heart' in verse 14?

Sum up how you believe studying the Bible will help you grow in your relationship with Jesus.

Knowing that studying the Bible will greatly impact your relationship with Jesus is vital as you look to develop this habit and skill. If this truth is lost on you, you will quickly come to see Bible study as a dry chore. Then when you 'get nothing out of it', you will think even less of Bible study. Conversely, if you approach God's Word as His love letter to you and seek for ways to learn about Him, you will find yourself enjoying Bible study because you will see how it impacts your life every day. Then that excitement will propel you to read

the Bible even more as you develop a **Psalm 42:1** heart. Two cycles - one downward, the other upward. Which cycle you find yourself in depends largely on how you perceive the Bible. But it's not that simple of course. Knowing *why* to study the Bible is the first battle. Knowing *how* to study the Bible is the next.

## **STARTING ON THE RIGHT FOOT**

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Once you have developed the proper mind-set for Bible study, your next step is to position yourself to succeed. This begins even before you crack open your Bible. Here are a few requirements for you to consider as you prepare to study God's Word.

### **YOU MUST BE A BORN-AGAIN CHILD OF GOD**

It seems like this should go without saying, but there are many of unsaved 'intellectuals' and 'scholars' who study the Bible as a work of literature. As long as they remain unsaved, their task is futile. Read **1 Corinthians 2:14** to see why.

**Why is it impossible for a lost person to understand the Bible?**

### **YOU MUST BE WALKING WITH GOD**

Being a Christian does not automatically give you the ability to study and understand the depths of God's Word. A Christian who is not walking with God might find it just as difficult to study the Bible as a lost person. Read **1 Corinthians 3:1-9** to see an example of this.

**What does Paul tell the church he has been forced to do and why?**

### **YOU MUST BE SPIRIT-LED**

Being Spirit-led is closely related to walking with God. However, the emphasis here is that you need to let the Holy Spirit teach God's Word to you and resist the urge to figure it all out on your own. Read **1 Corinthians 2:10-13** to see why this is so important.

**Who knows the thoughts of God?**

**How then can we know the thoughts of God (i.e. the Bible)?**

### **YOU MUST HAVE A TEACHABLE ATTITUDE**

One final requirement for successful Bible study is that you have a humble, teachable attitude. It is tempting to think that because you have studied a passage once, there is nothing else for you to learn from it. This is

often heard around Christmas when people look at passages concerning the first Christmas for the ‘umpteenth’ time. In addition, there will be times that your study of the Bible will lead you to a new understanding that might require you to change your mind on something. You may have believed something your entire life, only to find it wasn’t quite right. This is where we need humility to admit we were wrong and change our thinking.

In addition to the requirements above, here are several recommendations to make your Bible study as profitable as possible.

### USE A GOOD BIBLE AS YOU STUDY

There are two main considerations for what Bible you use. First is the version. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew (the Old Testament) and Greek (the New Testament). There are two different methods of translating one language into another. You can either translate word-for-word or thought-for-thought. Translating word-for-word ensures that the original writing is preserved the best. However, there are many times when this will result in confusing readings because of difficult to translate words and phrases. Translating thought-for-thought helps smooth over these difficult translation issues. However, the trade-off here is that the translator’s opinion of what the original text meant plays a prominent role in what you read.

Versions that use more of a word-for-word approach include the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), the *English Standard Version* (ESV), the *Holman Christian Bible* (HCB), the *New King James Version* (NKJV) and the *King James Version* (KJV). Bibles that incorporate more of a thought-for-thought method include the *New International Version* (NIV), the *New Living Translation* (NLT), the *Living Bible* and the *Message*.

The second consideration in choosing a Bible is the ‘extras’ included in the Bible. Do you want study notes? Maps? Charts? An introduction to each book? A concordance? Cross references? Wide margins for writing your notes, thoughts and findings? Do you want the text to be in paragraph form? Red letters for the words of Christ? All of these should be considered in choosing a study Bible.

### USE OTHER STUDY TOOLS

There are a number of wonderful tools available to help you as you study the Bible. **Bible dictionaries** provide succinct overviews of key people, places, events and Biblical terms. **Commentaries** offer great insight to the text. **Concordances** help you find every occurrence of a certain word allowing you to trace its use through the entire Bible. **Surveys** provide the historical context of each book of the Bible. **Bible Atlases** provide plenty of useful information on the geography and climate of the Biblical lands.

### STUDY THE RIGHT TEXT

You have the right Bible for you. You have some good study tools ready to use. Now its time to decide where to being studying. One method is to close your eyes and open the Bible to a page and begin reading. This is not recommended. You would not buy a novel and use this approach to begin to read and understand it. You would start at the beginning. In the same way, as you look for a place to begin to study the Bible, choose an entire book to study.

But what book should you choose? Pick one that interests you and that you have a good chance of reading and understanding. If you are interested in history, choose one of the historical books. If you are interested in poetry, choose a book like Psalms. If you are interested in practical ways to grow in your faith, choose Proverbs or James. In general, the gospel of John is a great book to start with.

### STUDY IN THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

You have a Bible, other tools and a starting place. Now you need a time and location to begin studying. Choose a time when you can really focus on your studies. Choose a time when you will be alert and have as few

## Bible Study

distractions as possible. Likewise, choose a location that allows you to study uninterrupted. Some people prefer a very quiet, secluded environment. Others prefer a coffee shop or restaurant. However you are wired, choose a time and place that works for you.

**What version of the Bible do you / will you use for study?**

**What other tools do you have? Which do you need to get?**

**What book will you begin to (or continue to) study?**

**What time will you study?**

**Where will you study?**

## **HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE THE "INDUCTIVE STUDY METHOD"**

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Have you ever read a passage of the Bible and had no idea what it meant? So you went back and read it again (and possibly again) and still had no clue? We all have! So how can we study the Bible to actually get something out of it? Consider the "Inductive Study Method". This tested and tried method of studying the Bible divides our time into three parts - observation, interpretation and application.

### **STEP 1: OBSERVATION - WHAT DOES IT SAY?**

OK. Quick - close your eyes. Can you describe what the person leading the discussion is wearing? What color are the walls in the room? The chairs? Are there any posters or pictures in the room? It's surprising how often we go through life without really observing what's around us. Often our surroundings become too familiar and we begin to take them for granted and we start to see without really seeing! We do the very same thing when it comes to studying the Bible. Good, solid observation is the foundation that the rest of Bible study is built on. If we fail to observe all the text says (or if we fail to observe it correctly) we will not study it properly.

Here are some specific items to look for as you observe the text:

- (1) **WHO:** Who are the key personalities? What is unique, special or significant about them?
- (2) **WHAT:** What is taking place in the passage. Is it a teaching? A parable? A miracle? Is there an admonition? A promise? A warning?

- (3) **WHERE:** Where is the action taking place? What kind of environment is it? What is the terrain like? The climate?
- (4) **WHEN:** When is the action taking place? Is there anything significant about the timing of the events?

Notice that **WHY** is missing. That is because that is the central question of the next step of the inductive Bible study method - interpretation.

### **STEP 2: INTERPRETATION - WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

Properly observing the text is essential to successful Bible study. Proper interpretation is what keeps you on the right path to reach your destination of ‘getting something out of the passage’. The goal of interpretation is this - what did the original writer of the passage intend to convey to his original audience? In other words, what did he mean to say? There is always one, and only one, correct interpretation of Scripture. One of the most common mistakes of Bible study is looking for what the text ‘means to me’. Quite frankly, that has no bearing on proper Bible study. What matters is what the original writer meant. An illustration might be helpful:

Suppose I said this to you:

**“The Florida Gators do not belong in the SEC.”**

You may take this to mean that I believe that the Gators are not good enough to compete in such a prestigious conference. Or you may take this to mean that I believe they are too good for such a lowly conference. Or you may take this to mean that I believe that the ACC would be a better fit for Florida. All are certainly viable interpretations. However, all cannot be true (or else I would violate the Law of Non-Contradiction). So the question is, “what did I really mean?” That is the heart of Biblical interpretation.

In addition to finding the one meaning of the author the second important rule of Biblical interpretation is to accept the literal meaning of a passage unless there is a very good reason not to. In other words, when the Bible says that Jesus walked on water, we would interpret that to mean that Jesus literally walked on water. We would not take this to be some sort of metaphor or allegory. At the same time, a literal interpretation would allow for such literary devices. In the book of **Revelation**, Jesus is said to have a sword for a tongue. This is of course a clear literary device.

The third and final major rule of interpretation is to always study a passage in context. This includes LITERARY CONTEXT (is the passage in a historical narrative such as **Genesis** or **Matthew**; is it in a poetic book such as **Psalms** or **Proverbs**; is it in a letter such as **Romans** or **Galatians**; or is it in a prophetic book such as **Daniel** or **Revelation**), HISTORICAL CONTEXT (what was happening in history at that time), CULTURAL CONTEXT (the Jewish culture), GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT (the physical lay of the land) and THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT (at what part of God’s progressive revelation did this occur).

### **STEP 3: APPLICATION - WHY DOES IT MATTER?**

The final step is where we finally get to a point of ‘getting something out of the passage’. The central issue of application is answering the question, “why does this passage matter?” or ‘what difference does this passage make in my life?’. Good observation and interpretation is pointless without this last step. The entire reason we study the Bible is to mold us and shape us in the image of Christ. We need to be able to study Scripture and walk away changed people.

There are three levels of application to keep in mind as you study the Bible.

- (1) **RESTRICTED APPLICATION.** Some passages in the Bible are not readily applicable to your life. Certain truths in Scripture apply almost entirely to the original recipient. Examples of this are the dietary and sacrificial laws in the Old Testament. While the direct application of these examples was for Israel, that is not to say that there might be an application for you today.
- (2) **SPECIFIC APPLICATION.** Other passages have a primary application to the original recipient, but it is easier for us to find an underlying principle that we can apply to our lives today. Examples of specific application include the issues of food sacrificed to idols, the Lord's Supper and sign gifts in 1 Corinthians.
- (3) **UNIVERSAL APPLICATION.** Still other passages are directly applicable to all people, at all times in all places. Examples of passages with universal application include God's love for mankind (**John 3:16**), asking in Jesus' name (**John 14:13-14**) and God's provision (**Philippians 4:19**).

## PUTTING IT ALL INTO PRACTICE

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Read **John 11:1-46**. Now use the inductive method to study the passage.

### OBSERVATION

Who —

What —

Where —

When —

### INTERPRETATION

### APPLICATION

# Worship

It came to Jane out of the blue. She didn't know if she was more surprised about the revelation occurring without warning or the fact that she had never noticed it before. In her entire time of marriage to Joe, she could not recall a single time when he told her why he loved her. She could not remember an instance when Joe celebrated her beauty or shared what he appreciated about her.

Later that day, Jane asked her husband why he never did these things. "Jane," said Joe in a pleading voice. "You know that I love you. I shouldn't have to say these things to you. And why do you need to hear them anyway? Are you insecure in our marriage? Isn't it good enough for you to see that I love you by what I do for you?"

**If you were Jane, how would you respond?**

**How does this relate to our relationship with God?**

Prayer

Bible Study

**Worship**

Ministry

## JUST WHAT'S WORSHIP?

To understand what worship is, it is helpful to understand where that word comes from. Worship is a modern version of the old English word 'worthship'. We can see from that original word that in general, worship is recognizing and ascribing worth to someone or something. You worship in this general sense when you praise your spouse's appearance or when you tell someone of how good the food is in a restaurant. However, when we think of Biblical worship, this worship is focused on God. Biblical worship then, is ascribing worth to an infinitely worthy God. A wonderful example of ascribing infinite worth to God is found in **Revelation 5**.

Read **Revelation 5:1-4**. **What was the angel looking for in verse 2?**

**Who was found to be worthy?**

## Worship

Read **Revelation 5:5-7**. Who is introduced as being worthy?

Read **Revelation 5:8-14**. What is emphasized in the song of the 24 elders and the praise of the myriads?

Why is Jesus worthy of your worship?

### **WHY WORSHIP?**

“Certainly God knows that He is worthy. Surely He knows that He is perfect and great. Why then do I need to tell Him that?” Has this question ever entered your mind? If it has, you’re not alone. To answer that question, let’s pose a different question. “Who should walk away changed because of worship—the One being worshipped or the one worshipping?” Isaiah writes of a powerful worship experience he had in **Isaiah 6:1-8** that will give some insight into this new question.

**What is emphasized in verses 1-4?**

**What was Isaiah’s response in verse 5 to his encounter with a holy God?**

**What did God do for Isaiah in light of his self-reflection?**

**What was Isaiah’s response?**

**Who then walked away from this worship experience changed?**

Another wonderful example of the interaction between man and God in worship is found in **Luke 5:1-11**.

**What two things did Peter recognize in verse 8?**

**What was Jesus' response to Peter?**

**What did Peter do when they got to land?**

**Who walked away from this worship encounter changed?**

We can see from these passages three primary reasons to worship. First, worship gives us the opportunity to **see who God is more clearly**. As we worship, we should block out all distractions and focus on Him. We often allow our hectic lives to interfere in our relationship with Christ. One of our main problems is that we simply don't think about God as much as we should. Worship helps us do just this.

Second, worship gives us the opportunity to **see who we are more clearly**. Have you ever thought something was white until you held it up against something that was truly white? This is what happens in worship. Any idea of how good we are is quickly dismissed as we compare who we are to who God is.

Third, worship gives us the opportunity to **see who we need to be more clearly**. Worship should lead to action in our lives. Worship should drive us to rid sin from our life. Worship should lead us to serve God more faithfully. Worship should change our lives.

### **HOW SHOULD I WORSHIP?**

Many people make the mistake of thinking of worship as music and singing. These are certainly two elements of worship, but worship is much more than that. Other people view worship as generating warm feelings toward God. Again, this may be a result of worship, but it is not what worship is about. How exactly should a person worship God then?

Read **John 4:23-24**.

**What two characteristics of worship does God seek?**

## Worship

How do you worship in spirit?

How do you worship in truth?

Which of these two characteristics do you think is more important for genuine worship?

## WHEN DO I WORSHIP?

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Is recognizing God's worth confined to Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings and Wednesdays? Can we worship more than that, or must our worship depend on meeting as a church body? Certainly we ought to worship as a church body, but our true worship of God cannot (and must not) be limited to those far too brief and infrequent occasions.

### CORPORATE WORSHIP

There is nothing like worshipping with a group of like-minded believers in Jesus Christ! It is a blessing that God has given us one another to support us, love us and encourage us. Read **Hebrews 10:23-25** to see a little more of God's intention for corporate worship.

What is the 'confession of our hope'?

Who stands to benefit from the truth of verse 23?

What two things are we to do in verse 24?

Who stands to benefit from the truth of verse 24?

## Worship

According to verse 25, how are we best able to fulfill this assignment?

How can our genuine worship encourage other believers (remember the three things worship should accomplish)?

### WORSHIP AS A LIFESTYLE

We can see from **Hebrews 10:25** that corporate worship is commanded of us and that it is an important part of our relationship with God. However, let's look at **Romans 12:1** to see how we are to worship everyday as part of our lifestyle.

What does Paul say is our spiritual worship in this verse?

How do you present your body as a living sacrifice?

How do the three aspects of worship (seeing who God is, seeing who I am, being changed) factor into living this kind of life?

### WORSHIP FOR ETERNITY

It has been said that we would do well to learn to worship because it is what we will be doing in heaven for eternity! Many people believe that heaven is about them - heaven will be what they want it to be - their great reward for a life lived right. That is not the case at all. Heaven is not about us - it's about God. We have been created to give glory and worship to God on earth and that continues in heaven. Read **Revelation 4:8** to see a snapshot of this eternal worship.

What prevents us from worshipping in spirit and truth on earth?

What do you suppose our worship will be like in heaven?

# Ministry

Joe couldn't help but be bothered. It seemed that he had been doing all of the work at home while Jane did very little if anything. Now Joe was worn out, frustrated and somewhat bitter toward his wife. As Joe thought about things, it didn't take him long to realize that he was partly annoyed that Jane wasn't doing her 'fair share' of the work, but he was more bothered that she seemingly didn't care enough about him to want to help out. Because of this, he didn't really want to go and tell her she needed to help out, he wanted her to understand this on her own and willingly pitch in around the house again. So Joe bit his lip, swallowed his pride and continued to do almost all of the household chores - waiting for Jane to realize what was going on.

**Do you think Joe was right to expect Jane to share in the work around the house?**

**What do you think about his desire for Jane to willingly pitch in?**

**What can you learn about Jane's servant-heart from this story? Joe's?**

**How does this relate to our relationship with God?**

Prayer  
Bible Study  
Worship  
**Ministry**

## **WHO IS SUPPOSED TO SERVE OR MINISTER?**

When many people hear the words 'ministry' or 'minister', they immediately think of a full-time pastor or staff member or a missionary serving God. After all, they are called 'ministers' aren't they? Don't we talk about people 'entering the ministry'? At the same time when many people hear the word 'serve' or 'servant' they often think of the deacons or those one or two people in every church who serve non-stop. But actually, when we hear these words the first thing that we should think about is 'me'! God has not called just full-time church staff members and missionaries to minister—He has called every believer. God has not just called deacons and those handful of special men and women to serve—He has called every believer. Consider what **Hebrews 9:14** has to say about serving.

**Who has actually been cleansed by Christ's sacrifice on the cross?**

According to this verse, what is the purpose of being cleansed?

Have you been cleansed by Christ's sacrifice? If so, what is your purpose?

Here it is quite simply: **If you have been saved, you have been saved to serve.** Every single believer in Jesus Christ has been called into full-time ministry (some just happen to get paid for it!). Your ministry might be to reach out to those in your workplace. It may be to use your career to take the gospel to parts of the world where it will open doors for you. It may be to use your career to pay your bills so that you can invest time in various church ministries. The ministry may be different— but the calling is the same. All of us have been called to serve God.

Not realizing your call to ministry is perhaps one of the main reasons that there are so many Christians living unproductive lives which are deplete of joy and meaning. It is vital for every Christian to understand that they have been called to serve God, find out how God specifically wants them to serve Him, equip and prepare themselves for that ministry and then to dive into it. Only when you are fulfilling the purpose of your life will you experience the fullness of your relationship with Christ. It is tempting to think of ministry as only what we do for God. However, ministry is also one of the major ways that God continues to mold you and shape you in His image. Just like prayer, Bible study and worship, ministry is essential for a person who wants to grow in their relationship with Jesus.

## WHAT IS MOTIVATION TO MINISTRY?

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Understanding that you have been called to invest your entire life into ministry is one thing. But being motivated to do just that is a whole other thing. Let's face it—ministry is difficult and it is time consuming. How are we to be motivated to be so involved in something that seems to have such immediate, personal reward? Let's look at four key motivators for ministry.

### OBEDIENCE TO GOD

Obedience is perhaps the most common motivation for serving God. We understand that we 'have' to serve God and we don't want to disobey so we serve. It is true that we serve out of obedience. Read **1 John 2:3-4** to see the importance of our obedience.

What does obedience to God demonstrate to ourselves?

Is there anything wrong then with being motivated to serve God in an effort to be obedient?

Surely there is nothing wrong with wanting to be obedient—we are supposed to be obedient! However this cannot be the only reason why we serve God. Obedience alone will lead to legalism—serving God to earn His favor. Remember, we are trying to move beyond religion and into relationship. We must move beyond a religion marked by legalism toward a relationship with Jesus marked by love and grace.

### **GRATITUDE FOR GOD**

Another motivation for ministry is gratitude for God. Read **1 Samuel 12:24** to see how gratitude and ministry go hand-in-hand.

**What great things has God done for which you are thankful?**

**What great things has God done for you?**

While a motivation out of obedience results in an ‘ought to’ mentality of ministry, motivation out of gratitude perfectly compliments this and leads to a ‘want to’ mentality. We should desire to serve God because He is good! Take some time and remember what your life was like apart from Christ. Do you remember what the guilt of your sin felt like? Being unforgiven without hope? Do you remember what it was like to have God’s wrath directed toward you? Now think about your life in Christ. What is it like to be completely forgiven of all of your sins? What is it like to have hope for tomorrow? What about having peace with God?

Being motivated to serve God out of gratitude offers the perfect balance for a motivation of obedience. However, we must be careful that we do not begin to serve God only as a result of what He does for us. We do not serve Him to return the favor of kindness. Even if God’s good provision seemingly dried up, we should still serve Him. That is the lesson Job learned.

### **JOY FROM GOD**

Obedience and gratitude can be enough to lead us to serve God. However, there still might be an important component missing. Have you ever seen someone involved in ministry that looked...well...looked miserable? It’s possible to serve God and still not have the right heart-set. Read **Psalms 100:2**.

**What difference do you think it makes if you serve God joyfully instead of grudgingly?**

We must remember one thing. While we are commanded to serve God, it is at the same time a privilege. The God of the universe has chosen you to make a difference for eternity. He has a specific plan just for you. How would you feel if the President of the United States called you one day and said, “I have something I need for you to do”? How much more special should we feel knowing that God has done just that? We must be careful though not to serve God to then experience joy or to serve Him only when we are feeling joyful. We serve God—period. However joy should accompany our service to the King.

### LOVE THROUGH GOD

One other motivation for us to serve God is love. This love takes on two different characteristics. Read **Galatians 5:13-14** to see the first way love affects ministry.

**We live under grace. However, Paul instructs us not to let grace be an excuse for idleness and to instead love. Who is this love is directed toward?**

**Is it natural to love in this way? How can we?**

Read **Matthew 22:35-37** to see the second way that love motivates us.

**What does Jesus say is the most important thing for us to do?**

**How does this affect our ministry?**

One could argue that love is the primary motivator to serve God. If we truly love God, we will love others (because He does). And if we truly love this way, then we will be compelled to serve Him and one another. But again a word of caution. This love must be genuine. People can spot a fake pretty easily—they can tell when you are saying you love them but not showing it. And if people can recognize this, how much more can an all-knowing God see through our façade? Our love for God and one another must be real.

### **WHAT DO I HAVE TO OFFER?**

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OK. I understand that I need to serve God—and I even want to. But what do I really have to offer? I haven't been seminary trained, I can't teach a class, I can't hold a note. What do I really have to offer? That is a fantastic question! If this is how you feel, join the crowd. There are countless Christians who want to do something great for God, but they don't know what they have to offer. Let's interact with this issue in two ways.

First, this is one of the reasons for the church. We exist to encourage and edify each other as we help each church member find their place of ministry and help equip them to fulfill this God-given ministry. Take advantage of the Discipleship ministry of this church as well as other resources designed to help you find and develop your ministry.

Second, God's Word has something to say about the value you bring God as a servant. What can you offer God? Nothing. That's right—you cannot provide God with anything that He needs. Wait a minute! I'm confused here! Didn't you just say that I am supposed to serve God? Didn't you say that I have been called by

God to impact eternity? That's right. But here's the key. You can't offer God anything. What can you do for an infinitely powerful, intelligent, loving God? What do you have that He lacks? So you can't offer God anything except your willingness for Him to use you. Do you see the difference? The key to serving God is to recognize that He is the one who does the work—you are simply the tool He uses to accomplish it!

Let's look at a couple of passages to help clarify this. First, read **2 Corinthians 5:17**.

**If you are in Christ are you the same person as you were before?**

**How has this change happened?**

If Christ has the power to change your life, don't you suppose He has the power to use you to change the life of others?

**Who has God used to impact your life? How do you suppose they were able to be used?**

The second passage for us to look at is **1 Peter 4:10**.

**According to this verse, who has a spiritual gift?**

**What is the purpose of these gifts?**

To learn more about spiritual gifts read **Romans 12**, **1 Corinthians 12**, **Ephesians 4** and **1 Peter 4**. These passages list the gifts and explain that they are all gifts given to us by God to be used in ministry. Spiritual gifts are explained more in detail in *Beyond Me: Finding My Place of Ministry* but for now understand that the spiritual gift (or gifts) that God has given to you is how He expects you to serve Him. You are not expected to serve God in your own power—in fact He doesn't want you to! We are called to serve God through His power!

Consider this as we end this study. God wants you to be in relationship with Him—so He made that possible through His Son's sacrifice on the cross. God wants you to grow in that relationship with Him—so He made that possible through the working of the Holy Spirit in guiding your Bible study, prayer worship and ministry. God wants you to impact the world—so He made that possible again through His work and His power. Do you see the pattern? God certainly is a good God.